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Strangers in a strange land: A phenomenological study of ELL students' experiences with anxiety

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STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ELL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH ANXIETY

by

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Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially to my Mom and Dad, for their patience, support, and encouragement.

Last of all, I dedicate this to my Heavenly Father who has equipped me with every skill I have needed throughout this journey. Your grace has been abundantly sufficient for me, and your strength has covered every weakness.

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There have been a number of key people who have come alongside me throughout this time. In particular, I would like to thank my Dissertation Committee members for their insights, and most importantly Dr. Kerrigan who pushed me to always strive for the best.

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My thanks, too, to Ruth, Chris, Stephen, Deb, and Magda. It is not easy to read through the many pages of this dissertation and find the typos, misspellings, and confusing language, and I appreciate your time in making this as error-free and clear as possible.

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Abstract

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STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ELL STUDENTS EXPERIENCES WITH ANXIETY
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A primary tenet of community colleges is open access. However, offering open access and ensuring completion are two different matters, especially for students who may not be as college ready as others. One group of students are English Language Learner (ELL) who, apart from all the other challenges new college students must face, have the added challenges of adapting to a new language and culture and the ensuing anxiety those challenges create. In order to understand the meaning these students make of experiences with anxiety, a hermeneutical phenomenological study following van Manen's (2014) methodology was conducted with five ELL participants from a community college ESL program. Their experiences with anxiety stem largely from a lack of English fluency which resulted in a diminished sense of their identity as college students, a tendency to self-isolate from their classmates and professors, and an inability to seek and receive timely support. Despite the danger that this cycle of anxiety creates, these students persevered in large part due to their determination to succeed. Implications for theory, practice, and policy from this study demonstrate the need to holistically support ELL students through enhanced engagement in pedagogy and advising, as well as a deeper consideration for ELL students' academic and career goals.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I have been a stranger in a strange land. Exodus 2:22

Marna had just finished taking a two hour ESL placement test, and was now waiting for her turn to be interviewed to determine where in our program she could begin. As she sat in a chair, I could see her twisting the interview slip in her hands and glancing at the clock every few seconds. When I called her name, she didn't immediately respond – perhaps I had mispronounced her name, or perhaps she was lost in her own thoughts. It was only when I was standing next to her that she jumped up with an apologetic smile. I introduced myself and extended my hand to welcome her. As she shook my hand, she quietly told me her name and then immediately apologized for not having "so good English."

In my office, I offered her a chair and asked how she was doing. She seemed to relax a little as I explained the interview process. There are a set of questions we ask all new ESL students. In part, we want to learn a bit about their background and educational aspirations, but it is also a chance for us to assess their spoken abilities in English in a natural setting. Her answers were short, but as we progressed, she became more animated. She was from the Middle East, where she had graduated from a high school and had studied several years at a university. However, before she could finish her degree she immigrated to the United States because her parents thought she could have a better life.

When she arrived, she had gotten married and had a child, and so going back to school had to wait. Since her son was starting school in the Fall, she felt the time was

right to restart her education. I asked about her boy. She was clearly proud of him, and she laughed as she said, “His English better than me.” I laughed as well, and told her about my time in Mexico; how my two sons seemed to learn flawless Spanish in a matter of months while I would still get nervous asking for a half a kilogram of tortillas at the market.

She told me she was working at a convenience store. It was an okay job, but there were no benefits and little pay. She wanted to be a nurse, but when I asked her why nursing, she shrugged her shoulders, and said it would be a better job. I also asked if she was applying for financial aid. She wanted to but was confused about the process. I showed her our website and the FAFSA workshops that were available. She would need to sign up for a time, and I encouraged her to do so as soon as possible.

With my questions done, I asked her if she had anything she wanted to ask me. “How did I do? Was I bad?” I tried to assure her that her scores were not a matter of good or bad, but simply a matter of where she needed to begin her studies in order to reach her goals. For her, that meant starting at our intermediate level. I explained that our program is an academic English program, and our focus is to help students develop college level English reading and writing skills. I directed her to one of our office staff and introduced her. A few moments later, she was back in my office for a signature on her registration form. She seemed excited and ready to start.

A few weeks after the semester started, Marna was back in my office. She had just gotten out of class, and was anxious, clutching nervously at her books. I asked how I could help her. “I don’t know what to do. I work hard all the time, but I don’t do so well on the tests.” We spent some time talking about working with her professor, but she was

a little scared of her professor because the professor shouted at the class once when no one had done an assignment. I also asked Marna if she had made any friends in her classes – someone she could study with, but she shook her head. “They are young, not serious. They don’t understand someone like me.” Lastly, I told her about our resource center and getting help from one of our tutors, and that seemed to give her some encouragement. She seemed less distraught when she left my office, but I never had a chance to follow up with her after our talk.

Context

Open access and community colleges. The first community college, Joliet Junior College, was founded in 1901. Like other community colleges that followed, its mission was to allow senior four-year institutions to focus on research and more academically sophisticated students (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Junior colleges, as they were known then, were to provide general education courses to prepare freshman and sophomore students. Students who were able to complete their studies could transfer to a four-year institution for a baccalaureate degree (Bailey & Morest, 2006). However, as community colleges grew from this point, there was increasing interest to expand from the transfer mission and incorporate occupational education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014).

This more diverse mission was also greatly impacted by the Truman Commission in 1946. With its strong recommendation to allow access to college for all people without prejudice to gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background (Gilbert & Heller, 2013), community colleges began to rapidly expand. However, in order to provide true open access to students, colleges began to realize that a number of potential students would need additional support before they could embark upon a college career. This resulted in

the expansion of developmental courses and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to the point that now upward of 64% of incoming students at community colleges are enrolled in one or more college readiness courses (Cohen et al., 2014; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002).

English Language Learner (ELL) students are the epitome of the population targeted by the Truman Commission. They are culturally and linguistically outside the mainstream, and often are socio-economically challenged (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Nuñez & Sparks, 2012). Furthermore, ELLs currently constitute over 10% of the K-12 student body, and that number could increase should current trends in immigration continue (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). As these students progress through secondary education, and desire to take advantage of the economic benefits of a college education, community colleges need to be ready to help these students achieve their goals beyond simply providing access.

Many students struggle in college, but ELLs can have a particularly challenging path. When considering the difficulties they must overcome, it is not surprising that success would be low. Even so, recent studies have shown ELL students' lack of success to be particularly alarming. A study by Belcher (1988) determined that only 16% of those students enrolled in the study's ESL program finished it, and only 7% were able to graduate with a degree. A more recent study by Kanno and Cromley (2013) had better findings placing the number of ELL students achieving a degree at 12%. Similarly, Almon's (2012) study demonstrated that ELL students outperformed their non-ELL counterparts in terms of overall GPA and engagement scores. However, success in the classroom did not translate into prolonged persistence. Her study found that 16% of the

students enrolled in a community college dropped out before the end of their first year. Even more disturbing was the finding that students who began in the lowest level of an ESL program were five times less likely to complete a degree program as those who began at higher levels. As these studies demonstrate, ELL students have had difficulty with success in college, but it is not always clear how they experience their time at college, or what meaning they make of those experiences.

The ESL program. This study was conducted at a community college located in a suburban central New Jersey county with a significantly diverse population. Over one third of the population in the county is either of Asian or Latin American descent. More specifically, Latinx students comprise 18% of the population, Asian Indians 13%, and other Asian groups 8% (Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce, 2016). The community college is also reflective of this diversity with a student population consisting of 29% White, 31% Latinx, 15% Asian, and 12% Black (Middlesex County College, 2017a).

The college has three campuses: a main campus and two smaller satellites. Currently, only the main campus and one satellite campus offer ESL courses. The student population in the ESL program also reflects the diversity of the county and the college. Latinx students represent 32% of the students, followed by Asian students at 27%, European White students at 12%, and Black students at 2%. Of these students, 48% are aged 25 years or younger, 45% are full time students, and 65% are female (Abbott & Roy, 2013).

Apart from their ethnic backgrounds, the ELL students enrolled in the ESL program have different educational and immigration backgrounds. The typology of ELL

students will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, but in brief, ELL students fall generally into one of four basic types: Generation 1, Generation 1.5, International students, and Undocumented students. Generation 1 students are resident immigrants who have had their previous education in another country, and the ESL program was their first experience with education in the United States (Suh, 2016). Generation 1.5 students are the children of resident immigrants and have had some experience in high schools in the United States prior to enrolling in the college (Doolan, 2017). International students are similar to Generation 1 students, but they differ in their immigration status as temporary students (Crandall & Shepherd, 2004). Finally, Undocumented students often have had prior education in the United States, but they do not have official citizenship (Chen, Budianto, & Wong, 2010). Chapter 3 will provide the rationale or why I opted to work with the Generation 1 students in this study.

Table 1 provides the breakdown of these ELL student types who were enrolled in the ESL program during the 2016 – 2017 academic year. Currently, the research site college does not have a simple way to differentiate Undocumented students from other students, nor to further specify how many of these students are enrolled in ESL program.

Table 1

ELL Students Enrolled in the ESL Program Academic Year 2016-2017

Type	Number of Students	Percentage
Generation 1	762	63.6
Generation 1.5	340	28.3
International	97	8.1
Totals (N=1199)	1199	

Regardless of the type of ELL student, all students who indicate on the college application that English is not their first language, who have had ESL as part of their high school curriculum, and/or who have been educated internationally are obligated to take the ESL ACCUPLACER© Reading, Language Use, and Writing tests as part of their admission requirements. Students are also interviewed upon completion of these three tests. At this point, the student may be exempted from ESL courses or assigned to appropriate courses and levels. ELL students who attend the main campus are 65% more likely to place in the intermediate or higher levels of the ESL program, whereas ELL students who attend the satellite campus are 84% more likely to begin at the lower beginning levels (Abbott & Roy, 2015). In addition, at the main campus 40% of ELL students applied for financial aid compared to 90% of the satellite campus ELL students (Abbott & Roy, 2015). Though no further data are available, these numbers suggest that main campus ELL students are more likely to have attended high school for several years in the United States, albeit in high school ESL programs, and have a more stable financial situation. Conversely, ELL students at the satellite campus have lower English proficiency skills, and have less stable economic circumstances.

ESL classes at the main campus are mostly held in two connected buildings in the center of the campus. However, other classes may be scattered across the campus. Apart from the classroom, ESL students have access to several language labs – one primarily for pronunciation practice, and the other a general-purpose lab with computers and other resources. The ESL department also employs tutors solely for ESL students. Though these tutors are available in the daytime and evening hours, the limited number of tutors and the high demand means a student looking for assistance may not be able to get help

in a timely manner. On the other hand, ESL classes in the satellite campus are housed in one building. Students there also have access to labs, but tutoring is limited to a few hours during the weekdays and on Saturdays.

The ESL program at the college underwent a significant program change in Fall 2016. This change began in part from the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) ESL white paper encouraging ESL programs to consider changes in existing programs to enhance student success (Friedman & Lown, 2013). The previous program consisted of five levels ranging from beginning English language skills (basic sentence structure and communication) to advanced academic English skills (essay writing and college text reading skills). In the first level, students took courses in writing, grammar, pronunciation, discussion, and listening. The five courses totaled 17 credit hours of study. The second level also had five courses in writing, grammar, phonology, discussion, and reading. These also totaled 17 credits. Levels 3 and 4 had four courses respectively – writing, grammar, phonology/discussion, and reading for 14 credits in each level. The final level consisted of a four-credit class in reading and writing. All told, a full time ESL student who began at the first level would need two and a half years to complete the program, enrolling in a total of 19 courses and paying for 67 credits – slightly more than a typical 61-63 credit Associates degree. Add another two and a half years to complete an Associate's degree, and the student would have already spent almost five years in school. A part time student could easily need twice that time. When considering placement and financial aid needs as referenced above, ELL students at the satellite campus typically had a much longer and more expensive path to complete the ESL program and then continue towards a degree than a typical ELL student at the main campus.

A further impetus for these program and curricular changes was the lack of student success in the ESL program. The number of drop-outs or stop-outs at the research site college is consistent with other studies on ELL success (Almon, 2012; Kanno & Cromley, 2013). The most recent ESL program review (Abbott & Roy, 2013) indicated that on average 200 students leave the program during each academic year cycle, or 19% of the student enrollment. These number suggest that a number of ELL students were having difficulties reaching their college goals. It was hoped that an improved curriculum and a more time and cost-efficient program will encourage higher persistence.

The revised ESL program began in Fall 2016. Under the new program, the first level was shifted to the Continuing Education Division. This in itself has presented a number of logistical challenges in registering students, securing payment, and transitioning them into the academic ESL program. One complication is that Continuing Education courses are not eligible for federal and state financial aid, such as Pell Grants and state grants (Middlesex County College, 2017b). Though the cost has been kept down, for students struggling in low paying jobs this still has proven to be an unexpected financial burden for them. In response, the college has offered limited scholarship opportunities and devised a payment plan to help allay the need to pay the entire cost up front.

Another change in the program was to the actual courses. Instead of offering discrete courses in reading, speaking, writing, and grammar, courses have been integrated as one Writing/Structure class and one Reading/Speaking class for each of the four levels – Intermediate, High Intermediate, Advanced, and High Advanced. In discrete skills courses like those taught in the old ESL program, language skills are primarily taught in

isolation from each other, with the overall intent to help the student become better at the targeted skill. The strength of discrete classes is to allow for focused work on a skill set, and to cover material in greater depth. Unfortunately, it can be difficult for students to then transfer or apply those learned skills as evidenced by students who did very well in a grammar class, but were unable to apply those grammar rules when writing a text (Abbott & Roy, 2013). An integrated class, as in the new ESL program, teaches two or more skills as complementary skills. This allows the students to better transfer skills from one content area to the next, and so become more academically proficient (Weaver, Bush, Anderson, & Bills, 2006). Finally, there is also an optional three credit phonology course for students who wish to enhance the accuracy of their pronunciation.

Additionally, in order to help lower the overall cost in tuition and fees for the students, the supplemental lab hour for the courses has been eliminated, and each course is five credits. All told, each level consists of 10 credits, and the entire program was reduced from 67 credits to 40 credits. This is a substantial change in time and money that ELL students need to allocate to their ESL coursework. As a result of the reduced class time, students will have to work harder outside of class than they did under the older program in order to put in the necessary practice to develop their academic English skills. A final change was the inclusion of a department final for all classes. The department final for both the Reading/Speaking and Writing/Structure courses consists of 25% of the final grade.

Problem Statement

ELLs are a significant student population in K-12 (Pitoniak, Young, Martinello, King, Buteux, & Ginsburgh, 2009). As school districts struggle to meet the demand to

academically prepare these students, much of the current research and policy on ELL success has been at the K-12 level. For example, Pappamhiel's (2002) study of Mexican immigrant middle school students revealed that these students struggle with a number of issues related to language anxiety in the classroom including self-isolating behavior and self-deprecation. Even though these same students will soon be looking to enter higher education, relatively little research has been done on ELLs' experiences once these students matriculate into higher education (Kanno & Cromley, 2013).

These few studies on post-secondary students have suggested that in addition to a lack of proper academic preparation, ELL students in colleges face a number of other challenges, including: the stigma of being unfairly perceived as deficient students (Marshall, 2010; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008); isolation from the "regular" college community (Almon, 2012; Samimy, Kim, Lee, & Kasai, 2011); and difficulties with self-advocacy (Holmes, Fanning, Morales, Espinoza, & Herrera, 2012; Nuñez & Sparks, 2012;). These challenges are further compounded by their linguistic and cultural differences. As a result, ELLs are finding success in higher education difficult as evidenced by their low graduation rates ranging from 12% to 16% (Almon, 2012; Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Though students can rise to the academic challenge with proper ESL pedagogy, they will continue to struggle with these other hurdles (Kanno & Varghese, 2010).

As an additional component of the ELL experience, recent studies in anxiety have demonstrated how fear can inhibit a student's ability to be engaged with faculty and other students (Brook & Willoughby, 2015; Cox, 2009; Russel & Topham, 2012). Other studies have pointed out the prevalence of racism in higher education (Hiraldo, 2015;

Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Picower, 2009) which can be manifested in subtle microaggressions by faculty and students towards ELL students (Ee, 2013; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). These microaggressions may in turn increase anxiety by creating an unwelcoming environment for ELL students who are not part of the college majority culture. Though studies have focused on the role of student engagement with student success (Astin, 1999a; Tinto, 1988) or even how fear plays a role in student behavior (Cox, 2009), the experiences of ELL students have been largely ignored in those studies. However, given the academic and non-academic challenges they face and the potential for marginalization, anxiety can be a very real experience for these students.

The ESL program at the research site college is a microcosm of the national trend of ELL non-completion. Two limited studies of ELL students' perceptions of the ESL new student orientation experiences (Abbott, 2014; Abbott, 2015) indicate that some ELL students from the beginning of their academic career at the college feel isolated, are unable to advocate for themselves, and are unsure of themselves as college students. If community colleges are sincere in their mission of open access and student success, then understanding these ELL experiences is important to better serve their ELL population.

Assumptions

Worldview. Chapter 2 will elaborate in greater detail on my worldview, but briefly, I adhere to a Social Constructivist framework in which our perceptions of reality are a synthesis of our social contexts, which includes culture, gender, ethnicity, and language (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Kim, 2001). Our understanding of reality, then, is unique onto ourselves. Therefore, even though each ELL student interprets reality differently from other ELL students, the ELL reality can be quite different from how

native English-speaking students will interpret their reality. Because this ELL perspective has not been well researched to date, this study was an attempt to give voice to these students so that greater success can result.

Theoretical assumptions. As a firm believer in the open access mission of community colleges, I also believe that creating a welcoming environment for our students is paramount to their success. Student Engagement Theory (SET) advocates for a number of policies and attitudes to establish that comfort for students. Engagement can entail adopting collaborative learning experiences in the classroom, enhancing student and faculty relationships, and more deliberate advising (Kuh, 2001; Kuh 2005). In contrast to these strategies, Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that working against engagement are the overt and covert racist and pejorative attitudes towards certain student groups, such as ELLs, that create an unwelcoming college environment, and so works to create fear and isolation (Bensimon, 2005; Picower, 2009; Solórzano, 1997). Therefore, efforts on the part of the college to enhance engagement with ELL students can be offset by overt and covert hostile behaviors by individuals at the college.

Leadership. Through the course of this doctoral program, I have learned that my overall leadership style is that of a Servant Leader which is closely related to transformational leadership (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). In its essence servant leadership is about service to others. Fairholm, as quoted by Russell and Stone (2002), states that servant leaders "serve by making available to followers information, time, attention, material and other resources" (p. 149). If the intent of transformational leadership is to motivate followers to pursue change in organizational objectives, the intent of servant leadership is an effort to facilitate the followers to effect that change

(Stone et al., 2004). In other words, for a servant leader, the followers come first, then the organization, and lastly the leader. Typically, the *followers* refer to the other members in the department. In my position as the Chair of the ESL, Languages, and Cultures Department, these followers include the staff and faculty of the ESL program. However, I believe that apart from serving the members of my department, my highest priority is serving the students in the ESL program.

Serving students necessitates that I also become a social justice leader. A social justice leader requires going beyond good leadership. Good leaders motivate their followers and work for the good of all in the organization. A social justice leader takes this a step further by focusing on the marginalized within that organization (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In education, social justice means ensuring that all students, especially those who are underprivileged, have the same opportunities for success as do other, more privileged, students. Because advocating for marginalized students challenges the status quo, a social justice leader can anticipate significant resistance which might come from within the school including staff and faculty and from the county and state leaders who can stymy these efforts by withholding resources or resorting to bureaucratic red-tape (Theoharis, 2007).

As a final consideration, implementing a new ESL program and curriculum took leadership to better serve our students. However, when a student is silenced because she is told, "You're from an arguing country," or when a student introduces himself in accented English and is told to drop the class because he does not have a chance to pass, then there is something inherently wrong with our institutional culture. If the harm our

institution does to our students is not addressed, then I, as a leader and advocate for ELL students, have accomplished little. As a servant leader, I have the moral obligation to advocate for the fair treatment of all students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand the experiences with anxiety of ELL students who are attending the ESL program at the research site college, and the meaning they make of those experiences in their identity as college students, in their ability to make connections, and their capacity to take advantage of institutional resources and opportunities. I define *anxiety* in the sense of *social anxiety* as used by Veale as "a marked and persistent fear of social or performance situations [which] tend to be avoided or endured with extreme distress" (Veale, 2003, p. 258). Furthermore, I understand anxiety as it relates to students' distress from confronting challenges in the higher education context which can lead to disengagement (Cox, 2009; Russell & Topham, 2012). For the purposes of this study, I worked with Generation 1 ELL students who are recent immigrants to the United States, are emerging English language learners, and have had little exposure to United States' higher education processes and culture. Data were drawn from three open-ended interviews with these students and resultant themes developed and interpreted from the theoretical lenses of Student Engagement Theory and Critical Race Theory.

In order to understand ELL students' experiences with anxiety, I sought to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

1. What meaning do ELL students make of their shared experiences with anxiety while attending the research site college?

a. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of identity?
b. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of connection?
c. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of agency?

Significance

When ELL students look to higher education to increase their employment opportunities and make a better life for their families, the open access of community colleges provides a critical gateway for their goals. As a whole much, of the research on engagement in higher education has been done with students in four year institutions, and relatively little at community colleges (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Though more recent research conducted at community colleges has included both quantitative and qualitative studies of developmental students, there is still a scarcity of research into students of color's perceptions or experiences in any depth (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000). More significantly, the ELL population has been largely overlooked in these studies, and there is very little available research that give voice to this population (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). This study, then, helps to fill the gap in the research by exploring the experiences of ELL students.

Though this research was focused on ELL students at the research site college, this study also has significance for other colleges with ESL programs. Every ELL population is different, and every campus has its unique culture, but the experiences of the ELL students at the research site can provide insights into how their ELL students may experience anxiety at their institutions. The themes developed in this study can help

researchers interpret the experiences their ELL students have with anxiety on their campuses as well.

This research can also help community college leaders better support their ELL populations. In 2013, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) spearheaded a white paper addressing ESL programs in New Jersey community colleges (Friedman & Lown, 2013). One of the stated purposes of this paper was to address how best to increase ELL persistence and retention. By providing community college leaders with insights into the experiences and challenges their ELL students encounter, they can better advocate for initiatives that support their students.

Overall, the greatest significance of this study is to the ELL students at the research site college. By better understanding the meaning they make of anxiety while attending the college, I have become more knowledgeable of their particular challenges. Ideally, this will lead to changes that the department and college can make to enhance their engagement by reducing their anxiety and limiting their isolation. In turn, these changes can help improve student retention and success, and thereby the students' academic and career goals.

Overview of Methodology

In order to understand the meaning ELL students make of their experiences with anxiety while attending courses at the research site college, I conducted a qualitative study. Qualitative studies are particularly insightful in understanding the human element, perspective, and experiences with the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Overall, studies about the ELL experience in higher education have been limited; therefore, this

study adds to the overall understanding of ELLs in higher education by giving voice to these students, and allowing them to tell their stories (Lester, 1999).

More specifically, this was a phenomenological study utilizing van Manen's hermeneutic methodological approach. Phenomenology does not seek to find causal relationships between factors, but instead seeks to understand the meaning of experiences with a phenomenon (Bevan, 2014; van Manen, 2014). I invited five ELL students to participate in this study with me in order to understand their experiences with anxiety. In order to participate, these participants had to have had experiences with anxiety when taking classes at the research site college. Phenomenology requires several interviews with each participant in order to come to an understanding of the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014; Englander, 2012; Seidman, 2013). Therefore, each participant worked with me through three separate interviews: the first to understand their background and experiences prior to attending the college; the second to recount their experiences with anxiety; and the third to reflect on the meaning they made of those experiences. In addition to the data from these three interviews, I also used insights gathered from field notes and reflective journaling as suggested by other phenomenological studies (Groenwald, 2004; Morrissette, 1999).

Key Terminology

The following definitions are provided to ensure clarity, understanding, and consistency of key terminology used throughout this study.

Anxiety – The feeling of stress resulting from new and/or hostile environments that result in avoidance behavior such as missed assignments, not seeking help, and withdrawal from the anxiety producing context (Brook & Willougby, 2015).

ELL – English Language Learner. The literature uses a variety of terms to refer to students whose first language is not English (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). For this study, I will use the term English Language Learners (ELLs) to refer to students studying English as part of their higher education curriculum. Since English is not necessarily the second language these students know, it is a misnomer to label them as ESL students.

ESL – English as a Second Language. Academic English skills are taught to ELL students in the ESL department at a college. Furthermore, the courses that these students take within an ESL department are known as ESL classes.

Engagement – For this study, I will be following Kuh's (2005) model of engagement which combines the student's need to participate in the college as well as the college's responsibility to create a welcoming environment for that interaction to occur.

Marginalization – Marginalization refers to the process in which students are made to feel as outsiders based upon external factors such as gender, race, language, and ethnicity (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994). The impact of marginalization results in the student feeling less worthy as a college student and/or less welcome at the college (Hill, 1999).

Identity – Identity is the ongoing development of a person's understanding of one's self as he or she interacts within social contexts and with other individuals (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). This study is focused on a student's academic identity as a capable college student.

Connection and Isolation – The feelings of belonging and/or separateness that ELL students may experience (Song, 2005). Lacking linguistic and cultural knowledge, they may not know how to make connections with classmates and professors, creating a feeling of loneliness in their college experience.

Agency – The students' ability to advocate for themselves and access institutional resources (Wassell Fernández, Hawrylak, & LaVan, 2010). ELL students can struggle with agency due to linguistic and cultural differences, as well as hostility from others when they do seek help (Fuentes, 2012).

Organization

This dissertation includes six chapters. The first chapter presents an overview of the study, the problem to be addressed, and the research questions to be answered. The next chapter reviews the theoretical foundations for this study. It begins with a review of the literature on the challenges ELL students encounter in higher education deriving from the linguistic and cultural differences and how these challenges compound stressors for them. Next, the ELL experiences are considered from the lens of Student Engagement Theory and the need for creating a classroom and college climate that invites and encourages full participation. Engagement, however, can be offset by Critical Race Theory and the damage racism and deficit attitudes toward students of color can do that engagement.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological approach used for this study. I give an overview of the roots of phenomenology as a philosophy and how it has developed into a methodological approach, and provided a justification for the hermeneutic phenomenological method employed in this study.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the data analysis for the narratives the five student participants provided about their experiences with anxiety. Chapter 4 details their individual backgrounds, especially with family and education before enrolling at the college. This is followed by a discussion of the eight over-arching contexts in which they

experienced anxiety. Chapter 5 delves into the meaning these students made of those experiences in terms of their identity, connection, and agency.

Chapter 6 contains a brief summary of the study, followed by implications for theory, recommendations for practice and policy, and suggestions for further research

Chapter 2

Literature Review

I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:14

This chapter lays out the theoretical foundation of this study in how English Language Learner (ELL) students experience anxiety in higher education, and the meaning they make of it. Since this was a phenomenological study, there is some discussion in the literature whether or not it is appropriate to have done this literature review before conducting the actual study so as not to bias the analysis of the data (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). However, because I employed a hermeneutical approach to this study, the literature review provided the necessary insights into the experiences shared by the participants (Finlay, 2008; van Manen, 1997a).

In any phenomenological study, *bracketing* is a critical aspect. In Chapter 3, I discuss this concept in greater detail. However, simply put, bracketing is the process whereby the researcher self-reflects on experiences, practices, and beliefs in relation to the phenomenon as a means to become aware of these fore-knowledges, and then through this awareness to be constantly vigilant that they will not impose meaning on what the participants have to share (Flood, 2010; Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 2014).

One of the first steps of bracketing is to reflect upon my theoretical, methodological, and research praxis (Gearing, 2004). The first three chapters of this dissertation are, in essence, the first stages of the bracketing cycle that I undertook for this study. In Chapter 1, I laid out my understanding of the overall ELL context in higher education. This second chapter details my conceptual framework and the theory that informs my understanding of the ELL experiences in higher education. Lastly, Chapter 3

explains the methodological approach I adopted for this study, and why I believe it is insightful into that ELL experience. Though many dissertations include these chapters as a pro forma process, for this study they served the added significance of bracketing that made explicit my understandings and biases that guided this study.

This chapter begins with a discussion of my conceptual worldview, and the beliefs and assumptions that it entails. I then proceed to review the linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds of ELL students. Next, I examine Student Engagement Theory and the ideas of Astin (1999b), Tinto (1988, 1999), and Kuh (2005) in how student success is connected to enhanced involvement in college settings. This is followed by a review of the tenets of Critical Race Theory that racism is endemic in higher education to the detriment and further marginalization of students of color. Finally, I give a brief overview of the underlying theoretical assumptions of a phenomenological study.

Worldview

The Constructivist worldview, sometimes also grouped with interpretivism, originated with Edmund Husserl's philosophical understandings of the nature of meaning, which he later developed into *phenomenology* (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). As such, it is concerned with the interpretation of meaning; more specifically, that reality is a social construct in which meaning is understood based on the world in which we live (Creswell, 2014). Unlike a positivist perspective in which research is designed to test a theory, constructivists allow findings to help shape theory or develop thematic elements.

Social Constructivism is closely related to constructivism; however, social constructivism focuses more on the role of culture and context in the interpretation of

meaning (Kim, 2001). This understanding of where meaning comes from is an important consideration in working with ELL students since their culture and social context that can be significantly different from native English-speaking students. This ELL background will be detailed more specifically later in this chapter under the ELL College Experience. As in any worldview, social constructivism necessitates certain ontological, epistemological, and methodological understandings and approaches (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Kim, 2001; Mertens, 2007).

Ontology. Ontology refers to the assumptions people make about the nature of reality and what they can know about it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For social constructivism, reality is a construct that includes language, ethnicity, gender, and especially culture, which "shapes the way we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). In this sense, social constructivism is relativist in that reality is contingent on the individual's uniqueness. It is not a matter of true or false, right or wrong, but simply the singular way in which everyone makes sense of reality (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It follows then, that the nature of reality can be quite different for those in positions of power as compared to those who are not, such as ELL students, when encountering similar situations (Mertens, 2004; Mertens, 2007).

Epistemology. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, or more simply, how do we know what we know (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)? Following the social constructivist's ontological understanding of reality, social constructivism sees knowledge as the creation of the person's interaction with others and the environment (Kim, 2001). For this reason, each person's knowledge of reality may differ from others even if they come from similar

backgrounds because of the differences that can exist in "social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). In a research project, this assumes that both the researcher and the participant are interacting to help discover that meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This interaction between researcher and participant is precisely what occurs in hermeneutic phenomenology, as discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

A further consideration is the researcher's obligation to act upon the knowledge gained from those participants. The ethical ramifications of social action begin when the knowledge gained from research reveals marginalization or inequity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Knowledge that is used to address issues of social justice can honor the respect developed between the researcher and the participants.

Methodology. In order to understand the meaning ELL students make of their experiences of anxiety, a qualitative study is the most appropriate methodology. Qualitative research is rooted in the understanding that knowledge is constructed through the experiences and perceptions of individuals (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Though there are a number of different approaches to help a researcher understand those experiences, I utilized a hermeneutical phenomenological study to understand and interpret the meaning ELL students make of their experiences with anxiety in higher education.

The ELL College Experience

ELL students often consider community colleges when beginning an academic career in higher education precisely because these colleges offer open admission, flexibility in scheduling, lower cost than four year institutions, and quite often a convenient location close to home and work (Blumenthal, 2002; Teranishi, Suárez-

Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). With more ELL students opting to attend college, these institutions need to understand ELL students' backgrounds and goals to better enhance ELLs' success. However, there still remains little research on their experiences in college, or the challenges that they encounter there (Teranishi et al., 2011).

A typology of ELL students. Identifying who is an ELL student is not as straightforward as it would first appear. Vandrick (2015) discusses the wide continuum of ELL students under the general category of those students whose first language is not English. She also argues that ELL students are often treated as an "Other" because of their non-standard language. Admittedly, this is a broad category, and the ELL students who come to community colleges cannot be simply characterized as one general set of students. In any given ESL classroom, a professor can encounter a wide range of students with very different backgrounds and experiences. More specifically, ELL students can be further separated into four different groups - Generation 1, Generation 1.5, International, and Undocumented students. However, these are by no means firm categories, and within each group, there can exist a wide range of abilities and academic goals.

Generation 1. This group of ELL students consists of recent immigrants. Suh (2016) uses Generation 1 students for this student group in order to distinguish them from Generation 1.5 students. Generation 1 students have had no prior education experience in the United States. For some students, their education stopped at the high school level in their home countries, and their English proficiency can be quite low. For other students, they have college experience and even post-graduate degrees (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). They may be interested in pursuing a degree, but they also may be seeking to improve their English for greater employment opportunities. The affordability and

flexibility offered by community colleges makes them an attractive option for these students (Suh, 2016). However, because these students also tend to have outside work and family obligations, they can have difficulties to devote their full time and attention to their studies (Kanno & Harklau, 2012). As such, building relationships and making use of campus resources is problematic (Suh, 2016).

Generation 1.5 students. Another subgroup of ELL students is Generation 1.5 (Gen 1.5) students. These are children of recent immigrants, and they have had some prior high school experience in the United States. Though they can be conversant in English, they can also have a range of academic English reading and writing abilities (Doolan, 2017). Helping these students to develop their academic goals has been a challenge for colleges. Due to their stronger conversational abilities, they can resent being placed into ESL classes (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). At the same time, their reading and writing weaknesses are better supported by ESL curricula than in developmental classes designed for native English-speaking students (Hodora, 2015).

International students. A third group of ELL students is international students. This group has a specialized status requiring an F1 Student Visa, are obligated to be full time students, and have limits on their ability to be employed. They have specific degree aspirations, typically as graduate students, and are looking to move quickly through ESL courses in order to begin their program specific studies (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). Depending on their prior preparation, they can struggle with conversational English and cultural adaptation (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). They can also struggle with academic English especially with grammar and writing skills, and they benefit from detailed

feedback from their professors and peer mentoring (Jalili-Greenier & Chase, 1997; Ravichandran, Kretovics, Kirby, & Ghosh, 2017).

Undocumented immigrants. A final subset of ELL students are undocumented immigrants who came to the United States without proper credentials either with their parents or as adults. Sometimes referred to as illegal aliens, they comprise approximately 11 million individuals, of which nearly 65,000 graduate from high school every year (Diaz-Strong, Gómez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011; Pérez, 2014). Although the 1982 U. S. Supreme Court Case Plyer vs. Doe ruled that children of undocumented immigrants could not be denied a K-12 education, there are no guidelines once these individuals enter higher education (Pérez, 2014).

This ambiguity in the legislation has presented these students with additional challenges beyond the typical linguistic and cultural ones of other immigrant students (Chen, Budianto, & Wong, 2010), most pertinently the fear of discovery and deportation (Chen et al., 2010; Hernandez, Hernandez, Gadson, Huftalin, Ortiz, White, & Yocum-Gaffney, 2010). The threat of deportation has become more pronounced with the rhetoric of the current Trump administration and his aggressive policies to expel undocumented immigrants (Bredemeier, 2017; Edelman, 2016; Miller, 2016). Moreover. because of their undocumented status, they are not eligible to apply for a Social Security Number or a driver's license. This can make applying for college difficult, as some application forms require potential students to supply their Social Security Number (Pérez, 2014), and automatically disqualifies them from Federal financial aid and other scholarship opportunities (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

Language proficiency. The goal for most ESL programs is to strengthen the English proficiency of their students. However, *proficiency* is a nebulous concept. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has devised a scale divided into four levels ranging from novice to superior. Within each section are descriptors of what a person should be able to do in terms of reading, writing, and speaking (ACTFL, 2016). Similarly, the Defense Language Institute has developed their own 5 point scale ranging from 0 (no language ability) to 5 (native language proficiency) for military use in determining a level of proficiency in a target language (ILR, 2012).

These scales can be useful in marking progress in a person's functional language proficiency, but do not consider language that is necessary for success in the classroom. In 1979, Jim Cummins developed a conceptual framework to delineate the distinction between conversational proficiency and academic proficiency (Campos, 2010). The first phase Cummins termed BICS for Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills. This takes two to three years for the language learner to develop, and essentially relates to conversational ability. More specifically, it is the social communication that is heard on the playground or in informal conversations (Cummins, 2008). In addition to BICS is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, or CALP. This can take an additional five to seven years to develop. CALP is the academic language of the classroom that is necessary for students to be successful academically (Cummins, 2008: Murie & Thomson, 2001).

Educators who fail to recognize this continuum have created problems for ELL students. For one, many educators can confuse oral fluency (BICS) with academic proficiency (CALPS), conflating the two. In the K-12 sector, this can result in ELL

students being mainstreamed once they become socially conversant, but then struggle because they still do not have the same academic proficiency as their native English speaking peers (Cummins, 2008). In higher education, this misunderstanding of ELL students' conversational proficiency can also lead to poor placement into ESL programs (Cummins, 2008). State and federal agencies have also failed to take CALP into consideration by placing increased pressure on ESL programs to reduce the number of levels in their programs in response to stricter federal financial aid guidelines and the emphasis on improving time to completion rates for students (Blumenthal, 2002). This reduction in courses and level places an increased pressure on students to become academically proficient in a much shorter time span without the needed support that Cummins maintains is crucial for their success.

Programs can also create difficulties for their students if they focus too much on academic proficiency at the expense of needed conversational development. Lee-Johnson's (2015) study of international students revealed that the more these students could be socially successful in building relationships outside of class, the better success they had academically. Likewise, Campbell's (2008) study of ELL students enrolled in health related programs showed students had enhanced success in the classroom when they were able to gain improved confidence in their abilities to converse more confidently in informal settings.

Challenges for ESL programs. Beyond the range of language proficiencies in any given ESL classrorom, there are a number of other challenges that ESL programs must consider when looking how to best serve their students. Blumenthal (2002) explicates the bewildering variations that higher education has in implementing ESL

programs; they may be part of an English, Foreign Language, or Developmental department, or an entirely separate program. They also may be tied to credit level programs or adult education. Neither is placement testing uniform, nor is the number of levels and courses offered consistent. Additionally, little coordination or communication occurs between secondary school ESL programs and higher education programs (Harklau, 2000), creating difficulties in transitioning ELL students into college. This confusion of variation makes it difficult to create any uniformity of processes for prospective ELL students as every institution's ESL program will be unique.

Another fundamental consideration is the instructor teaching the class. Ideally, this would be an individual trained in either Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) or linguistics in order to be cognizant of language acquisition and pedagogy. Instead, too often they are taught by part-time faculty or under-skilled instructors who are not familiar with departmental or college procedures let alone sound language classroom approaches (Curry, 2001; Szelényi & Chang, 2002; Teranishi et al., 2011). Even if an ESL program is able to hire qualified, tenured faculty, these instructors can often be seen as "lesser" professors compared to their colleagues in degree bearing programs because ESL is deemed a skills-based discipline, and, therefore, less rigorous (Blumenthal, 2002). This attitude can lead to the isolation of ESL faculty, and an overall neglect from the institution for funding and support. None of which is beneficial to ELL student success.

Once in the classroom, the ESL instructor is likely to encounter a bewildering level of diversity among the students apart from the expected differences in proficiency levels. No longer is the United States' immigrant population coming from western

European countries; now, immigrants arrive from all over the world, and they bring with them a complex set of expectations, perspectives, and values (Curry, 2001). These cultural values can also intersect with gender making some topics uncomfortable for some students to discuss in mixed settings, or even creating awkwardness in working with a professor or classmate of the opposite sex.

Professors will also find diversity in the educational backgrounds of their students. Some may have advanced degrees from their native countries, while others may have had a limited high school education (Curry, 2001; Szelényi & Chang, 2002). Accordingly, their educational goals can be quite diverse. Though some students may want to earn a degree and look to graduate or transfer, others may be content to develop better English skills for employment opportunities, or simply to help a child with school work (Blumenthal, 2002; Menard-Warwick, 2004).

Finally, ELL students can have a wide range of prior experiences in the United States (Curry, 2001; Harklau, 2000). Some may be new to the United States, and so may be lacking in cultural knowledge and still see themselves as outsiders to mainstream US values and beliefs; others have spent a number of years in the United States already and may identify more with US culture than their "native" culture. This creates an interesting dilemma in the classroom. A presumed commonly understood cultural reference to the TV show *The Simpsons* may not be understood by all the students in the classroom. On the other hand, assigning a writing topic on "what is education like in *your* country" can be insulting to students who see the US as their country (Harklau, 2000).

Pedagogical approaches. The temptation in any classroom may be for the instructor to teach as if the classroom were a homogenous group of students simply

because it is the easiest approach. However, this approach will only create frustration for both the professor and the students in an ELL classroom. In order to address the heterogeneity in the ESL classroom, several pedagogical approaches have been suggested. One area is in teaching strategies. Because an ESL class can have a range of abilities and learning preferences, professor are encouraged create more individualized assignments (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Nero, 2005). This requires the professor to take the time to get know the students in the class and better understand their backgrounds, expectations, and goals (Nero, 2005). Guduru (2011) also suggests that time should be spent on working with English idioms and figurative speech. Since so much of conversational and academic English is highly idiomatic, even ELL students who have conversational proficiency can struggle with these common but confusing phrases. By taking the time to work through idiomatic expressions, Guduru has had success with his students becoming more academically proficient.

Another approach is learning communities. Learning communities are not new to education, and they have been shown to be very effective with ELL students (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Smith, 2010; Teranishi et al., 2011). In a learning community, students typically take two or three courses as a cohort with the courses reinforcing the content and skills of the others. Quite often, for an ESL learning community, a credit course is taught collaboratively with an ESL reading and/or writing course.

This framework allows for several advantages for ELL students. For one, it can help reduce their anxiety in their coursework by providing a structured framework to work collaboratively with other students (Engstrom & Tinto 2008). In addition, ESL learning communities can help ELL students achieve greater connection, a more positive

identity, and increased agency. ELL students can feel like outsiders in college due to an identity as an ESL student (Marshall, 2010; Murie & Thomson, 2001; Nero, 2005), but involvement in learning communities can help build connections with other students and faculty, easing that feeling of isolation by building in social and academic support networks (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Smith, 2010). Identity development is also an important consideration for ELL students due to the deficit mentality that many on campus may have towards them, and they can struggle with feeling like actual college students (Reeves, 2009; Smith, 2010). Learning communities that incorporate credit bearing classes alleviate that deficit identity by giving ELL students the opportunity to take and be successful in college courses, and so begin to see themselves as actual college students (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Lastly, learning communities help ELL students with knowing how to access resources available to them such as tutoring or career counseling and so help ELL students establish better agency (Smith, 2010; Song, 2005).

Similar to the advantages derived from learning communities, Elwell and Bean (2001) propose that ELL students can also benefit from service learning curriculum. Because service learning ties course content with real-life application in the community, ELL students not only have practical opportunities to improve their academic English skills, but they also can develop their identities as valuable, contributing members of society. When so many immigrants can feel like outsiders in society (Nero, 2005), service learning helps to them to see how they can contribute in very viable and productive ways in their communities.

Supporting ELLs in higher education. Apart from classroom approaches, higher education institutions can help support ELL students outside the classroom. Even

though ELL students may be enrolled in a college, they may not have complete comfort or fluency in social situations and so may still struggle to speak to others and establish relationships. Lee-Johnson's (2015) study of out-of-class learning for ELL students recognized the value in creating opportunities for ELL students to engage with native English speakers. It is in these more informal settings that ELL students can have the comfort to ask questions about language, culture, and values. In fact, her study suggests an ELL student's ability to make relationships and be socially successful correlates to academic success. Making available and encouraging ELL students to participate in clubs, conversation partners, or other campus social events can therefore be an effective way to help them build confidence in themselves, make connections within the college community, and have greater success.

Because ELL students can have such diverse backgrounds, colleges would do well to offer enhanced counselling, tutoring, and advising opportunities for them (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008). A number of ELL students, especially more recent immigrants, can struggle with the cultural and linguistic transitions necessary for success in the college classroom (Szelényi & Chang, 2002). Paradoxically, they can also be fearful of losing their cultural identity in the process (Nero, 2005). These are complex issues to work with, and college counsellors need to be aware of the struggles that ELL students can encounter in college. Apart from advising, ELL students also benefit greatly from tutoring. Both Campos (2010) and Lee-Johnson (2015) maintain that advising is most effective if it is individualized and focused on both academic content and cultural knowledge. In a sense, Lee-Johnson sees this type of advising as a merging of both social (BICS) and academic (CALP) proficiency development. Finally, colleges should invest in

advising opportunities for ELL students. Again, because ELL students have such diverse backgrounds, colleges need to be more proactive with their advising (Szelényi & Chang, 2002). For many ELL students, this will be their first experience with higher education in the United States, and it can be confusing for them to know what the expectations are for them, or even where to go get help. By mandating advising sessions, many of these questions and confusions can be resolved before they become larger problems. As an additional consideration, these advising sessions should be tailored to consider specific ELL needs (Teranishi et al., 2011).

ELL students' challenges and anxiety. Many new college students will begin a college career with a certain amount of anxiety (Cox, 2009). ELL students can also experience this anxiety due to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Derwing, DeCorby, & Ichikawa, 1999). Studies have shown that significant anxiety occurs in students learning a foreign language since the language classroom can "challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Horwitz et al. refer to the anxiety that occurs in the language classroom, but an ELL student confronts this same situation not only in the classroom, but also in every interaction in the college in which communicating in English is necessary (Pappamihiel, 2002). In particular, they must manage interactions in the classroom, outside the classroom, the college's institutional practices, and the college culture.

Academic challenges. ESL instructors may encounter difficulties in effectively teaching a diverse ESL classroom, but the challenges ELL students encounter in that same classroom can prove to be anxiety provoking. Quite often the first experience an

ELL student has with the college is through an ESL placement test. Different colleges use different ESL tests to measure an ELL student's academic English ability to determine if the student is in need of further language support and development prior to taking credit level college courses (Friedman & Lown, 2013). Whatever measure is used, placement tests can be unreliable, and many students can experience "negative psychological effects associated with misplacement" (Hodara, 2015, p. 20) which can impact the persistence of those students in their studies. This is especially true if ESL programs are placing students primarily on their conversational fluency without considering their academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2008). Ideally, students receive a placement that is challenging but achievable.

Additionally, ELL students who are already coping with academic proficiency may not be college ready in terms of content knowledge (Callahan & Shifrer, 2012). Their lack of conceptual knowledge in core disciplines makes the development of only linguistic abilities insufficient for sustained classroom success. Lastly, ELL students may be frustrated with a mismatch in teaching strategies with their preferred learning style since the more participatory-discovery pedagogy utilized in many community college classrooms may be very different from the lecture and memorization approaches found in non-Western classrooms (Campbell, 2008; Reid, 1987; Szelényi & Chang, 2002). These combined academic challenges can make the classroom a stressful, anxious setting for some ELL students.

Institutional structural barriers. Apart from the classroom setting, ELL students also encounter significant barriers within the institutional structure of the college. Crucial procedures, such as applying to the college, registering for classes, and financial aid

processes, are difficult enough for non-ELL students to comprehend, and ELL students can easily become confused with the opaque language and steps involved (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Even freshman orientation sessions, a best practice for student retention because it helps students to learn common college procedures and make connections with other students and college staff (Noel-Levitz, 2013), are not always sensitive to ELL students who would benefit from longer, intensive, more one-on-one sessions (Abbott, 2014; Spurling et al., 2008). Additionally, as discussed above, ELL students do not always receive timely academic advising (Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Teranishi et al., 2011) or appropriate counseling (Szelényi & Chang, 2002). If colleges are not willing to invest in better counselling and advising, this can lead to confusion and frustration to such an extent that students may drop out (Morales, de Sabatés, Fanning, & Murry, 2007).

Institutional cultural barriers. Higher Education often espouses valuing diversity, but it does not often do well in positively acknowledging the cultural and linguistic diversity of ELL students (Holmes, Fanning, Espinonza, & Herra, 2012). Instead, too often some faculty and staff can have a deficit attitude about ELL students and so view them as deficient students who lack the cognitive ability to be successful college students (Fuentes, 2012; Shapiro, 2012; Smith, 2010). Therefore, ELL students who are enrolled in ESL programs can feel demeaned by an ESL label, and some actively seek to hide their ELL identity as a result (Fuentes, 2012; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). When the very identity of being an ELL student prompts negative stereotypes in professors, staff, and other students, ELL students' can experience increased anxiety and stress.

ELLs and marginalization. *Marginalizati*on can be understood as the "process through which persons are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations,

experiences, and environments" (Hall et al., 1994, p. 25). Marginalization can contain elements of stigma, disempowerment, silencing, alienation, and exteriority, which is the inability to access resources available to others (Hill, 1999). ELL students who experience anxiety from their college experiences can interpret this as marginalization when they feel stigmatized, silenced, or alienated because of their ELL status. This perceived marginalization can lead to increased difficulties in overcoming the challenges confronting them, and they can feel increasingly isolated and rejected (Fernández, 2002). Counterbalancing this marginalization is the degree to which the student can create a positive identity, make connections, and access resources.

ELL Students and Identity, Connection, and Agency

As will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, Student Engagement Theory and Critical Race Theory have much to say about the benefits of a healthy academic identity, connections with classmates, instructors, and the college community, and the students' agency to take advantage of the resources and opportunities an institution offers. They also speak to the policies and practices of institutions that can impede each of these components. It is helpful, then, to consider the ways in which ELL students can develop their identity, connection, and agency in education, and how anxiety plays a part in that process.

Identity. Identity is a broad concept that relates to someone's social, language, culture, and academic understanding of oneself (Dema, 2015). For an ELL student an academic identity is often a blend of these various understandings, and that identity is often fluid, dynamic, and constantly changing (Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009;

Waller, Wethers, & De Costa, 2017). The focus of this study is on ELL students' academic identity, or their perceptions of themselves as capable students.

A number of studies have explored how ELL students develop their academic identities. Steele's (1997) seminal study on the impact of stereotyping on students of color showed how prejudicial attitudes on the part of teachers and other students led to the disidentification of students of color with the school and its practices. In order to build a stronger academic identity, he argued these students need to have a sense of belonging and access to resources and opportunities. Both De La Vega's (2016) and Flores, Kleyn, and Menken's (2015) studies had similar findings with ELL students in high school ESL or bilingual programs. In order to promote a stronger academic identity for ELL students, it is critical that these students feel supported and respected for the knowledge and abilities they have despite their lower academic fluency.

Further weakening an academic identity is the common practice in K-12 ESL programs to water down the ESL curriculum from a misconception that a lack of linguistic ability is the same as a lack in cognitive ability (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010). This same attitude of ELL students as being deficient carries into higher education. Fuentes (2012) and Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) discuss how some ELL students who are enrolled in ESL programs attempt to avoid this deficit ESL label by refusing to self-identify themselves as ESL. Even though they know that they have language difficulties, they would rather struggle and become non-participatory than admit to their professor that they need added language support. An ELL identity can then carry with it an automatic stigma, potentially compounding a student's anxiety by not being seen as a true college student who belongs in higher education.

Studies that have examined the development of an academic identity in international students enrolled in graduate programs have reached similar conclusions as those for ELL students in high schools. International students, too, can be wrestle with diverse identities of their home culture and mother tongue and their new identity as students in higher education in the United States (Halic, Greenburb, & Paulus, 2009). Quite often, that first year of studies is the most challenging as they struggle with a number of factors – academic, linguistic, and cultural, and yet they were able to regain much of their confidence at the end of that first year (Dema, 2015). One of those struggles was the self-perception that others viewed them as less-capable because of their growing language abilities even if that deficit attitude was not overtly expressed by these other people. Dema also explains how their academic identity was enhanced by "engagement in academic practices and participation in social networks" (p. 216). Therefore, academic identity for an ELL student is closely tied to both connection and agency.

Connection. ELL students can be at a disadvantage when trying to make connections within the college community. Their lack of linguistic proficiency can make it difficult for them to readily bond with students and professors (Song, 2005); a connection Murie and Thomson (2001) say is important to their overall academic success. Because ELL students may be embarrassed to make a mistake and be laughed at by classmates or instructors, they can choose to silence themselves as a protective measure and disengage from others (McCloud, 2015). At times, this self-protective reticence to speak can be misinterpreted as disinterest in the class (Wassell, Fernández

Hawrylak, & LaVan, 2010). Instructors and even classmates, then, may opt not to engage with quiet ELL students, further isolating them and frustrating connections.

Additionally, because ESL programs tend to be located in a separate part of the campus, the larger college community can remain inaccessible and unknown. This creates an atmosphere of isolation (Derwing et al., 1999). As well as the isolation created by their linguistic needs, ELL students may not know the proper cultural ways to approach others for help. As a result, they struggle on their own, self-segregating themselves from those who could help them (Jalili-Greenier & Chase, 1997), and in the process making it difficult for them to make use of those resources that could help them succeed. ELL students who cannot connect with the college due to anxiety from linguistic and cultural differences are in danger of becoming disengaged from the college (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

Agency. Agency is a student's "ability to access and appropriate resources to meet their learning and social needs" (Wassell, Fernández Hawrylak, & LaVan, 2010). Much like identity and connection, true agency for an ELL student can be difficult to achieve. Several studies involving ELL students in high school found agency could be enhanced or frustrated by a number of factors. McCloud's (2015) study of ELL students in a high school ESL program found that when ELL students were allowed to partner with a fellow ELL student of similar language and background, essentially a mentoring relationship, the newer ELL student was more easily able to adapt to the new practices of the school, as well as have someone to provide the necessary language and emotional support at the onset. McCloud also showed that teachers who demonstrated care and support for ELL students were able to enhance those students' agency by helping them to

navigate the school's administrative policies. To these, Wassell et al. (2010) would add that agency for ELL students was improved when teachers took the time to work with students individually and who pushed and supported their students to do better academically rather than treat them as lacking in ability. This sense of trust and respect did much to help students develop greater agency within the school.

At the same time, however, other factors can work against an ELL student's agency. Several factors mentioned earlier related to impaired connection and identity – weakened curricula and isolation from the other students – also impact agency (Wassell et al, 2010). ELL students' agency in high school could also be impaired by an English only rule in the classroom (McCloud, 2015; Wassel et al., 2010). By not being able to speak with another student in their first language, students were not able to gain the necessary clarity and direction to perform the necessary tasks.

Many of these same elements of developing or impeding agency were identified in studies of ELL students in ESL programs in higher education. In a study of three Japanese students enrolled in an undergraduate ESL program, their agency was enhanced by being able to work on a group project with each other in Japanese because it allowed them to better discuss and develop the concepts involved in a project (Kobayashi, 2003). Furthermore, a study of international students in a graduate program revealed how they wished they could have had one-one-one meetings with faculty to discuss more in-depth feedback of their writing, both conceptual and writing skills, as well as the opportunity for peer mentoring (Ravichandran, Kretovics, Kirby, & Ghosh, 2017). Both of these studies affirm how ELL students' agency is improved with peer and instructor support.

Apart from the classroom, oftentimes ELL students and their families lack the cultural knowledge to know what the necessary steps are to seek help with college applications, advising, and registration (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). In addition, they may not have the necessary language fluency to ask the right questions to find out the information that they need (Nuñez & Sparks, 2012). Unless the college is willing to institute added support structures for ELL students, those ELL students who are experiencing anxiety from a lack of agency will be obligated to find ways to overcome their fear on their own. If they cannot, they will miss out on opportunities, fail to meet deadlines, have difficulty understanding instructions, and end up with misconceptions and confusion (Fuentes, 2012; Holmes et al., 2012).

Though each of these aspects of identity, connection, agency have been discussed separately, they are very much inter-related. An academic identity is strengthened when a student is able to make connections with classmates and instructors and knows how to access resources and opportunities. Connection is improved when students feel confident in themselves as capable students to interact with others in the classroom and other social settings. Lastly, agency is directly tied to students' identification as capable, engaged students. If students are confident in themselves and are able to interact, then they will have better access to the resources they need.

Theoretical Perspectives

Given that ELL students encounter a number of significant challenges when attending college, their potential to experience anxiety may be heightened. What meaning they make of those experiences with anxiety will be examined through the theoretical lenses of Student Engagement Theory (SET) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Both theories speak to how anxiety can play a role in a student's ability to make connections

with peers, professors, and the college community. SET argues that successful students are involved, engaged, and integrated students, while CRT argues that the inherent racism in college classrooms and institutional structures create a hostile environment for students of color that can make that engagement difficult.

Student Engagement Theory. It not possible here to address all of the research that has been conducted towards understanding the complex nature of student engagement in higher education. Numerous articles and books have been written that have addressed this seemingly straightforward question and have approached it from slightly different perspectives. However, much of what can be termed Student Engagement Theory is built upon the formative works of Alexander Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1993b), Vincent Tinto's Theory of Integration (1987), and George Kuh's Engagement Theory (2001).

Before looking more deeply into these perspectives, it is helpful to first define more accurately the terms *persistence* and *retention*. Reason (2009) provides a good understanding of these often confused terms. Persistence is the ability of the student to continue with a college career until these academic goals have been met. This may or may not include receiving a certificate or a degree. In this way, persistence is largely a student reality. For example, as Crandall and Sheppard (2004) note, ELL students can have a variety of reasons for attending college and taking ESL classes. Some may be looking to attain a college degree and so need academic English development in order to achieve that goal. Others may be looking for a certificate of achievement that they can present to an employer as evidence of enhanced language skills. Still others are simply hoping to improve their overall English abilities for more personal reasons, such as pride,

family interaction, or self-improvement. Therefore, an ELL student may persist only until that goal has been achieved, and then subsequently stop attending college.

Retention, on the other hand, is an institutional activity (Reason, 2009; Tinto 1999). These are the policy, practices, and cultural values of an institution that encourage students to continue in their pursuit of their academic goals. Because of the increased public scrutiny on colleges for improved graduation rates, many colleges are attempting to retain students through the completion of degrees. Even though a student's persistence may be at odds with a college's retention goals, both concepts play a critical role with student success.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement. Astin's ideas on student involvement grew out of his original theory on Input-Environment-Outcomes (I-E-O) in which the degree to which a student grew academically and socially (outcomes) was related to the student's family, social, and academic background (inputs) and the institution's programs and policies (environment) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Involvement is "the amount of time physical and psychological energy that the student invests in the learning process" (Astin, 1999b, p. 588). He goes on to identify five components of involvement (Almon, 2010; Astin, 1999b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

First, involvement requires an investment on the part of the student to make the effort psychologically and physically to interact within the college. This involvement is more of a continuum than a direct measure, and students may be more involved in certain aspects of the college than others. For example, a student may not interact much with faculty or tutors, but be heavily involved in a student group. Involvement also has both quantitative (time on task) and qualitative (attitude and attention towards those tasks)

aspects. Moreover, the level of involvement will impact student learning and development. Lastly, institutional policies and practices can hinder or encourage student involvement.

In Astin's model, involved students are frequently on campus and not just in the classroom. Therefore, he cites activities such as on-campus residency, student clubs and government, and strong student-faculty interaction as positive influences on student involvement. Uninvolved students are non-interactive with their peers, professors, and the institution's staff. The ultimate form of noninvolvement is for a student to withdraw from the college. In this sense, Astin approaches student success from the perspective of the ability or willingness of the student to persist in higher education.

Some of the criticism towards Astin's theory is that it places too much emphasis on the role of the student while ignoring the role of the institution in student involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). To this criticism, Astin has responded that the institution does play a major role in how it can or cannot encourage student involvement. In fact, he advocates that every faculty, staff, and administrator should "assess their own activities in terms of their success in encouraging students to become more involved in the college experience" (Astin, 1999b, p. 529).

Others have criticized Astin's idea of involvement as being too focused on students attending traditional four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Astin readily admits that community college students have a more difficult time with involvement because they tend to be part-time, non-residential, non-traditional students (Astin, 1999b). In response, there has been more recent research directed toward the persistence of community college students. For example, several

studies have focused on developmental and students of color since these are key sectors of the community college student population. Conway's (2009; 2010) studies of immigrant and native students persistence in an urban community college setting expresses concern that many students of color are perceived as deficient, and so they end up being "cooled out" of certain majors and steered into vocational or workforce programs. Rather than hold these students back, she advocates for added resources to help them make the transition into college. Other studies (Barbatis, 2010; Chaves, 2003) suggest that the collaborative nature of learning communities can help this same student population have greater success and persistence.

Because involvement is more difficult for non-traditional students, Rendon (1994) says the institution needs to take on a greater role in creating an environment conducive to involvement for these students. She cites the concept of *validation* as key for these students. Validation requires a degree of sensitivity to diversity in the classroom and college context. Eliminating an environment that creates a "fear of failure" (p. 49) means creating tolerance, appreciation, affirmation, and respect for diverse cultural identities. Astin (1993a), too, has attempted to address the growth of diversity on campuses and how it relates to enhanced involvement, and charges institutions and faculty to improve racial understanding via diversity classes and workshops. In the process, this will create a stronger peer to peer, and student to faculty relationships (Astin, 1999a). This is important when considering ELL students who may struggle to make these important connections.

Tinto's Theory of Integration. Tinto's approach to student success seeks to understand why students choose to withdraw from their institution, and so incorporates

more elements of the institutional role of retention than does Astin. His model grew from anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep's ideas on rites of passage in which individuals went through a process of separation from past identities, transitioning to a new identity, and ultimately to an incorporation of that new identity in all aspects of life (Tinto, 1988). This last stage of incorporation involves the *integration* of the student into the college culture.

Integration is "the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal community or in the subgroup of it" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). Therefore, the more a student can integrate into the college, the more success the student will have in achieving academic and personal goals. Conversely, the more a student encounters negative experiences in the classroom or other college settings, the more difficult integration will be.

Though integration does involve effort on the part of the student, the institution is also responsible for creating opportunities for this integration to occur. Tinto (1999) details several institutional imperatives to help create a more supportive student environment. For one, college advising needs to clearly direct students throughout their academic career. In addition, the institution needs to provide pertinent academic and social support, and create an atmosphere in which students feel involved in all aspects of the organization. Lastly, colleges should incorporate pedagogies that incorporate active, collaborative learning such as learning communities. Especially important for integration to occur is to establish these criteria during the student's first year. To that end, Tinto believes strongly in the efficacy of first year seminar programs and courses, so long as they incorporate the above imperatives (Tinto, 1999).

Much like Astin, Tinto's theory of student integration falls under criticism because it is primarily focused on traditional, residential, degree-seeking student and does not consider how community college students experience integration (Almon, 2010). Because community college students tend to be less sure of their academic goals, and often have work and family responsibilities, establishing true integration with an institution's academic and social culture can be more difficult. Two studies by Deil-Amen (2005) and Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) indicate that for community college students, social integration and feeling welcomed in the classroom is slightly more important than academic integration. Tinto would agree that no matter the type of student, there is a "need to feel welcomed not threatened" (Tinto as quoted in Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 424).

Another criticism of Tinto is what integration means to students of color (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). As will be discussed in greater detail below in Critical Race Theory, if institutions of higher education incorporate policies and practices to sustain a culture of privilege for majority students, then students of color are at a distinct disadvantage to achieve integration. It much easier for a middle class white student to integrate into such institutions than it is for a lower-class student of color. For these students, integration would mean in essence an abandonment of their ethnic and racial identities. Understanding what integration means for students of color, then, is an area in need of further research. Kuh's (2009) study of institutions serving students of color sheds some light on this question. In these contexts, students felt better engaged in their college when there is strong faculty and student interaction, academic

and social support, intrusive advising, and "when they cultivate a culture of affirmation, aspiration, and achievement" (p. 691).

Kuh's Engagement Theory. For the purposes of this study, neither Astin's ideas on student involvement nor Tinto's ideas on student integration are satisfying. Astin's stronger emphasis on the responsibility of the student to achieve success largely ignores the impact the institution can have on that involvement. Tinto's concept of integration is troubling when it is applied to a student of color entering into a predominantly White institution. George Kuh's concept of student engagement strikes a good balance. For Kuh, student engagement "represents aspects of student behavior and institutional performance that colleges and universities can do something about" (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 8). Institutions can promote better student engagement through a number of practices, including first year seminars, collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and timely, intrusive advising (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2005). In this way, students are actively involved with numerous opportunities to interact with peers, faculty, and staff.

Another key component of Kuh's understanding of student engagement is the value of diversity in the college or university (Kuh, 2005). A study conducted by Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) proposes that "diversity on college campuses is not a gratuitous or idealistic goal: it is essential in order for college students to learn how to live and work effectively with others who differ from themselves" (p. 210). Kuh (2009) would agree with Rendon's (1994) idea of *validation* for diverse students in that creating an inviting and affirming environment for diverse students is key to their ability to engage.

Engagement, then, includes both Astin's idea of the student investment in college, as well as Tinto's ideas on the institutional role in providing those opportunities to happen. Institutions that promote engagement have strong student-faculty interaction, utilize active/collaborative learning in the classroom, and strive for inclusivity (Kuh, 2005). As this study seeks to understand the meaning ELL students make of anxiety, Kuh's engagement theory places the right balance on the student's role and background while also considering the institutional role in creating or inhibiting that engagement to occur.

Anxiety and engagement. This study will adopt Brook and Willougby's (2015) definition of anxiety as the "fear of negative evaluation and avoidance of new or all social situations" (p. 1139). This is not to be understood as a debilitating anxiety (Veale, 2003), but rather in the sense of how it relates to avoidance of uncomfortable situations encountered in the college environment, and therefore increasing isolation and a lack of engagement. Cox (2009) uses fear in this way to explain a lack of success for many first generation college students. The students in her study engaged in avoidance strategies, such as absenteeism, incomplete assignments, and withdrawing, as coping mechanisms to manage their fear of failure. Topham and Russell (2012) suggest one way to alleviate the anxiety students may feel by creating opportunities for students to get to know each, such as ice-breaking activities in the classroom, or college mixers. Along the lines of Tinto, they see social integration as paramount in combating fears of students.

Implicit in Almon's (2010) study is the role of anxiety in ELL engagement, especially when ELL students are unsure how to interact with others, or when their identity is belittled. Anxiety, in fact, has been shown to directly inhibit student

engagement (Cox, 2009; Rendon, 1994). Other studies in social anxiety have demonstrated that student anxiety can lead students to withdraw from any social engagement (Brook & Willoughby, 2015). Most of these studies have not attempted to specify a student population beyond the more typical first generation college student, let alone consider ELL student population's experiences with anxiety.

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers an additional understanding of the role of anxiety in the classroom as experienced by students of color. CRT has its roots in Critical Legal Studies, which was an attempt to demonstrate how the legal system has both created and protected class structures (Ladson-Billings, 1998). However, proponents of CRT felt Critical Legal Studies did not fully address the issue of racism and especially why racial reform following the Civil Rights movement was so slow in coming (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). As CRT has developed and expanded into addressing issues of racism in education, it has established five essential tenets (Hiraldo, 2015): racism is inherent in society; whiteness as property; interest convergence; critiques of liberal ideologies; and counter-storytelling. To these five tenets, some would add a sixth tenet of intersectionality (Capper, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano, 1998).

Racism. A basic tenet of CRT is that racism is endemic in U.S. society, and that the educational system is one that favors Whites to the detriment of people of color (Hiraldo, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Racism in this context is not defined as overt confrontational acts of hostility towards others of a different skin color or ethnicity, but instead racism is an insidious use of power to maintain the status and privilege of one race over another (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Taylor, 2000). More

recently, CRT has expanded from a White/Black perspective, and has grown to add other groups, such as gender, ethnicity, language, accent, and sexual orientation as potential victims of marginalization due to the use of power to maintain the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

In education, this prevalence of racism can have devastating effects. Some studies have demonstrated how despite efforts to diversify the curriculum and create greater inclusiveness of differing cultures and perspectives, a majority of teachers still cling to stereotypical and harmful presumptions of non-white students as stupid and lazy. As a result, they ultimately blame these students, their families, and their cultures for not valuing education (Bensimon, 2005; Picower, 2009; Solórzano, 1997).

Microaggressions. One very powerful way this hostile environment is created is through *microaggressions*, or subtle, often unconscious acts that degrade a person's sense of self (Yosso et al., 2009). Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquilin (2007) define microaggressions as acts of micro-assaults (explicit verbal or nonverbal attacks such as name calling or posting offensive, provocative symbols), micro-insults (insensitivity or rudeness to a person's social identity or heritage), and micro-invalidations (excluding or demeaning the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of students). Microaggressions can be manifested in a number of ways including inappropriate jokes, stereotypical comments about a student's ethnic and socio-economic background, and setting low academic expectations based on a student's ethnic and socio-economic background (Ee, 2013; Solórzano, 1997). This can occur from a faculty directing these comments toward a student, or from other classmates. In addition to these more personal aggressions, microaggressions can occur at an institutional level in the

culture and protocols that demean students of color, such as the lack of diverse faculty, the lack of administrative help, and the use of English as the sole means of communication (Yosso et al., 2009).

These attacks against a student's identity and ability can be made by people who espouse valuing diversity. However, when these same individuals operate from a deficit cognitive framework (Bensimon, 2005), that same diversity is in fact viewed as a detriment, and pejorative assumptions are automatically made about these non-White students' academic abilities. Students who are the victims of microaggressions can have lowered expectations for themselves because they are made to feel as if they do not belong in the classroom (Solórzano, 1998), suffer from an inability to integrate with the college community (Yosso et al., 2009), and feel increased anxiety (Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009).

In Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso's (2000) study of the impact of microaggressions upon African American students in higher education, they discovered that this form of racism created a hostile environment for many students of color. The implicit yet persistent attacks based upon their ethnicity resulted in feelings of self-doubt, isolation, and fear prompting some to give up on their academic goals. Ee's (2013) survey of international students' experiences with microaggressions had similar findings, as did Yosso et al.'s (2009) study of Latinx undergraduates.

Whiteness as property. A second tenet of CRT is the idea of Whiteness being equated with property. Property has value; it gives the owner status, privilege, and access to opportunities, and so being White can be considered as ownership of property (Bell,

1995; Capper, 2015; Hiraldo, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The corollary is that not being White disenfranchises a person – it limits their access and lowers their privilege.

This has ramifications in education as White suburban schools are equated with privilege and so receive better resources. Meanwhile, urban schools serving students of color living in poverty are not as valued and so do not receive adequate resources (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). This in turn can create a self-fulfilling prophecy in that those same students of color who receive inadequate educational opportunities can begin to believe that they are lesser students. A process that Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) term as *self-condemnation* (p. 57), or internalizing the stereotypes of the majority. Studies have shown that ELL students can develop this same mindset of shame in the classroom (Hodara, 2015; Marshall, 2010; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008).

Interest convergence. A third tenet of CRT is *interest convergence*, or the belief that people of color only benefit from anti-discriminatory policies if Whites also benefit from them (Capper, 2015; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). At the national level, interest convergence is demonstrated in how busing to end segregated schools in the South had support of Whites in the North, but when busing was then recommended for Northern schools that interest quickly died (Tushnet, 2009). It is also evident in how recent proposals to end Affirmative Action have been supported in a number of communities because it is promoted as discriminatory to Whites (Delgado, 1991; Taylor, 2000).

Interest convergence is manifested in higher education when colleges and universities that claim to promote diversity only really do so as a way to benefit their

White students (Yosso et al., 2009). Cultural festivals and diversity awareness seminars make White students more employable because they now have the semblance of being culturally sensitive, but they do little to benefit the students of color that are often the focus of those festivals and seminars. Meanwhile, these same students of color are still treated as lesser students precisely because of their diversity (Bernal, 2002; Bensimon, 2005; Gillborn, 2005; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008).

Critiquing liberal ideologies. Liberalism would seem to have much in common with CRT; however, CRT is rather critical of several liberal ideologies precisely because they give the appearance of promoting equality while they actual do little to address racism. In particular the ideologies of meritocracy and color blindness work counter to creating a just and equal society (Capper, 2015). Meritocracy assumes all students have the same opportunity to be successful so long as they put in the effort, and therefore any failure on the part of these students is directly related to their lack of effort. Color blindness is the ideal that one can learn to ignore "race or color in an attempt to eliminate personal prejudices" (Abrams & Moio, 2009, p. 250). CRT maintains that meritocracy and colorblindness are myths because students of color come from disadvantaged circumstances and do not have the added benefits that white students have (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). To ignore the significant challenges students of color face demeans their struggles even further.

Ladson-Billings (2006) details the enormity of the educational debt students of color are confronted with. She defines this educational debt as the educational disparity of marginalized students based on decades, and sometimes centuries, of historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral abuse. To claim that students from chronically

disadvantaged environments can have the same opportunities as White students if they simply work hard enough whitewashes the reality of educational inequality.

This is not to say that students, such as ELLs, should be coddled (Callahan et al., 2010; Fairbrother, 2008). To do so only reinforces deficit stereotypes. However, it does mean that when working with these students, faculty and staff should be cognizant of the backgrounds these students are coming from. They, too, have high expectations for themselves, and they are not lesser students simply because they are not White. They may not have the same advantages as their White counterparts, but they should not be shamed because of that.

***Counter-storytelling*.** In order to give voice to marginalized people, CRT endorses the use of personal narratives as means to expose racism, and to combat the majoritarian stories of the privileged (Bell, 1995; Capper, 2015; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Too often, the stories of the majority class demean students of color as way to both justify the majority's status and to explain the "failings" of the students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These majoritarian stories equate White with being good and Black with being bad, and reinforce cultural deficit models of the experiences of students of color. Rather than acknowledging racism, majoritarian stories explain the lack of success of students of color due to a lack of intelligence and cultural/ethnic values that do not appreciate education (Solórzano, 1997). Counter-stories allow these students of color to share their experiences with racism and combat the majoritarian assumptions. They can also provide some solidarity in the realization that individual experiences are not unique, but are the experiences of many others as well (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The stories of the experiences of students of color are in line with the phenomenological approach of this study. Phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experience accounts, or what van Manen (2014) terms Lived Experiences Descriptions (LED). LEDs are detailed descriptions of the participant's experiences with the phenomenon. Because the LEDs the participants of this study recounted are ELL students, these accounts also function as counter-stories. Their experiences with anxiety and the meaning they make of them are quite different than those of the majority, and it is important to understand and validate that ELL perspective.

Storytelling in Research. A number of researchers have used CRT as a methodical approach in studying the impact of racism on students of color. Qualitative interviews are not new to research, but CRT would maintain that too often these interviews, especially in educational research, ignore the voices of marginalized students. As such, much of educational research acts to reinforce the majoritarian stories and beliefs. In CRT studies, the narratives of students of color are the primary data source (Fernández, 2002; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). By using these stories to expose racist experiences, CRT researchers can better argue for transformative solutions and social justice (Santamaría, 2014).

Intersectionality. A final tenet of CRT concerns how race is often tied to other areas of subordination, such as gender or sexual orientation. This has led to the expansion of CRT from a White/Black focus to include Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Feminism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Therefore, a Latinx female student faces discrimination not just from her ethnicity but also from her gender. Though other areas of subordination of students have been mentioned as potential areas of

intersectionality, little has been done in research in the areas of ELLs even though these students face a number of challenges including race, ethnicity, culture, and language.

Critiques of Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory presents a thought-provoking perspective on the college experience for students of color. However, not all scholars are so ready to accept its tenets. Some have gone so far to assert that CRT creates an "us versus them" mindset, claiming that if one does not agree with CRT then CRT theorists will label that person a racist (Hutchinson, 2004). However, Tatum (1997) counters that this claim is primarily an emotional reaction with little of substantive value, and may stem from a person of privilege experiencing cognitive dissonance with racism. In other words, they attack CRT because it makes them uncomfortable to consider how they have benefitted from their privileged status.

An additional concern with CRT is the emphasis on race and racism in marginalizing students. CRT holds that higher education is primarily for the benefit of White students to the detriment of students of color. However, several Marxist scholars have questioned whether socio-economic class in reality has a stronger influence than race in how marginalization occurs in society (Cole, 2009; Hill, 2009; Kubota & Lin, 2006).

This Marxist interpretation does not dismiss White privilege, but also warns against grouping all Whites as privileged and so creating an idea of White Supremacy as the driving force in inequality (Cole, 2009). Truthfully, a poor White student will have more in common with a poor Latinx student than with a rich White businessperson in terms of their "material conditions of their daily existence" (Hill, 2009, p. 27). By over-emphasizing race, CRT ignores the role that class plays in subordinating individuals.

For the purposes of this study, this distinction between class and race is in reality a blurred one. The ELL students who participated in this study were by and large blue-collar, underemployed people. Their developing English fluency regulates them to low paying, menial work. An ELL student by definition is outside the privileged status – race, class, gender, ethnicity, and language are all at work.

A further criticism of CRT is in the use of counter-stories to give voice to students of color' experiences especially in how they have experienced marginalization. These stories can be powerful and moving; however, Litowitz (1996) warns that there can be a temptation to let these stories play too much on emotion, and the researcher needs to be mindful to maintain an analytical approach to the data. This is a point that Farber and Sherry (1993) also make when they caution researchers to be sure to consider validity, truthfulness, and typicality when incorporating these counter-stories into research. Darder and Torres (2004) also raise concerns that the misuse of counter-storytelling can actually create further divisions and over-represent or "overhomogenize" (p. 103) Whites and people of color. Instead of provoking dialogue, these counter-stories can become politicized to the point of blocking the insights they are intended to create.

Though van Manen (2014) argues that the anecdotes gained from phenomenological interviews should be evocative, he also stresses that the researcher has to let these stories speak for themselves and not attempt to shape them for some other agenda. By closely following the analytical steps outlined in chapter 3, I have striven to avoid over-sensationalizing my participants' accounts while still giving voice to their experiences.

Assumptions of Phenomenology

In this study, I have studied the experiences of ELL students with anxiety from a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology began as a philosophy of meaning developed by Edmund Husserl and further developed by Martin Heidegger. It has also proven to be insightful as a methodology for education, nursing, and the social sciences precisely because phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals experience life (Lester, 1999; van Manen, 2014). More specifically, I followed van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach which assumes several foundational concepts.

Following the idea of Heidegger, hermeneutic phenomenology holds that meaning cannot be separated from reality. This conforms to my social constructivist framework and my understanding of ontology that our experiences and contexts shape our perception of reality, or, as Heidegger terms it, our *historicity* (Finlay 2009; Laverty, 2003; Schacht, 1972). Van Manen (2014) builds on the concept of historicity by encouraging researchers to consider the participants' lifeworld – space, body, time, relations, and technology – as having an interpretive impact on meaning. Considering the challenges that ELL students face, the principles of engagement, and the marginalization of racism as part of the participants' historicity can help better understand how they make meaning of those experiences.

Another key component of phenomenological studies is bracketing, which was discussed briefly at the start of this chapter. Again, for hermeneutic phenomenology, bracketing is a reflective process in which the researcher considers existing bias, practice, and any other preconceptions about the phenomenon or participants prior to the study in order so that they may help add interpretative power to the analysis (van Manen, 2014).

Therefore, my understanding of ELL experiences, Student Engagement Theory, and Critical Race Theory can help inform this study. Still, I will need to take care so as not to let that understanding dictate how I interpret the participants' experiences (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004).

Summary

ELL students can face significant challenges when it comes to engagement in higher education. As a case in point, Almon's (2010) dissertation utilized a mixed methods study to look specifically at ELL engagement and how it impacted retention in the community college environment. Her results confirmed other findings of challenges that ELL students have when it comes to being engaged, including outside responsibilities, unfamiliarity with college processes, dealing with deficit assumptions from faculty and other students, linguistic challenges in being able to initiate dialogues with others, and challenges to their identity as viable college students. Her study discovered that despite performing at a higher GPA than non-ELLs, only 43% of the ELL students completed their ESL coursework, and only 12% actually graduated. Her implications encourage colleges to seek ways to increase engagement with ELL students.

The ideas of Student Engagement Theory and Critical Race Theory create a troubling conflict when it comes to ELL students' experiences with anxiety. If student success is enhanced by a student's relative comfort in engaging with faculty and other students, but if that same classroom and college culture is laced with racism, microaggressions, and deficit frameworks, then that student is placed at a disadvantage. Coupled with the other linguistic and academic challenges ELL students must overcome, SET and CRT can offer insights into the experiences of anxiety in these students. It is

worth exploring, therefore, what meaning ELL students make of anxiety and a fear of engagement from a potentially hostile classrooms and college culture.

By understanding the experiences of anxiety of ELL students, this study sought to identify areas in which the practices of the research site college contribute to that anxiety, whether it arises from racism, academic challenges, or other challenges. In turn, changes in policy and practice are proposed in the final chapter to ease that anxiety, resulting in a safer, more validating environment for ELL students. Only then, can ELL students have the opportunity to better overcome their marginalized status, become engaged, and enjoy success in their college careers.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. *Psalm 130:2*

This study was a hermeneutical phenomenological study of ELL students' shared experiences of anxiety deriving from their day to day activities at the research site college as they worked toward their academic goals, and the meaning they made of those experiences. This anxiety had the potential to result from the students feeling under-prepared for the coursework, uncertainty of how and where to ask for help, feelings of marginalization from stigma and/or pejorative attitudes directed towards, or any combination of these (Brook & Willoughby, 2015; Cox, 2009; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Solórzano, 1997). By reflecting on Kuh's Student Engagement Theory, Critical Race Theory, and my experiences and expertise, I sought to answer the overarching research question and sub-questions:

1. What meaning do ELL students make of their shared experiences with anxiety while attending college?
    a. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of identity?
    b. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of connection?
    c. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of agency?

I conducted a qualitative study because, unlike quantitative studies which examine statistical relationships, a qualitative study is much more concerned with descriptions of situations or people (Maxwell, 2013). More specifically, I followed van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach to answer these questions.

Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation. When applied to phenomenology, it is focused on understanding human existence, the interaction of researcher and participant to arrive at meaning, and the use of provocative language to reveal that meaning to others (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Gill, 2014; van Manen, 1997a; van Manen, 2014). Because the research questions sought to understand experiences of ELL students with anxiety, phenomenology was the best approach to use. Furthermore, since I wanted to understand the meaning that these students make of those experiences, an interpretative phenomenological approach, such as van Manen's, was also necessary.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, in itself, is often a misunderstood methodology, and researchers have found fault with studies that claim to be phenomenological in nature but violate its basic tenets by failing to understand its philosophical foundation, confusing descriptive and interpretative phenomenology, and/or making no reference to the role of reduction or bracketing in the study (Finlay, 2009; Giorgi, 2008; Todres & Wheeler, 2001). Therefore, in order to ground this study as truly phenomenological, it is first necessary to understand what phenomenology is, the different approaches that have arisen, the justification for the approach I felt was suitable for this study, and the subsequent role bracketing had.

Much of the difficulty researchers have with phenomenology is that it is both a philosophy and a methodology (Finlay, 2009). Phenomenology "asks 'What is the nature, meaning, significance, uniqueness, or singularity of this or that experience as we live through it or as it is given in our experience or consciousness?'" (van Manen, 2014, p. 39), and it places a higher emphasis on describing a person's experience with the phenomenon rather than attempting to explain the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). Lester

(1999) makes the point that phenomenology is "particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives" (p. 1). At its heart, then, phenomenology is a philosophy of meaning, not a methodological approach. However, since understanding the meaning that people make of their experiences can provide important insights in a number of disciplines including nursing, psychology, and education, researchers have attempted to develop a corresponding methodology of phenomenology.

The origins of phenomenology began with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who developed the philosophy of Phenomenology in order to connect the essence of meaning with both the experience of the phenomenon and the perceptions of the person experiencing that phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). Husserl termed it as returning meaning "to the things themselves," or a description of things as they actually are (Dowling, 2007). Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, rejected several of Husserl's key concepts of phenomenology, and this resulting schism has resulted in the two basic approaches to phenomenological study – Husserlian, or Descriptive Phenomenology, and Heideggerian, or Interpretative Phenomenology (Crowell, 1990).

Husserl and Descriptive Phenomenology. Descriptive Phenomenology as developed by Husserl, and further advanced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Amedeo Giorgi, is also known as Transcendental Phenomenology. Husserl wanted to explore the question, "how do we know what we know," and so sought to determine "the 'whatness' of the experience so that its 'itness' becomes revealed" (Willis, 2004, p. 4). His approach is primarily an epistemological one because it seeks to know how people experience objects. It is also termed transcendental because it moves beyond the physical

understanding of a phenomenon in order "to reach the core of an essence through a state of pure consciousness" (Kafle, 2013, p. 186). Central to Husserl's philosophy are the ideas of *intentionality, reduction and epoché*, and *free imaginative variation.*

Intentionality. Intentionality refers to Husserl's idea that "every mental act is related to some object" (Dowling, 2007, p. 132), or "as a process where the mind is directed towards objects of study" (Laverty, 2003, p. 5). In other words, meaning is found through our insights and understandings of the experience itself. Husserl further delineates intentionality of being composed of the *noema* – "that which appears and is experienced"; and the *noesis* – "the mental apparatus of the experiencing . . . to which it appears" (McNamara, 2005, p. 697). Kafle (2013) further explicates this as "the total meaning of the object or idea which is always more than what is given in the perception of a single perspective" (p. 182). In order to arrive as this dual understanding of experience and reality, and therefore its true essence, Husserl maintains that the person must first undergo the process of *reduction* to arrive at the *epoché*.

Reduction and the epoché. Reduction is also referred to as *bracketing*, and is the process in which the researcher sets aside cultural and experiential bias, pre-conceptions, beliefs about the veracity of the participants views, and anything else that may interfere with the ability to experience the phenomenon as it truly is (Dowling, 2007; Flood, 2010; Gill, 2014). Van Manen (2014) explains that reduction is going back to the original experience with an open mind, or a pre-reflective state. It is through the reduction that understanding of the lived experiences of the participants is revealed. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2004) in their discussion of bracketing suggest the use of the term *bridling* instead of bracketing. Bracketing, they feel, is too exact and scientific for what is

essentially a reflective process whereas bridling suggests the idea that researcher bias and experience guide without controlling the understanding of the phenomenon. What may sound as a simple mental exercise of becoming aware of one's preconceptions and then guarding against these from interfering with an understanding of the phenomenon is quite challenging to do and requires constant vigilance on the part of the researcher (Finlay, 2008).

The arduous process of reduction allows the researcher to arrive at the *epoché,* whereby researchers "make no natural judgment of perception" (Husserl as cited by Crowell, 1990, p. 504). The *epoché* essentially means 'to not judge,' or to be able to perceive the phenomenon in a fresh way (Moustakas, 1994). Once the researcher has arrived at the epoché, the actual phenomenology of the essence can occur. The researcher is now free to explore the "transcendental experience" (Schacht, 1972, p. 299) and to describe that essence using *free imaginative variation.*

Free imaginative variation. The goal of Husserl's phenomenology is to describe a phenomenon free from interpretation or cultural context in its universal essence as vividly as possible (Gill, 2014). What is essential is "to describe *what* shows itself in experience or consciousness and *how* something shows itself" (van Manen, 2014, p. 229). Therefore the researcher attempts to consider all facets of the phenomenon and determine which ones are essential to its core sense (Giorgi, 1997), or the "essential structures of the phenomena, without which it would not exist" (Laverty, 2003, p. 6). These are then synthesized to arrive at the core description of the phenomenon as it is.

Heidegger and Interpretative Phenomenology. Though Heidegger began as a disciple of Husserl, he eventually departed from Descriptive Phenomenology and

developed Interpretative Phenomenology. Unlike Husserl's epistemological and transcendental approach to meaning, Heidegger adopted an ontological approach, and tied meaning back to the person, or *dasein* – the "being-there" in the world (Schacht, 1972). For Heidegger, people are inextricably tied to their reality, and so it is not possible to transcend it as Husserl advocates. This fundamental departure from Husserl led him to a different understanding of reduction and the importance of *historicity*.

Heidegger and reduction. For Heidegger, complete reduction is neither possible nor advisable. To understand and interpret a phenomenon, researchers must first reflect upon their own understanding of the phenomenon as a means to recognize their own bias and what meaning they make from it (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixmith, 2013). By becoming aware of those preconceptions and biases, one's experiences can help with the understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon as experienced by others. In keeping with social constructivism's understanding of the pivotal role of culture in understanding meaning, researchers must keep their own social context in mind during this reflective bracketing process (Flood, 2010). Therefore, the researcher does not attempt to exclude these past experiences, but rather can draw upon them as a way to better understand the participant's experience with the phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). In this sense, bracketing in hermeneutical phenomenology is one phase of the data collection in the study (Finlay, 2008).

Historicity. Historicity maintains that a person's background, experience, and culture are key to understanding the world (Finlay, 2009; Laverty, 2003). For Heidegger, the self and the world are interconnected in such a way that not only does the world shape meaning, but also our backgrounds shape the world we experience. It is precisely our

background, culture, and experiences that influence how we understand our world. Therefore, in order to understand how a person derives meaning from a phenomenon, the researcher must seek to understand how both the researcher's and the participant's historicity has shaped that understanding of their shared experiences.

Hermeneutic cycle. For Heidegger, then, to be human is to interpret experiences. For researchers engaged in interpretative, or hermeneutical, phenomenology, it is possible to look for meaning in these shared experiences, or how "meanings of the individual's 'dasein' [experience] and how these meanings influence the choices they make" (Flood, 2010, p. 9). This is achieved by employing the hermeneutic cycle, or an iterative dialectical dance in which the researcher must engage in self-reflective critiques of presuppositions throughout the study in order to be open to new insights that the participants bring to the phenomenon (Finlay, 2008).

The hermeneutic cycle can be understood as having three essential stages: fore-understanding, resistance, and reinterpretation (Finlay, 2003). Fore-understanding is the process in which researchers come to an awareness of their own historicity with the phenomenon. Van Manen (1997a) asserts that a foundational problem with phenomenological studies is that researchers know too much about the phenomenon, and so they need to first reflect on this prior knowledge before engaging in the study. A basic tenant of interpretative phenomenology is that each person makes meaning from reality. How I understand anxiety in language learning can be very different for someone else. Therefore, I first had to become aware of my fore-understanding of this phenomenon, so that I was less likely to allow "unelucidated prejudices" (Finlay, 2003, p. 108) from imposing meaning on someone else's reality. For this, reason, I, like many researchers,

used reflective journaling in order to bring my own historicity to light (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Finlay, 2008; Groenwald, 2004; Laverty, 2003).

Once fore-understandings have been made explicit, I had to expect these preconceptions to be challenged when my participants began to relate their own experiences and meaning. Their understanding of their experiences was not always the same as my understanding of their experiences. This is the resistance stage in the hermeneutic cycle (Finlay, 2003); however, it is precisely this confrontation of multiple understandings of a phenomenon that provoked me to consider alternate understandings leading to revisions of my fore-understandings. By engaging in this continuous cycle of reflection, reciprocal interrogation, and renewed understandings, I was better able to co-construct the meaning of anxiety with my participants (Hammill & Sinclair, 2010).

Van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenology. Phenomenologists who engage in Husserl's descriptive analysis can be critical of those who adopt Heidegger's interpretative approach as not being true to the roots of phenomenology; at the same time, interpretative phenomenologists have critiqued purely descriptive phenomenology that does not include interpretation as shallow (Todres & Wheeler, 2001), or overly abstract and analytical (Willis, 2004). Ultimately, the choice of an approach to a phenomenological study rests on the purpose of that study (Finlay, 2009; Gill, 2014).

A descriptive approach is appropriate if that study seeks to describe an experience in general as one shared by many, or the universal essence of a phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). On the other hand, an interpretative approach is appropriate if the purpose is to gain insights into the meaning of a phenomenon for the participants (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Tuohy et al., 2013). Since the purpose of this study was precisely to understand

how ELL students make meaning of their experiences from anxiety and not a universal description of anxiety, I adopted an interpretative phenomenological study. More specifically, I used van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology of lived experiences.

Van Manen's phenomenology can be seen as a blend of Husserl and Heidegger. Like descriptive phenomenology, he places an emphasis on the pre-reflective experiences of how things appear and providing detailed descriptions of the phenomenon. However, he also stresses the necessity of interpreting the meaning of those experiences (van Manen, 1997a; van Manen, 2014). To do this, he advocates certain approaches to *bracketing,* the *hermeneutic cycle and the lifeworld,* and the use of *vocative language*.

Bracketing. A key component of van Manen's hermeneutical phenomenology, as in all phenomenological studies, is bracketing. However, bracketing is not done in order to set aside preconceptions of the phenomenon as it is in descriptive phenomenology, but rather to be become aware of those preconceptions in order that they may help inform the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). Some have termed this as *reflective bracketing* or a "thoughtful, conscious, self-awareness" (Finlay, 2002, p. 532) of the interplay between experience and meaning. This is not to be confused with seeking an explanation for a phenomenon, but rather as an interpretative aid to better understand the true nature of the experience (van Manen, 1997a). Therefore, I journaled my reflections on my experiences of anxiety as they related to language learning that in turn helped me to identify these theoretical, professional, and personal influences that became part of the interpretative process. Gearing (2004) in his discussion of typologies of bracketing maintains that no matter what approach is undertaken bracketing must consider three components: abstract formulation, researcher praxis, and reintegration.

Abstract formulation and bracketing. Abstract formulation refers to the theoretical orientation and methodological approach of this study which is discussed in full in Chapter 2. Briefly, I embrace a social constructivist worldview in which our understanding of reality is tied to our individual experiences, cultural, and social backgrounds. Gearing maintains that too few researchers are clear in their ontological and epistemological stances, but these are the foundational pieces that shape the entire study. It is precisely because of my theoretical orientation that I conducted a hermeneutical phenomenological study.

Research praxis and bracketing. Research praxis incorporates a number of components including the internal suppositions of the researcher, the temporal framework of the bracketing process, and the boundaries of bracketing (Gearing 2004). One aspect of the internal suppositions refers to the researcher's values, background, and experiences – both personal and profession – with the phenomenon. Personally, much like ELL students, I have lived as an outsider in an almost exclusively homogenous society. For a number of years, my family and I lived in a Zapotec village in Southern Mexico doing field linguistic work. We were the only non-Mexican family living in the town, and were treated with a fair amount of suspicion and hostility especially at first. Our house abutted the house of the local shaman, and he was known to have made comments that he would do what he could to drive us out. There were times when I feared for our safety, and times when I definitely felt ashamed of my lack of cultural understanding and language skills. Reflecting on those experiences can help me first identify how I made meaning of those experiences with anxiety in terms of my identity, connection, and agency. By becoming aware of these preconceptions, and then by continuously reflecting on my

interpretations of my reality as a language learner as I worked with my participants, I was better able to allow them to relate their experiences and the meaning they made of them but not assume meaning for them.

Professionally, I have worked in higher education community college settings for the past eleven years both as an ESL instructor and an ESL department chair. In that time, I have seen how ELL students struggle with the same barriers that have been identified through research, and I have also heard their stories of being treated poorly by others on campus precisely because they were ELL students. I have witnessed their anxiety as new students, and their uncertainty in how to get institutional and academic help. At the same time, I have come to deeply admire the tenacity that many demonstrate despite these challenges, and the tremendous gratitude they have for those who help them with their academic goals. I had to reflect on these experiences so as not to impose upon my students' stories my understanding of what they are experiencing. However, again, during the analysis of those experiences, these reflections helped inform the meaning they made from them.

The other aspect of these internal suppositions is the theory that is employed in understanding the phenomenon, which Chapter 2 covers in greater detail. This study is founded on the beliefs of Kuh's Student Engagement Theory that students who are welcomed, included, and supported in the college environment will be more likely to persist in their college careers (Kuh, 2005; Kuh 2009). On the other hand, Critical Race Theory that holds that some students, in this case ELL students who are linguistically and culturally "different" from the majority of the campus, can be subjected to pejorative attitudes because they are different, thereby breaking engagement (Solórzano, 1997;

Solórzano et al., 2000). Lastly, I recognize the challenges that ELL students face in terms of their ability to integrate, to build a positive identity, and advocate for themselves (Derwing et al., 1999; Fuentes, 2012; Jalili-Greenier & Chase, 1997; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Nuñez & Sparks, 2012; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). All of this theoretical understanding required guarded diligence from me to not allow those concepts from artificially adding meaning.

Gearing (2004) also advises researchers to be explicit in the timing of the use of bracketing in the study. When did it begin and when does it end? For hermeneutical phenomenology, reflexive bracketing begins at the outset of the study before participant data are collected and continues during the analysis phase of the data (Finlay, 2008; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For this study, I had already begun reflexive journaling on my personal experiences with anxiety and my professional experiences in working with ELL students, and I continued to do so as I considered the meaning my participants made of their experiences, and the subsequent recommendations that arise from these findings. Bracketing did not end until the study was concluded.

Lastly, the boundaries of the bracketing in the study should be delineated. Descriptive phenomenology attempts a rigid bracketing so that no fore-knowledge or pre-suppostions of the researcher interferes with that transcendental nature of the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). However, this is an interpretative phenomenological study, and rigid bracketing is not practical; instead I reflected upon my fore-knowledge and pre-suppostions as part of the interpretive process of the study (Flood, 2010; Laverty, 2003). These were explored though reflective journaling as a means to prevent bias from

entering the study, but I also returned to these as part of the interpretation of the meaning of anxiety that the participants revealed.

Reintegration and bracketing. In this final and often overlooked step to bracketing, Gearing (2004) advocates the researcher return to those bracketed presuppositions and reintegrate them back into the research process. This is a critical step in hermeneutic phenomenology as this involved allowing those presuppositions from my worldview, the theoretical foundation of this study, and my personal and professional experiences to help inform those student experiences with anxiety but without artificially imposing meaning on them.

Hermeneutic cycle and the lifeworld. Interpretative phenomenology engages in a process of analysis of an ongoing interaction with the texts termed the hermeneutic cycle in order to extract the overarching themes prevalent in the experience. Van Manen (1997a, 2014) encourages the researcher as part of that hermeneutic cycle to consider the *lifeworld* of those participants; this includes *lived space, lived body, lived time, lived human relations*, and *lived things and technology*. These are universal, existential ways in which all human beings experience the world, and understanding them helps the researcher to situate the phenomenon in the real world (van Manen, 1997b).

Lived space. Lived space refers to the spatiality of human existence. This is not the physical dimension of space (length or height), but the feelings we attach to the spaces in which the phenomenon occurs (van Manen, 2014). An experience with anxiety might be quite different when it occurs in a classroom as opposed to the home. The formality and isolation of a classroom are quite different than that of the informal and inclusivity of a kitchen which can alter how the student makes meaning of the experience

with anxiety. This is seen when one of the participants remarked he was embarrassed to ask a question about how to use a vending machine in the context of the college, but instead raised the question with a cousin at a wedding.

Lived body. This is the corporeality of our existence; "we are always bodily in the world" (Heinonen, 2015, p. 37). Here is where we perceive and feel the phenomenon. Van Manen (2014) gives an example of a child holding a secret, and how her whole body is involved in that experience from the gestures, eye movement, and body language that result from it. How an ELL student might physically react to anxiety, and how might that be interpreted is important to consider. Several of the participants told of the physical toll their anxiety played on them from headaches to stomach aches, from nervous pacing to sweaty palms.

Lived time. Lived time is the temporality of the experience, and how we perceive time as part of the experience with the phenomenon. Apart from the scientific measurement of time, our subjective perceptions of time are ever changing. Ten minutes sitting doing nothing can "feel" longer than two hours spent with a friend over dinner. Van Manen (2014) remarks that lived time and lived space often interact in that our perceptions of space can also impact our perceptions of time. For example, a five minute experience with anxiety in a classroom can be perceived as a much longer event by the student. During the study, one participant had to wait anxiously for a department chair to sign off on a registration form, and he made frequent comments about how long it was taking to happen. The more time passed, the more anxious he became.

Lived human relations. Relationality can provide insights into "how self and others are experienced with respect to the phenomenon that is being studied" (van

Manen, 2014). This is a complex dimension that can touch upon identity, community, and more intimate relationships such as friends, family, and significant others. Anxiety can often be the result of a power dynamic when a person in authority creates stress in a subordinate. This was readily evident when the participants told of insensitive professors that created anxiety and made them question their abilities.

Lived things and technology. The final lifeworld experience that van Manen discusses is materiality, or our interaction with the "things" in our lives. We live in a materialistic society, and quite often the things around us speak to our identity in positive and negative ways. These inanimate objects can have a powerful impact on how we experience phenomena (van Manen, 2014). One student who is comfortable with technology may think nothing of having to upload an assignment to a class website, whereas another student who has had limited experiences with technology may find that experience bewildering, frustrating, and stress inducing. Interestingly enough, one participant felt reduced anxiety when he was working with computers because he knew them so well. This familiarity with technology made it easier for him at times to make connections with classmates and professors.

The lifeworld of ELL students and anxiety. Student Engagement Theory and Critical Race Theory combined with van Manen's use of lifeworld experiences can help better understand the meaning ELL students make from anxiety. Student Engagement Theory advocates creating a collegiate environment that is safe, welcoming, and engaging (Kuh, 2005; 2009). However, if the lifeworld experiences of ELL students are ones of not being welcome as diverse students, then the potential for anxiety can increase. Critical Race Theory can provide insight into how those lived spaces can be perceived as

unwelcoming though the prevailing attitudes of racism and a deficit attitude towards minorities (Bensimon, 2005, Picower, 2009). The lived space of ELL students can be a very different experience for them than it is for other students on campus.

Additionally, Critical Race Theory would also suggest that the lived body experiences with anxiety of ELL students would be manifested in feelings of self-doubt and increasing isolation (Ee, 2013; Solórzano et al., 2000). This was also supported by Almon's (2010) study on ELL engagement, as well as Cox's (2009) of anxiety and first year college students. The ultimate lived body experience with anxiety is to disengage completely to avoid that anxiety (Brook & Willoughby, 2015).

Similarly, the lived human relations of ELL students can be understood through Critical Race Theory and Student Engagement Theory. Kuh's (2005; 2009) research indicates that students who are able to interact positively with faculty and staff will have improved engagement as these relationships are critical in helping a student feel validated as worthy, competent college students. On the other hand, Critical Race Theory demonstrates that those same necessary relationships between faculty/staff and students can become dominated by power and marginalization due to prevailing attitudes of racism and privilege (Hiraldo, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano, 1998).

Vocative language. Through the existential hermeneutic cycle, the researcher can begin to develop the themes that constitute the phenomenon and share that with others. "A good phenomenological text has the effect of making us suddenly 'see' something in a manner that enriches our understanding of everyday life experiences" (van Manen, 1997b, p. 345). However, the struggle now becomes how to "bring into presence this phenomenon that can be represented only in words – and yet escapes all representation"

(van Manen, 1995, p. 718). Simple summary statements ultimately fail to help the reader share in the lived experience.

In order to overcome this apparent paradox, van Manen encourages the use of the vocative to make the phenomenon vivid for the reader. This can be achieved through the use of poetic and literary devices to intensify the meaning, allowing the experience to resonant with the reader (Magrini, 2012; van Manen, 1997a, 2014). "A phenomenological text should never be read merely for its surface message" (van Manen, 1997b, p. 366). Instead it should move the reader to deeper, non-cognitive or emotional effect.

As a means to achieve this epiphany, the title of this dissertation, the start of each chapter, the discussion of the contextual experiences, and meaning of anxiety incorporate quotes taken from the Scriptures in order to encapsulate the essential themes. This is explained in greater detail in Chapter 4, but as an example, the title of this dissertation, *Strangers in a Strange Land,* is taken from Moses naming his son Gershom, or *stranger*. For Moses it commemorates how he and his family lived in exile, separated from his people. For the readers of this dissertation, it is meant to provoke reflection in how they might have been strangers in a strange land, and so, in turn, help them to better understand the experiences of the ELL students in this study.

Scope

This was a hermeneutical phenomenological study of ELL students' shared experiences of anxiety deriving from their day to day activities at the research site college as they worked toward their academic goals, and the meaning they made of those experiences. By the very nature of the research questions, this study was limited in scope

to the research site college ELL students who have persisted in their studies despite challenges they have encountered at the college. Additionally, since it was necessary to work with participants who have experiences with the phenomenon under study (Englander, 2012), these were students who have had experienced anxiety while attending the research site college.

Setting

The focus of this study was on Generation 1 ELL students at the research site college and their experiences with anxiety. Therefore, though the overarching setting for this study was the research site college, it subsumed various components. Primarily, it was situated within the ESL department at the research site college as this was the locus of these students' first contact with the college. In addition, it included the class experiences of the students. This included both ESL classes as well for some participants those non-ESL courses they had taken along with those ESL classes. Finally, the setting also included the larger campus context since these participants had to interact with a number of different offices. For example, in order to be enrolled for courses, any given student needed to first interact with the ESL department staff, the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid Office (if receiving grant or loans), and the Finance Office. Other settings these students may have encountered included resource services such as the library and tutoring. In all of these contexts, some of the participants experienced anxiety, and so needed to be explored.

Participants

Because this study was concerned with the experiences with anxiety of ELL students who were attending the research site college, I selected participants who fit these

criteria. ELL students, themselves, have diverse backgrounds and educational goals. Chapter 2 discussed the diversity of ELL students including Generation 1 students, Gen 1.5 students, international students, and undocumented students. For this study I opted to work Generation 1 ELL students.

Gen 1.5 students, for the most part, are culturally acclimated and conversant in English (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). International students typically are experienced higher education students (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). Undocumented immigrants can be a difficult population to identify, as they tend not to self-disclose. Finding these students and earning their trust to tell their stories of anxiety would be difficult. Additionally, their focus on anxiety may be overly focused on their status and less so on their actual college experiences. However, Generation 1 ELL students face cultural, linguistic, family, work, and educational challenges (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Any of these can increase their anxiety when attempting to take classes. As such, their experiences had the potential of being especially telling in terms of anxiety as it relates to meaning derived from identity, connection, and agency.

Since the heart of a phenomenological study is the interview, it was important that the participants in this study had a reasonable comfort, though not necessarily a proficiency in English. As a result, I identified ELL students who were at the end of their ESL coursework. Though their speaking abilities still did not ensure that all questions and responses were clearly understood or articulated, it did not necessitate the need for a third party translator for clarity and accuracy, which would have added an awkward barrier to what was a partnered exploration into their experiences.

Lastly, this study focused on those ELL students who have persisted in their college coursework despite the challenges they have encountered. For the most part, these students were able to overcome the impulse to disengage from those anxiety producing contexts. Simply because these students can be deemed successful because of their persistence does not imply that their college experience had not been challenging to their understanding of themselves or in engaging with the college culture. This is in line with an anti-deficit achievement framework (Harper, 2010) that while acknowledging the struggles students of color have, seeks to understand those experiences that led to success rather than failure.

Participant Selection

In phenomenology, a researcher is looking for examples rather than a generalizable sample size (van Manen, 2014). Furthermore, the intent of these examples is so that the researcher can "gather enough experientially rich accounts that make possible the figuration of powerful experiential examples" (van Manen, 2014, p. 353). Englander (2012) cautions that though a researcher will want to have enough participants to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, too many participants can make the task overwhelming. However, since every person experiences the phenomenon uniquely, too few participants will limit a fuller understanding. To that end, for this study, I worked with five participants.

In addition, these five participants were selected purposefully. To conduct a phenomenological study, the participants must have had experience with the phenomenon under study (Englander, 2012; Groenwald, 2004). To understand what meaning ELL students make of their experiences with anxiety when enrolled at the research site

college, I had to select participants who fit this description. Therefore, with the help of the Institutional Research Office at the college, I identified more than 50 ELL students who had attended ESL classes for a semester, who had enrolled in at least one more subsequent semester, and who were at the final levels of the ESL program.

From this list, I looked more closely at the students' backgrounds to determine if they were Generation 1 students. Students who had attended high school in the United States, and so would be considered Gen 1.5 students, or who had an International Student status were eliminated from the participant pool. Of the remaining 20 Generation 1 students, I contacted them directly via their college email account to see if they would be interested in participating in this study. This email summarized the purpose of the study and invited them to participate in the study with me (Appendix A).

In addition to the email contact, I also asked permission from several ESL professors to visit their classes. I presented an overview of the study to the students and extended an invitation to participate with me. They were given a handout with an overview of the study and contact information should they be interested or wanting further information (Appendix B).

As a final means to identify participants, I also had the option to employ snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a process in which participants can identify others who would be "information-rich key informants" (Patton, 2001). In this case, this would have been other ELL students who were not included in the initial round of identification, or who were not able to be contacted. This is a technique employed to good effect by Groenwald (2004) and Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000) in their respective phenomenological studies.

In the end, four of the five participants were secured through contact from the email, and one from a class visit. These students are henceforth identified by the pseudonyms Aaron, Deborah, Esther, Leah, and Hannah. These five participants are listed in the order in which they began to work with me. Therefore, Aaron was the first to be interviewed, followed by Deborah, and so forth. Chapter 4 will explore their individual backgrounds in greater depth; however, Table 2 provides a basic overview of each of these five participants.

Table 2

General Background of the Five Participants

Background	Aaron	Deborah	Esther	Leah	Hannah
Native Country	India	Egypt	Jordan	Peru	Colombia
Native Language	Gujarati	Arabic	Arabic	Spanish	Spanish
Age	21	38	39	26	38
Gender	M	F	F	F	F
Higher Ed in Home Country	1 yr	4 yrs	4 yrs	4 yrs	4 yrs
Years in the US	3 yrs	7 yrs	6 yrs	4 yrs	3 yrs
Home Life	Single	Married	Single	Single	Married
Work Status	PT	FT	FT	FT	n/a

Ultimately, I did not need to use snowball sampling even though one of the participants in the study did recommend a classmate of hers. However, by this time, I had already identified and had started working with the five participants. A sixth potential participant from a class visit was disqualified as he would have been a student in my class at the time of the interviews. A seventh student from the result of a class visit decided not to participate just prior to the start of the first interview citing challenges with her

schedule. Lastly, an eighth participant had expressed interest, but never followed through with further attempts to set up the initial interview.

Prior to the start of the interviews, I met briefly with each participant. This session laid the groundwork for the study, developed rapport, secured permission, and assured confidentiality (Appendix C). Not only did this help establish the necessary ethical considerations of the study, it also encouraged the participants to begin self-reflecting on their experiences with anxiety.

Data Collection

Interviews. The primary means of phenomenological research is through several open ended reflexive interviews. Seidman (2013) recommends three 90 minute interviews. The first interview establishes the overall setting for the experiences; the second as an in-depth exploration of those experiences; and the third to reflect on the meaning of those experiences. This is similar to Bevan's (2014) approach to phenomenological interviews to contextualize, apprehend, and clarify the phenomenon. Seidman also encourages the spacing of the interviews to occur within a week of each other. This facilitates a positive relationship to develop between the researcher and the participant, as well as promoting reflection in-between interviews without losing focus from being spaced too far apart. Ideally, this would have resulted in a span of 15 to 16 weeks for the fifteen total interviews planned for this study with one participant's set of three interviews followed by another set. However, on numerous occasions, the participants had to cancel and reschedule interviews. This resulted in some overlaps of having to interview two different participants in one week, as well as extended gaps between the three interviews.

Of the five participants, Aaron was the only one who completed all three interviews in the span of three weeks. Esther, Hannah, and Deborah all completed their interviews within four to five weeks. Leah proved to be the most challenging, not from a lack of interest, but from difficulties with work and transportation. In all it took six weeks to finish all three interviews.

During the first interview, the participants shared their background as it related to anxiety at the research site college; what Seidman refers to as a focused life history. Here, the participant told of their ethnic background, family, work experiences, education background, reasons for coming to the United States, and desires for attending college.

The second interview was semi-structured and asked the participants what and how questions to reveal the details of their experiences with anxiety. It is important to remember that phenomenology is not seeking to ask why, or to pursue the opinion of the participants about their experiences (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, what and how questions were better at encouraging the participants to relate their experiences. What was necessary was to obtain detailed descriptions about experiences related to anxiety, or as van Manen (2014) terms the "lived experience descriptions" (p. 300) – LEDs for short. To get at these vivid descriptions, he says it is important to encourage the participants to describe the interplay of the phenomenon in terms of their lifeworld experiences. These specific details provide the access to the meaning the participants make of the phenomenon, or anxiety in this study. In those times when the participants began to generalize, I needed to steer them back to their specific experiences.

The third interview asked the participants to reflect on the meaning they made of their experiences, or "the intellectual and emotional connections" (Seidman, 2013, p. 18)

with the phenomenon of anxiety. Because the first two interviews helped the participants to reflect on their past and their experiences with anxiety, they were better able to consider what all of this meant to them for their identity, connection, and agency.

Van Manen (2014) advocates for an additional meeting after the analysis is done to validate what has been recorded from the previous sessions. Rather than present the participant with a lengthy summary of the detailed lived experiences descriptions, van Manen (2014) suggests the researcher condense key information into anecdotes. Anecdotes should be short and focused on a single incident. They should also relate the key moment of the experience with concrete details, and contain several direct quotes. The caution for the researcher is to not editorialize these anecdotes by inserting analysis or theory or bias, but to create "powerful texts that function as 'examples' in describing phenomenon" (van Manen, 2014, p. 254). These anecdotes should always be checked by the participant to ensure accuracy in content and, more importantly, in meaning. This also helps to establish validity of the study. Along these lines, for each participant I shared their resultant LEDs to ensure they were accurate to their understanding. In a few cases, small but insignificant changes in wording were made by Esther and Hannah.

A final overarching consideration for a phenomenological interview is to create the proper level of comfort and trust. Participants are asked to reveal intimate details, and the researcher must be very sensitive to the context in which the interview occurs. Therefore, I sought out locations that encouraged them to freely explore their thoughts. Though I offered to meet with the participants off campus, all but one interview occurred somewhere at the college. Some were in private tutoring rooms in the library, while others in semi-private locations such as a secluded table in the college's cafeteria. One

interview happened at a restaurant. In all cases, I made sure the participants were comfortable with the setting. I also endeavored to be approachable, flexible, and empathetic to create a conversational relationship with them and allow for adequate time for these conversations to flow (van Manen, 1994).

Instrumentation. Phenomenological interviews are semi-structured utilizing open-ended questions (Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 1997). It is up to the researcher to develop questions that will encourage the participants to describe what the phenomenon was like for them. These will invariably be how and what types of questions, but should also allow for the researcher to ask follow-up questions, or prompt the participant to provide greater detail about an experience. Since phenomenological studies are seeking rich description without generalizing and limiting the bias of the researcher, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) argue that it is better if the interview protocol is less structured to allow for the participants to more fully provide the data sought after. Therefore, I prepared several questions in advance to encourage the participants to detail their experiences with anxiety as part of the college career. According to van Manen (2014) these need to be concrete, specific questions to encourage the participant to relate an experience in detail. See Appendices D, E, and F for the Interview Protocols that I developed and used for the three interviews.

Student journals. Because I was working with students who are still developing their language proficiency, I wanted to be sure that each participant would be able to share their experiences in rich and detailed accounts. A lack of fluency could result in superficial accounts of their experiences with anxiety, not because they were unwilling to

recount them, but because they lacked the linguistic ability to fully explore them in depth using English.

In order to overcome this potential barrier to the data I needed, I asked my students to record their stories via a journal prior to each interview. This gave them adequate time to reflect upon and process the details of their stories. In fact, allowing ELL students added time to think about questions prior to a response is an effective ESL classroom strategy (Bergman & Kennell, 2013; Farley, 2016). For this study, they were able to journal in whichever language was most comfortable for them. They were also encouraged to bring their journals to the interview as a reminder of their anecdotes. This strategy worked well in the pilot study I conducted.

Student journals are not new to qualitative studies, and have been used primarily as an added data source to collect and/or clarify data gathered from interviews (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012). Those studies, especially in language teaching studies, that have incorporated them as a data source have had an added depth of introspective data to draw upon precisely because they include the students' perspectives (Hoggard & Sato, 2015; Richards, 2009). Phenomenological studies have also incorporated student journals as a data source. Kearney, Perkins, and Maakrun (2014) used student journals for their phenomenological study on cross-cultural service learning in Kenya, as did Lin, Groom, and Chin-Ying (2013) in their study of an ESL writing classroom.

Despite the value student journals can add, the primary challenge to their use is that not all students will want to do the journaling activity, or they may not do it in any great depth (Hayman et al., 2012; Hoggard & Sato, 2015; Lin et al., 2013). ELL students especially may not feel comfortable with the reflective writing required due to linguistic

challenges or confusion with what is expected. To help alleviate these concerns, Hayman et al (2012) offer several strategies to encourage better participation including: modeling, guide questions, assurances of confidentiality, and clear directions. I used all of these suggestions to encourage my participants to reflect and write about their experiences with anxiety prior to each interview. In fact, all of the participants in this study did make use of the journal though some more so than others. Interestingly, all them opted to write in English, and all of them volunteered to give me their journals, which I was then able to use as a further data source.

Graphic elicitation. In addition to following Seidman's phenomenological interview process, I also used a graphic elicitation protocol (Bagnoli, 2009) throughout the interview sessions, but especially for the second and third interviews. Graphic elicitation techniques are fairly new to qualitative research, but have been shown to be very effective in supplementing the standard interview by helping participants have a concrete way to experience abstractions such as feelings, identity, or relationships (Rodriguez & Kerrigan, 2016). They also have been demonstrated to help participants to establish a cognitive framework especially when they have difficulty expressing emotions (Thygesen, Pedersen, Kragstrup, Wagner, & Mogensen, 2011).

Rodriguez and Kerrigan (2016) used a relational map in which their participants were asked to spend a few minutes filling in the diagram with adjectives or nouns that described how they viewed their identity as college students. This became a starting point for the interviews in which the participants were asked about the relational map they created. Similarly, Thygesen et al. (2011) asked their participants to map their emotional frame of mind on a grid to reference several key events in their experiences with cancer.

The resulting emotional dynamic then allowed for more probing questions to help those participants reflect on their feelings and experiences.

For this study, I used the Children's Fear Scale (McMurtry, Noel, Chambers, & McGrath, 2011), which is a series of pictures depicting increasing levels of anxiety.

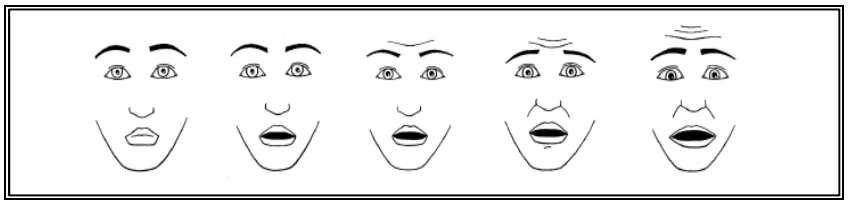

Figure 1. Children's Fear Scale

Describing experiences with fear can become very abstract, and so this scale has been used in hospitals to help children visualize and express those complex feelings. ELL students can have the same linguistic challenges and lack of sophisticated vocabulary when attempting to discuss feelings, and so the Children's Fear Scale provided a starting point to discuss their experiences with anxiety.

Since one of the purposes of the first interview is to encourage the participants to begin to reflect on their experiences with anxiety (Seidman, 2013), towards the end of that time I introduced the Children's Fear Scale. I explained what it represents, and together we came up with a few examples of what could provoke the various facial expressions. For example, being chased by a dog or a visit to the dentist could provoke a stronger level of fear than a burst balloon. I then asked them before the next interview to reflect on experiences they had with anxiety while attending the research site college, and to think of as many different contexts that occurred such as the classroom, or in an office,

or other location at the research site college, and how they might indicate their level of anxiety on the Fear Scale.

The second interview delved into the rich details of the participants' experience with anxiety; therefore, I asked them to tell me of those experiences using the Fear Scale to help begin that conversation. As a prelude to relating an experience, I asked them where on the Fear Scale they would say this particular experience would fall. Based on their choice, I followed-up with questions to gain the details of that experience with van Manen's lifeworld framework to guide those questions: When and where did this occur? Who were the people involved? How did you respond to the anxiety you felt?

In the third and final interview, where the meaning of those experiences is explored, the Fear Scale continued to be employed. It served as a graphic reminder of the level of anxiety experienced, and encouraged the participants to further reflect and possibly change to a different level. As they reflected upon the entirety of their experiences, the Fear Scale was a touchstone for those experiences to provide clarity in what they meant. For example, several participants indicated a higher level of anxiety for one classroom experience, but a lower level for a seemingly similar classroom experience. By probing the varying degrees of anxiety, the participants were able to give further insights into the role of anxiety in those contexts.

Reflective journal. An important aspect of bracketing in hermeneutic phenomenology is using a reflective journal. This journal is meant to record the researcher's own experiences with the phenomenon as a means to come "face-to-face with the participant's reality" (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010, p. 23). This in turns allows the

researcher to share in the experience with the participant, providing greater insight and understanding.

In my past, I have had several cross-cultural experiences which allow me to have a shared experience with anxiety as the participants in this study. These have occurred in academic settings when I have taken language courses and in personal settings when I have lived overseas and needed to learn the language and customs of that country in order to function. As I reflected on those experiences, and the anxiety it produced, I gained insights in how I interpreted that anxiety. As the students in this study shared their experiences with anxiety, these reflexive journals helped me to share in those experiences.

I also self-reflected on my professional experiences. Working with ELL students both as an instructor and as an administrator has provided me insights into their experience. In those dual roles, I considered how my attitudes and approaches to working with ELL students could lessen or increase their anxiety. I also had to consider pejorative attitudes I may have developed towards ELL students, and how I might have used microaggressions in those interactions.

Apart from reflecting on my past experiences and pre-suppositions, journaling also continued throughout the data collection phase in order to reflect on the interviews (Janesick, 1999). In order to gain deeper insight into how her participants interacted with her, Finlay (2008) reflected on her behavior and attitude toward them, resulting in greater empathy and deeper insights into their experiences. However, this, she admits can be a painful process of self-critique in uncovering one's bias and limitations. I had similar experiences especially when students had critical experiences to tell. Deborah had been a

previous student in my class prior to this study, and she was not always kind in relating her experiences in my class. Rather than dismiss experiences as a disgruntled student, I needed to "step outside" and consider the context from her perspective.

Field notes. Field notes are additional ways for researchers to collect data (Groenwald, 2004). Especially with phenomenological interviews, much meaning is conveyed through the body language of the participant. A shudder, a smile, or closed eyes can speak as much about the lived experience as the words spoken, but an audio recorder will not capture them. An observant researcher can record these subtle meaningful moments which can then be added to provide the detail and vocative depth of the subsequent anecdotes (Fade, 2004; Morrissette, 1999).

Groenwald (2004) delineates four different types of field notes. The first is observational notes. These are the notes I made during the interview in order to record the non-verbal language of the participants that added in the analysis. For example, Deborah would often tap a pen or pencil repeatedly when recounting stressful experiences. This added an additional layer of meaning to her accounts. After the interview, I wrote up several other types of field notes. Methodological notes were the reminders and critiques of how I conducted the interview. These notes helped me to improve upon the interview process and data collection for future sessions. After each interview, I also took time to write out theoretical notes which were early reflective attempts at interpreting the meaning after the interviews. Last of all, I wrote up analytical memos. These were summary statements of the interviews which incorporated the previous theoretical and observational notes. It is important to note here that though these field notes were a

source of data, by their reflective nature they were also a part of the analysis process (Finlay, 2008; Groenwald, 2004; Morrissette, 1999).

Pilot Study

In order to verify if my data collection protocols were sufficient to obtain the necessary in-depth data I needed to successfully conduct this study, I conducted a small pilot study. For this pilot study, I worked with two students who fit the criteria as established for this study. Both students are fairly recent immigrants from an Asian country; both have had higher education experiences in their country of origin; both began their ESL courses at the test site institution in the intermediate level; and both have progressed into high advanced courses. Therefore their conversational fluency was strong though they were still developing their academic proficiency. For each student, I conducted three interviews using the interview protocols and graphic elicitation detailed above. Furthermore, I asked both to journal their experiences with anxiety prior to the second interview.

The journals proved to be very helpful. For one, they encouraged the students to think through their experiences in greater depth and detail rather than merely identifying those stories. Secondly, when they brought their journals with them to the second interview, they frequently made reference to their journals. Rather than reading their accounts, they used them as a reference to help them remember details or other anecdotes. Just like the five actual participants, both opted to write their journals in English. One wrote out detailed stories, while the other was more a list of bulleted points.

In all, the pilot study confirmed the value of using the student journals as a way to encourage students to reflect more deeply about their experiences with anxiety. However, I did realize more specific instructions utilizing pointed questions for the students to

reflect upon would have been more helpful. For example, for the actual study I directed the students to include details for each anecdote along the lines of van Manen's lifeworld framework (van Manen, 2014): when did the story happened, where did it occur, who else was involved, what were you doing, and what happened afterwards? In this way, they already had reflected upon those details, and so were able to tell a fuller, richer story.

The pilot study also gave support to the roles of identity, connection, and agency with anxiety. Both students touched upon all three in some fashion or another as an aspect of anxiety when attending their ESL classes. In addition to this confirmation, one student raised another area of anxiety that I had not anticipated. I have been focused on anxiety for ELL students while taking ESL classes. However, when this student talked about moving out of the ESL program and taking credit courses full time, she expressed a significant amount of anxiety. She was unsure how she would interact with her fellow non-ELL classmates and professors (connection); she was concerned how she would get the help she needed without the resources our ESL department offers (agency); and, she was less confident of her ability to be a successful student outside of ESL courses (identity). As I worked with the students in the study, I explored this area more deeply to see if there was convergence or divergence with other ELL students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in phenomenology is better termed explication as it seeks more to investigate the phenomenon in its context rather than dissect it into "meaningful" or thematic parts (Groenwald, 2004). It is through this explication of the resultant themes that interpretation can occur. Different phenomenological researchers have adopted

different means to achieve this. Because every phenomenological study is unique onto itself, to stipulate a common structural framework would violate the basic integrity of phenomenology (van Manen, 2014). No matter which technique is adopted, the one commonality is to reflect on the data.

For this study, I followed van Manen's (2014) thematic interpretive approach for analyzing the experiential accounts of my participants. This a process of analysis from a macro level to a micro level. Once I transcribed an interview and read through it multiple times, the various lived experience descriptions (LEDs) were separated out and considered as individual, though related, experiences. For each of these LEDs, the first stage of thematic analysis was a holistic reading. Here, the aim was to summarize in a word or phrase the overarching phenomenological meaning of this experience. The second stage in thematic analysis was to read the LED selectively, looking for key words or phrases that helped illuminate the essence of the experience. I highlighted these to use as thematic statements. The third stage was an even more detailed reading in which each line of the LED was read as I reflected upon the question, "what does this sentence say about the experience" (van Manen, 2014, p. 322).

In addition to this multiphase thematic analysis, van Manen reminds the researcher to be cognizant of insight cultivators (van Manen, 2014). These are outside aids in the reflective interpretive process that can create a fresh understanding or an alternate interpretation. These could be other phenomenological texts, seemingly unrelated experiences, or even etymological analysis of the words used by the participant. Anything that can spark a new insight into understanding the phenomenon should not be discounted.

As I read through each LED, the previous reflection on my past experiences and fore-knowledge I had done came back into the process. I had to ask myself, "How might Student Engagement Theory and Critical Race Theory help inform what this student has experienced? How do my personal and professional experiences with anxiety bring insight?" This was the hermeneutic cycle at work – "understanding emerges in the process of dialogue between the researcher and the text" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 623). Ultimately, this reflective analysis helped me in forming the subsequent anecdotes and texts seeking to create that epiphany of a shared experience for the reader.

This analysis of the texts progressed from one participant to the next. That is to say, I began with the transcribed interviews of the first participant, and using van Manen's method, developed and listed the themes that emerged. As I moved onto the next participant's transcribed interview, I was mindful of the themes developed from the first analysis to look for congruence in their experiences and meaning of anxiety. However, I also allowed themes to diverge from that initial list. In fact, it was in these divergent themes that a fuller understanding of ELL students' experiences with anxiety occurred leading to a deeper level of analysis, and thereby enhancing the credibility of the study (Miles et al., 2014). Once all the interviews were analyzed, a master list of the themes was collated. Each of these themes were illustrated by passages from the interviews, with every participant represented.

As a means of organizing these themes, I employed construct tables as suggested by Miles et al. (2014). For example, one context the participants experienced anxiety was in a perceived lack of conversational fluency. For Leah, this occurred in sub-contexts with interacting with classmates, professors, and generalized classroom interactions.

Table 3

Anxiety in Context with Lack of Basic Conversational Fluency - Leah

Sub-context	Interview, LED	Illustrative Quote
Classmates	2, LED 15	When I was trying to make friends, it was hard for me to understand them.
Professors	2, LED 5	How was I going to communicate with her?
	2, LED 12	The teacher was speaking so fast, and I couldn't understand anything she said.
Generalized	2, LED 3	I don't understand nothing!
	3, LED 20	Think in English. Trying to listen in English. Translate into Spanish, then think of my answer in English. Translate this. And then how do I pronounce the words

Though Miles et al. (2014) say that construct tables are useful for the researcher to ponder *why* conditions might have affected the variability or *what* are the potential consequences, this is not the purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Instead, I used construct tables as an organizational tool to provide a framework for the themes. This in turn provided a richer understanding of the lived experience of the five participants, and to see how their experiences were similar as well as divergent; what Miles et al claim as "the range and thus the parameters" (p. 173) of those experiences. From this organization, I was then able to summarize the themes in a narrative utilizing descriptive quotes and anecdotes as suggested by Lester (1999) and van Manen (2014).

Ethical Considerations

Phenomenological studies delve into sensitive topics, and it was important for my study to be considerate of several ethical factors. This began with informed consent so that the participants fully and completely understood the scope and nature of the study, and their involvement with it (Walker, 2007). Since I worked with ELL students, who

were still developing their English skills, I needed to be extra careful to describe the study clearly and accurately. At all times, I assured them that they had the freedom to decline to participate. An additional ethical concern was to abide by confidentiality. I assured each participant at the beginning that their identities would not be made explicit in any fashion during the write up of the study. This personal confidentiality is explained in more detail in the following chapter. Confidentiality also meant that my data and analysis storage were kept secure (Walker, 2007). All of the data of this study including the participant identifiers, recorded interviews, transcriptions, field notes, LEDs, and organizational charts are kept in a safe spot in my home office. Lastly, confidentiality meant allowing each participant to choose the site of the interviews. For some, like Deborah and Leah, a semi-private area in the college's student lounge or a remote booth in a restaurant were sufficient. For others, like Esther, a more private study room in the library was more comfortable.

An additional ethical consideration is how my role as Chair of the ESL department impacted the overall research process. Though my intent was to engage in a dialogue with these students, and create a free exchange of information, Kvale (2006) and Rossman and Rallis (2012) maintain this is not really possible due to the inherent power inequality between the student participants and an administrator. These students were members of my department at the time of their interviews, and they had attended classes with ESL professors, who are my colleagues. They could have felt threatened to participate, or hesitant to be free in sharing their experiences that involved these faculty from a concern I would share their accounts with those professors. As a result, part of my informed consent protocol was to assure them that no harm or retribution would come to

them due to their participation. In this way I endeavored to establish trust and ethical sensitivity.

A further ethical concern is who benefits from this research? It can be easily argued that I am the primary beneficiary of this research since it is part of a doctoral program that can grant me added prestige and employment opportunities. This presents a troubling dilemma in that I was exploiting already vulnerable students for my own gain (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Wong, 1998). One way to offset the potential for misusing these students is to ensure that the results of this study lead to changes in the ESL Department at the research site college that promote a more engaging and welcoming environment for our ELL students. This is the very purpose of social justice leadership when working with students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and so must be an element of this study.

Researcher Role

As a person who has been a language learner in a cross-cultural setting and as a professional who has worked with ELL students for a number of years, I am acutely aware of the role of anxiety as it relates to learning a new language and culture. Learning a language well requires more than memorizing a list of grammatical rules and vocabulary, or managing the frustration and humiliation of knowing what one wants to communicate but lacking the ability to do so clearly. It also requires the ability to think in that new language, which can be akin to creating a new identity – the English speaking identity versus the mother tongue identity (Pappamihiel, 2002). This in itself is unnerving**.** Yet, this is the context that ELL students encounter every moment they step onto campus. Though I have had experiences with anxiety as a language learner and as an outsider, I never had to use that second language in an academic setting where clear

communication is vital to success in a class. It is one thing to ask for and get the wrong item at a store, but quite another to ask a question but not understand the answer.

Certainly there are other means to investigate how ELL students experience with anxiety both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, I am drawn to phenomenology, and especially hermeneutic phenomenology, for several reasons. In the classic book *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the lawyer Atticus Finch teaches his daughter Scout a valuable lesson about compassion when he tells her, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee, 1960, p. 39). Hermeneutic phenomenology allows us to "walk around" in a person's skin; to know not just their experiences, but also and what it means to them. For me, this is the more interesting question.

Phenomenology is also about story telling – those insightful anecdotes that reveal the experiences and cause us to have that "aha" moment (van Manen, 2014). Writing and storytelling has always been important to me as a way to think through my ideas or to create something new. More than just relating the findings of this study, I can tell the story of my participants. Through their experiences, others may come to know what it means to be an ELL student. When Aaron (3, LED 15) admits, "Still that scares me right now!" about a past encounter with a professor, or Esther (3, LED 3) laments, "Nobody will help me," those expressions are more powerful than an abundance of statistical data.

Furthermore, van Manen's approach to phenomenology is a shared experience of the phenomenon between the researcher and the participants (2014). As a result, along the lines of Flood (2010), my own experiences with anxiety helped to guide the interview process. During the data collection process, I was in reality a co-researcher with the

participants as together we explored the meaning of anxiety (Flood, 2010; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Morrisette, 1999). This helped me to establish empathy with my participants as I was able to share my own similar experiences with anxiety at times, which in turn led to a greater comfort in sharing their experiences.

Throughout the study, I had to remain objective, and not allow my own bias or experiences to interfere with what the participants had to share. This was especially important as I conducted the data analysis so as to allow the participants' experiences to shape the themes, and not what I believed should be there (Englander, 2012). Finlay (2002) adds another layer of complexity in her discussion for the need of researchers to be reflective of their role in the interview and data analysis process. This had ramifications in the inherent power dynamic that existed between me, the "expert" researcher, and the participants, as well as any attitudes toward the participants that I may have developed and subtly communicated to them. Any of this could have resulted in skewed data. Several of the participants had critical remarks to make about colleagues I know, the ESL program I am in charge of, and the institution where I work. It was important for me in those times to listen openly without being dismissive or attempting to defend these people or offices.

Credibility/Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that establishing validity in a research project is a term better used for quantitative studies. On the other hand, the concept of trustworthiness, or credibility, in the findings they feel is more suitable for a qualitative study. They outline several steps to take in order for a qualitative study to demonstrate credibility which include: prolonged and persistent engagement with the study,

triangulation of data sources, divergence, and member checking. These have also been cited by Jasper (1994) and Groenwald (2004) as important to establish credibility in a phenomenological study, though they both use the quantitative term validity.

In this study, I ensured credibility through these same processes. This study required three separate interviews with each of the five participants. This small sample size would at first blush seem to discredit validity. However, van Manen (2014) argues that the number of participants is not a valid question for a phenomenological study, but rather the ability to "gather enough experientially rich accounts" (p. 353) to allow for provocative and powerful anecdotes of the participants' experiences. Because I worked intimately with these five participants, I came to know their experiences well, and I did all I could to develop the necessary rapport so that they felt comfortable sharing their experiences with anxiety in detail. Working closely with these five participants allowed for numerous rich, prolonged, and persistent accounts from each one.

Moreover, I personally transcribed each interview verbatim in order to familiarize myself with their responses, and following van Manen's analytical cycle, I devoted extended time to read and reread those transcripts. Also, the use of the interviews, field notes, and reflective journals provided three data sources to allow for triangulation. As part of the data analysis, I was open to divergent themes so as to develop as complete as possible understanding of the participants' experiences with anxiety. Lastly, I reached out to each participant to share with them those resultant meanings from anxiety in anecdotal form in order to verify that what I had identified did indeed resonant with what they shared with me.

Validity for phenomenological studies. For van Manen (2014) validity is a misnomer in a pure phenomenological study, and "no predetermined procedure . . . can fulfill such demand for validating a phenomenological study" (p. 349). Instead, he contends validity is only an appropriate consideration if the study asks a phenomenologically sound how or what question, is based on an analysis of descriptive accounts, and is founded on established phenomenological literature. As I adhered to the methodological approach as detailed above, I have satisfied van Manen's validity criteria.

Other researchers in phenomenology claim validity can be achieved through several means. First, validity is established through participant verification of the resultant themes and narratives (Evans & Hallet, 2007; Groenwald, 2004). This also confirms van Manen's suggestion to share the anecdotes with the participants for verification of the essence of the meaning. Secondly, validity can also be established by a clear audit trail of the analysis. My research methods and analysis do allow for other researchers to follow my analytical steps, and see how the themes were developed. (Toma, 2006). Additionally, Jasper (1994) claims the use of the participants' narratives to illustrate the resultant themes creates validity. Lastly, Walker (2007) reinforces the phenomenological necessity to acknowledge the multiple meanings that the participants make of the phenomenon as a way to establish the validity of the study. Both Jasper's and Walker's understanding of validity is evident in Chapters 4 and 5 in the participants' anecdotes and the common and diverse ways they experienced and understood anxiety.

Summary

This study was a hermeneutic phenomenological study of ELL experiences with anxiety and the meaning they made of those experiences in their identity, ability to

connect, and self-advocate. It entailed identifying five ELL students who were recent immigrants to the United States at the time they enrolled at the research site college in the ESL program, and have continued with their ESL coursework. The overall methodological approach followed the data collection and analysis as developed by van Manen. As a co-researcher, I reflected upon my own experiences with anxiety in language learning. This gave me insights into the shared experiences with the participants, as well as helped me to develop empathy with them.

Using van Manen's lifeworld framework and the theoretical concepts of Student Engagement Theory and Critical Race Theory to guide the analysis, I read through each interview transcript three times moving from a holistic reading to sentence reading identifying the thematic elements that brought insights into the participants' experiences with anxiety. These themes are expressed in provocative anecdotes that the participants verified as true to their understanding and to which the reader can share in an understanding of their experiences as well.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis: Experiences with Anxiety

You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in your bottle; are they not in your book? Psalm 56:8

The analysis of the participants' experiences with anxiety in this chapter follows the methodology as suggested by van Manen's hermeneutic cycle and the lifeworld experiences of these participants (van Manen, 1997a, 1997b). This chapter is focused on expounding upon the historicity of the five participants, describing the contexts in which they experienced anxiety, and detailing the approaches they took to managing that anxiety. The subsequent chapter will delve into the meaning these participants made of these experiences.

As themes have unfolded from this analysis, I have also attempted to make use of van Manen's encouragement to use poetic and literary analogies to help further draw that connection between the participants' experiences and meaning and that of the reader (van Manen, 2014). Van Manen (1995, 2014), himself, illustrates this by equating the futility of phenomenological writing in trying to capture the essence of an experience with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Orpheus traveled to Hades in order to rescue his beloved Eurydice. He was allowed to lead her out so long as he did not turn back and look at her until they had entered back into the realm of the living. However, as they neared the end of their journey, Orpheus looks back, and in a fleeting moment sees his beloved one last time before she disappears forever. Van Manen likens that momentary glance as akin to the phenomenological writer who attempts to capture the elusiveness of a pre-reflective

experience - once we reflect upon an experience, it has already changed in substance, and so effectively disappears.

This is an approach I have endeavored to use to relate the experiences of ELL students with anxiety. More specifically I have drawn upon the imagery as found in the Old Testament scriptures to help evoke these experiences. The books that comprise the Old Testament are sources of spiritual comfort and direction for many people of faith. However, their inclusion in this chapter is not intended to be taken as evangelical or theological. Rather, they are meant as literary devices. The books of the Old Testament carry a wealth of characters, stories, and poetry. Indeed, the use of the Scriptures as literature is widely prevalent in classical and modern day literature, and it is in this literary spirit that the quotes are included here.

Strangers in a Strange Land

The books of the Old Testament detail the ancient Hebrews' long and difficult history. Abraham, the patriarch of the nation, leaves the familiarity of home and culture to journey to new land. Later, they were a nation enslaved by the ancient Egyptians. It took several centuries and a 40 year-long wilderness experience before the Israelites were able to return to the "promised land" in Canaan. Eight hundred years later, during the Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar, the Israelites were taken from their homes and forced into exile. For 70 years, once more they were strangers in strange land. During these times, they were treated with a measure of compassion offset by suspicion, fear, and hostility. As they finally settled and re-settled into their homes, they were admonished to remember those years of slavery, wandering, and exile, so that they would treat newcomers to their homes with compassion and empathy.

When an ELL student embarks upon a path in higher education, it is not the beginning of the journey. Rather, it is only the next step in a series of journeys that have led that student to college. Those first steps require them to leave the relative safety and comfort of family, language, and culture. Adapting to a new environment is not easily done, and often there are painful lessons to be learned, and a stark realization of how little advanced preparation they actually had. By the time they arrive at college, much has already been endured, and many obstacles overcome, but a multitude of challenges still await these students. Often, there have been key people offering encouragement and support throughout that passage. However, that kindness can often be injured by disrespect and insensitivity, sometimes at the hands of those who would seem to be the best allies. It is remarkable that so many ELL students even begin that journey, let alone persist through it. Such is the odyssey of many ELL students on the college campus.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences ELL students have had with anxiety and the meaning they make of those experiences in their identity, connections, and agency. To do this, I worked with five Generation 1 ELL students, listening to their disparate yet similar stories of their journeys through their college careers so far. Each one sat with me for three interviews; each one often lasting an hour and a half, in which they detailed their earlier life experiences of home, family, and education prior to coming to the United States, their experiences with anxiety as they progressed through the ESL program, and their reflections on what those experiences meant to them. From these self-reflections, we are able to capture a glimpse of what it means to be an ELL student, a stranger in a strange land.

The Sojourners

The five ELL students who participated in this study come from different backgrounds and have arrived at the college for different purposes. Their paths through their classrooms, college offices, and the campus in general have been mixed. For some, that journey has been straightforward with a clear goal in mind; for others, it has been a more circuitous route, sometimes with a series of starts and stops. What connects these five diverse experiences is the role anxiety has played in those experiences. Central to this study is to understand where that anxiety presented itself, and how the students understood it. For each student in this study, their prior experiences were key in how they met and interpreted that anxiety. This is the element of *historicity* Heidegger emphasizes is crucial to understand how each participant makes meaning of the phenomenon of anxiety (Finlay 2009; Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 2014).

These five participants create an interesting cross section of the ESL program at the research site. Four are females, reflecting the majority of females in the program. Two were Hispanic, two Middle Eastern, and the fifth an Asian Indian. They ranged in age from early twenties to late thirties. Though I had not purposely set out to work with only Generation 1 students who had had prior higher education experience, all five participants did have some higher education experience in their home countries prior to immigrating to the United States and four had completed degrees in their countries.

Though all the participants are now at the end of their ESL coursework, they began at different levels. They also all started in the old ESL program. This is explained in greater detail in Chapter 1, but essentially the old program had five levels from beginning to high advanced. The new ESL program began in the Fall 2016 semester. In

this program, there are only four levels – intermediate to high advanced; reading and speaking courses have been integrated as one course as has writing and structure courses; and, there is now a common department final that all students must take. For some students, such as Aaron, they had to adjust to this new curriculum in the midst of their studies. For others, such as Esther and Hannah, who had stopped out during the old program, they had to come back to a new program and expectations.

To protect their individual identities, I have changed their names in referencing their experiences as detailed in this chapter, and they are presented below in the order in which each began to relate to me their experiences. The five participants then are Aaron, Esther, Deborah, Leah, and Hannah. Since Aaron was the first participant I worked with, his is the initial story. Likewise, Hannah was the last, and so she concludes the participant overview. In addition to referring to the participants by these new names, all explicit references to individuals by name, whether a family member, professor, or staff, have been removed in these quotes, and a general classifier is used – sister, for example.

At times, in order to help with the greater context of the anecdote, an explanatory word or phrase is included in brackets: "I get nervous because I have to go there [in the front of the class]." Additionally, for the sake of greater fluidity I have removed the frequent hesitations (ums) and back-tracking self-corrections: "I, um, had a rude professor, he was . . . she was" appears as "I had a rude professor, she was." In all these editorial corrections, I have striven to maintain fidelity to the intent of the experience. Therefore, their comments, observations, and reflections that are used to illustrate the themes and sub-themes are their actual words. These are referenced according to the number of the interview, and the specific Lived Experience Description (LED). For

example, a quote of Aaron's from the 2nd interview and the 6th LED is referenced as Aaron 2, LED 6.

Aaron - the dutiful son. *A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother* (Proverbs 15:20). "My parents are expecting me to do it. . . . I had that thought that I have to make him proud" (Aaron 3, LED 20). Aaron is a young man originally from India. He grew up with a small family which included his Mom, Dad, and an older sister. At the same time, he lived in a family compound with his extended family and spent much of his childhood interacting with his grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. His grandfather, especially, was a key figure for him growing up. "He used to give me everything. I used to ask for anything and he would give it to me" (Aaron 1, LED 6). His grandfather also was his first teacher of his language and culture. "In Gujarati, we have poems, and I used to have a hard time remembering them. My grandfather still remembers those same poems, and he used to sing them [to me]" (Aaron 1, LED 6). Even now, in his home in the States, he continues to live with his Mom, Dad, sister, and grandfather, and finds support and motivation from them. As a result, family has always played a central role in his support system and motivation.

In India, he enjoyed much of his school years, making several close, long-lasting friends. In addition to his family, these school friends were an important part of his life whether it was studying together or playing pranks on other students and teachers. They would often sit in the back of the classroom and try to do something that would get another classmate in trouble with the teacher, such as dropping a book to make a loud noise, or flicking a pen cap at the person to get them to say something out loud. Leaving these friends behind when he came to the United States when he was 18 was almost as

difficult as leaving behind family members. “From 4th grade I had three or four friends. I studied with them until 12th. First to 12th, I loved to go to school because I loved to hang out with them. So, I miss them a lot” (Aaron 1, LED 7).

At the same time, these friends could also be merciless in teasing each other either over girls or making mistakes. For example, he tells a story about a friend who was having difficulties pronouncing a word correctly. The teacher would make him do it over and over again, but then beat him for not doing it correctly. Even as he told the story, he was laughing at the memory. “It’s so funny. Whenever we meet, every time I tell him that story again” (Aaron 1, LED 14). Teasing from making mistakes, and the anxiety it provokes would become a major theme for Aaron as he recounted his experiences of learning English at the college.

Committed to his studies, he was also not above playing pranks, accepting the resultant punishment so long as he felt it was fairly given. On the other hand, he can become angry when recounting times when he was unfairly punished. In India, it is common for teachers to hit students for not complying with rules. Once, an 8th grade teacher hit him for not doing his homework. Aaron was upset with this. “I got beat up one time because I forgot to do my homework. But he never listened to me; I had a reason, but he didn’t listen to me” (Aaron 1, LED 14). This strong sense of respect and being treated fairly still is evident today in his perceptions of how he is treated by his professors.

Excelling in math, he had set his mind upon an educational path in engineering, but switched to Computer Science at the college. In contrast, he has struggled with English, considering it his least favorite subject. This was amplified when he went to

college in India and was with other students who had been educated in an English medium school and so had much stronger English skills than him. “You have to give an interview. You have to tell about yourself, introduce yourself. I was scared a lot for that” (Aaron 1, LED 12). Unlike his school friends, his college classmates were not supportive. “When I go there ask them, they don’t tell me. They don’t give me notes or nothing” (Aaron 1, LED 12). As a result, as soon as his classes ended on Friday, he would return home to his family for the weekend, not wanting to further endure the isolation of the college environment. This is a pattern that has continued with his college coursework: he is reluctant to make friends or even interact with his classmates, and often leaves the campus as soon as classes are over.

Aaron was in the middle of his university career in India in Electrical Engineering when his family decided to immigrate to the United States. Initially excited for the new life and opportunities he believed would come in his new home, he quickly realized that life in the United States is very different from his life back in India. He misses his friends. He misses the festivals, family gatherings, and his neighbors. Here, he confesses, “I don’t know who is living next door” (Aaron 1, LED 4). The weather, too, has become a barrier. Lamenting the cold weather for six months out of the year, he can no longer go outside for a few hours simply to refresh and reinvigorate himself. Afterwards, he said, “Your mind can study better” (Aaron 1, LED 4).

Soon after his family arrived, he applied for the college and subsequently was placed into the old ESL program’s second level (Intermediate). He has made steady progress since then, taking his last ESL course in the Summer 2017 semester. In addition to his ESL coursework, he has also taken several courses towards a degree in Computer

Science, passing all three with high grades. Of the five participants, he has made the most direct, steady progress in his ESL classes, as well as supplementing those courses with other credit courses in his major.

Deborah - the mistreated one. *When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong* (Leviticus 19:33). "You don't test me. You don't kill me with papers. You are here to help us immigrants not judge us" (Deborah 3, LED 16). Deborah's journey through life has not been an easy one. As a Coptic Christian growing up in a small Muslim town in Egypt, she faced her share of marginalization. Much like Aaron, she lived with her nuclear family, with neighbors she knew. However, where Aaron found a sense of belonging and identity in this upbringing, Deborah found it stifling. "All of us, the same religion, same faith, same everything . . . We had a traditional life. No fun. . . You feel you weren't alive" (Deborah 1, LED 1). This yearning to be her own, independent person was still evident in her accounts of her experiences at the college.

Her early, preschool and elementary years were safe and stable. Her family could afford to send her to a private Catholic school where she was challenged while nurtured. She remembers fondly the educational opportunities she had, the nuns who taught her, and the other activities she could participate in such as basketball and volleyball. Above all, she felt safe and respected. "No one bothered you physically or with words. No one saying bad stuff" (Deborah 1, LED 8). It was in Catholic school that Deborah began her interest in psychology, a subject she would later study in the university.

However, this supportive if routine life changed when her father grew ill with a liver disease. The increasing demand for medical attention ate into the family's income

eventually obligating her to stop going to the private Catholic school. Instead, she had to start attending the local public school. Not only did she not get the attention she had received from the nuns in her old school, but now she was a Christian student in a predominantly Muslim classroom. Her education suffered in quality, and she was often the target of bullying. "It was bad. A lot of harassment. They don't treat you equal with the other Muslim students" (Deborah 1, LED 7). She was made to sit on the floor in the hallway during religion class, and the other students would pass by and tease or hit her. "I just go home and cry. I do my homework. I hated it. I hated it" (Deborah 1, LED 7).

Her father's illness also took much of her mother's attention to the point where Deborah became the caretaker in the family for her other brothers and sisters. "My father all the time in the hospital. Maybe he stayed in the hospital one month, two months. He was always in a coma. He can't even remember us. It was horrible" (Deborah 1, LED 5). When she was 15, her mother became pregnant. "She was six months [pregnant], and I'm holding her. She keeps crying. And he's in the hospital for one month" (Deborah 1, LED 5). As a result, she had to grow up quickly, a feeling she has now that she never had a real chance to live her life.

In effort to relieve the strain on the family finances, her mother married Deborah off when she was 20 years old to a wealthy man 15 years her senior, and one she barely knew. They were introduced at a cousin's wedding, and she described him as charming and handsome. The marriage was quickly arranged soon after that. "My husband was rich. He had a green card. That's why my mother wanted me to marry him" (Deborah 1, LED 6). They really only had one date, so no real courtship; unlike her cousin she

wistfully recalled who "got married to someone she was in love with for years" (Deborah 1, LED 6).

Her wedding day was lavish beginning with the church ceremony in the afternoon and followed by the reception at a hotel in the evening. In the second day of their marriage, matters began to take a turn for the worse. Though her father was able to attend the wedding, he became violently ill soon after, throwing up blood in her new house. Then she met her in-laws, whom she took an immediate dislike to. More American in values than Egyptian, they were insensitive and arrogant towards her. She began to fight with her husband and had second thoughts. "I was young, not mature enough. The stuff that was happening in my life was just giving me pressure. I didn't like his family. I feel like everyone is older than me. I don't want to sit with his friends' wives, they are all like old. I hate all of them" (Deborah 1, LED 10).

Still, life continued for Deborah. She had two daughters, and she graduated with a degree in psychology. However, it was difficult for a Christian to find work in her town. "Anything involved with the government is not for us. We aren't allowed to go to the military. It's not for us. If you want to go for a government job, they are good, you cannot." (Deborah 1, LED 4). Nor was it always safe in her town. In order to protect her family, she had $3000 metal gates installed with "a lot of locks, locks, locks" (Deborah 1, LED 2).

It was not until the spring of 2011 that the emotional alienation from being a Christian turned into more dangerous physical attacks. At this time, she was traveling in a public bus, and a stranger pulled her hair and cursed her for being a Christian. She was enraged by this assault and turned to defend herself. "I slapped his face. I couldn't take it.

He started to hit me. . . I was looking for something stronger, so I took my shoes off and started to hit his head" (Deborah 1, LED 4). Both were subsequently taken to the police station where she was pressured into admitting she was the guilty one for not wearing a hijab. Though she wanted to defend herself, her husband decided not to pursue the case. "My husband got scared, so he backed off" (Deborah 1, LED 4). Three months later, after her daughters had finished the school year, they immigrated to the United States.

"I came to this country to start living" (Deborah 1, LED 15). However, much like Aaron, it was a difficult transition to make. For one, it meant temporarily having to live with her in-laws, which created strained relationships especially with her sister-in-law. "She was mean to my kids . . . She made me work around the house" (Deborah 1, LED 11). Deborah did her best to ignore her and cope with the situation, but when her sister-in-law complained to Deborah's husband about her supposed poor attitude, he struck Deborah. "That's why I can't stand this lady. Whatever she done to us, I know because she has the power, money, power, language, everything" (Deborah 1, LED 11).

Recognizing that she needed to learn English in order to have any chance of being able to have a life of her own, she enrolled in the college at the first opportunity she could. "I need to learn. I'm not going to be behind my sister-in-law with her power and language" (Deborah 1, LED 15). She began at the intermediate level in the old program like Aaron. She also made steady though slower progress through the ESL program until the end of the Spring 2014 semester. At the this point, the strain of trying to work multiple jobs, caring for her daughters, and attending classes was too much, and she stopped out for two years. She returned in the Spring 2016 semester, and just recently completed her ESL coursework. During her time in the ESL program, she never had the

time to take any credit bearing courses, and she is uncertain what her next steps will be; if she should continue her college career or focus on work.

Unlike Aaron, who stays connected to his family and cultural roots, Deborah has found more satisfaction outside her ethnic community. She no longer attends the Coptic Church because of judgmental attitudes. "They have mentality, and I can't deal with it. I don't like anyone to judge me. I suffered too much in my time" (Deborah 1, LED 16). On the other hand, her work friends have pushed her to learn English without judging her in any way. Her friends, all younger than she is, also allow her to have fun and experience life. "I don't feel like I'm old. I still like to do young stuff. That's why I follow three friends" (Deborah 1, LED 9).

Esther - the resolute woman. *Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening* (Ecclesiastes 11:6). "If I study, I have to get an A or perfect. I have to understand everything. If I didn't understand, I couldn't do good in this material" (Esther 3, LED 11). Esther was born and raised in Jordan. Much like Aaron, she grew up in a close, extended family, and much of her childhood and early adult years were centered around the people and activities of her home. The eldest of the family, she has three other sisters and three brothers. Her father worked as a high school teacher, and her mother took care of the family. It is her mother that she remains closest with. "She notices everything – if you are sad or angry, and can solve these problems. . . Your mom is the only one who can keep secrets and can always give you the advice that give you the right choice" (Esther 1, LED 3).

She cherishes the memories of Friday gatherings at her grandmother's house in the countryside. The day began with a traditional breakfast in which all the women

participated in making the meal. This was followed by a leisurely time of catching up on each other's news and playing games. In particular, Esther enjoyed a word game that was both "for fun and for learning" (Esther 1, LED 4). After a late evening meal, the day would end around 11PM when they would return to their homes. With sadness she remarked, "I miss that a lot. But I go back now, I couldn't find all these things. Because everybody grows up, and everybody goes their different way. Some of them got married, some of them have gone to other countries" (Esther 1, LED 4). Much like Aaron, she also realizes that life in the United States has put an end to these happy times. "We had a lot of fun. Not like here" (Esther 1, LED 4).

Her school years passed unremarkably. A good student, she enjoyed the challenges to her intellect that her classes provided for her. Her classes including college were same-sex classrooms, and so all her classmates and teachers were female. This raised some challenges for her when she came to the States and started taking classes with a mixture of males and females. "I feel very uncomfortable to talk to any man or any professor. . . I don't know what I have to do. I have to say, 'Yes' or what do I have to do? Oh my God! It was a very hard two years in my life" (Esther 1, LED 7).

It was in her school years that she developed the habit of always sitting in the middle of the class. As she explains, "The middle is very good. In the front, I cannot see. I don't feel comfortable. Very close to the teacher. In the back, sometimes you cannot hear the teacher what they say" (Esther 1, LED 6). Even now at the college, she always takes care to choose a seat in the middle of the room.

An active learner, she enjoyed teachers and classes that were creative and interactive. A favorite teacher of hers was a high school science teacher who "was very

creative. She tried to make us understand every detail in any way, trying to find a new way to make us not forget this information" (Esther 1, LED 8). One of the ways she did this was to take Esther's class to a hands-on science museum where the students could manipulate the displays. Consequently, she did not appreciate a math teacher who simply had them copy information from the blackboard into a notebook. One time, Esther could not understand how to do a math problem. She approached the teacher and implored, "Please explain it to me. It's very important if I need to science [in order to pass an exam to allow her to attend a science based university]" (Esther 1, LED 10). When the teacher merely told her to repeat the steps, she grew frustrated, and ultimately did not get the good grades she wanted.

In college she earned a degree in pharmacy technology and began working in a pharmacy that was owned by one of her father's friends. Not long after she started working there, she found herself suddenly alone. Her mother, father, three sisters, and two brothers immigrated to the United States. Because she and her older brother were too old, they could not join them. It took eight long years before her father earned his citizenship and then could bring them both over to rejoin the family. Those were difficult years of her life. "It was very bad. Eight years of my life. I am usually always with the family. I like my family. I don't like being alone" (Esther 1, LED 2). However, those eight years on her own also taught her independence and self-reliance, a trait she continues to carry today. "I can do everything now by myself" (Esther 1, LED 2).

Those years alone she continued to work at the pharmacy. She enjoyed the challenge and the opportunity to learn more skills, gaining more and more responsibility in the process. In particular, she liked the chance to help people with their problems.

When she was able to immigrate to the United States, she looked for a job in a pharmacy, even enrolling in an adult education program in Pharmacy Technology. Unfortunately for her, that did not translate into a job. “Maybe the English, or maybe the scarf [her hijab]” (Esther 1, LED 12) hinting at a measure of marginalization.

Like Aaron and Deborah, coming to the United States was a mixture of anticipation and disappointment. Esther was delighted to be reunited with her family again. “But after that I started to miss Jordan. I spent three months in my house, and all my family works, so I stayed alone. I don’t do anything, and I feel bored” (Esther 1, LED 2). Unable to find a job in a pharmacy, she took a job working with special needs children. Realizing that she needed to learn better English if she would have any chance at a better life in the States, she enrolled in a nearby language institute. The class turned out to be largely Latinx students taught by a Latino professor. She quickly became frustrated, “He always speaks to us in Spanish. I cannot find a person to speak or practice English” (Esther 1, LED 13). Much like her high school math teacher, she approached him to complain. “We came here to learn English, but you speak Spanish with them. How can I understand if you explain it in Spanish?” (Esther 1, LED 13). Eventually, she gave up, but her sister, who was a student at the time at the research site, encouraged her to enroll in the ESL program there.

In the Fall 2012, Esther initially placed into the old level 3 (High Intermediate), slightly higher than Aaron and Deborah. She persisted for two years and had one last course remaining when she stopped out for two years for work purposes, just like Deborah. When she returned, the program had changed, and she was obligated to take two courses now to finish the ESL program. The first she completed in the Spring 2017

semester; the second she took in the Fall 2017 semester. Like Deborah, she has not taken any credit course in a major, but instead has kept her focus just on ESL. She is also unsure of what her next steps will be upon completing the program, including a major to pursue.

Leah - the faithful daughter. *Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay* (Ruth 1:16). "My mom is here. My family is here. I'm going to do my best to get more for her. For her and for me" (Leah 3, LED 21). Of the five participants, Leah has had the most difficult path in her college career. Though her early childhood in Peru was mostly stable, her parents separated when she was young, and her father subsequently moved to the United States taking her brother and sister. For a few years, she lived with her step-father and mother, until they also separated when she was 8 years old. From then on, she lived just with her mother, which resulted in a very close and supportive relationship that has persisted to this day. "I grew up with my Mom. She was great. My best friend. For me, it was perfect. She was everything to me. She helped me with everything" (Leah 1, LED 1).

Her school years up to college were relatively calm and uneventful. She attended large classes of up to 30 students, and strove to do her best. In her school, final test grades were publically posted so students could see where they ranked in the class. Leah thrived on this. Once, another girl took her top spot. "I like competition so I studied more because I wanted to do better. But I was never at the bottom because my Mom would kill me" (Leah 1, LED 8).

She was not speaking facetiously either. When her step-father and Mom separated, Leah, only 8 at the time, was having a difficult time concentrating in class

because of the family turmoil. As a result, she received a bad grade, and she had to have her Mom sign a form and return it to the school. Fearing a beating when her Mom returned, she confessed, "I put on many pants and t-shirts" as a layer of cushion. Upon returning, her mother, however, merely told her to go to sleep, and they would talk in the morning. "I thought, maybe the teacher didn't tell her anything. So I took off everything, and I wore a little t-shirt and shorts. Then in the early morning, she started yelling at me. She had a belt and started hitting me" (Leah 1, LED 9). She laughs at the memory now, but also claims the experience helped her to be a better student. "It wasn't just me by myself. It was my Mom asking me all these questions at the end of the night" (Leah 1, LED 9).

Unlike Aaron who relished sitting in the back so he could cause trouble with his friends, or Esther who prefers the not too close not too far away middle seat, Leah liked the front row, but often got put in the back row. "I didn't like that. Everybody at the back is talking and I like to have good grades" (Leah 1, LED 3). Moreover, like Esther, she liked classes that involved some form of interaction. "They [teachers] make us make something that we can put blue [dye] in, and you show how the smoke, how your lungs get dark. It was different. I loved that school!" (Leah 1, LED 5).

While Aaron struggled with English in school, Leah loved it. She did well in her classes, and received high marks. Yet when she immigrated when she was 22, it was a shock to her how little English she actually knew. In school, "it was just words. And it was easy to copy them . . . But I never spoke it to my friends" (Leah 1, LED 4). Her inability to speak clearly and fluently when she arrived in the States has been a consistent source of her anxiety in her time both in school, at work, and in the community.

For the time being, however, she was confident in herself and her abilities. Upon completing school, she enrolled in a university and began taking courses in International Business. College tuition is expensive no matter the country, and in order to pay for the increased cost, Leah's Mom began doing odd jobs. In Peru, not everyone can afford a phone, so she would rent her cell phone to people. "My Mom was out there [in the town square]. Okay, you want to make a call, one minute is 50 cents" (Leah 1, LED 11). She would work from 7AM until late at night. Sometimes Leah would bring her something to eat and take over the business while her Mom had a short rest. "When they were paying, it was with coins, it wasn't with bills. So she was paying [the tuition and fees] with coins. It was kind of sad, but it was, okay, I have to learn because of this woman. She is doing whatever she has to do" (Leah 1, LED 11).

Then she experienced something similar to Esther. Her siblings brought her mother to the States to live with them. For two years she struggled on her own. Though she was still getting financial support from her Mom, she lived by herself. "I didn't have nobody. And I had to go to the restaurant. And I could see families eating with their mom and everybody, and I was crying!" (Leah 1, LED 12). Still, she persisted the best she could. "All the time, it was home, study, and sleep. And the next day the same. It was kind of sad" (Leah 1, LED 12).

Finally, her family was able to arrange for her to the come to the States, but it did not turn out well. Like Esther, she soon found out that all of her family was working, so she was alone most of the day. She also quickly discovered that she did not know English as well as she thought. Burning her finger on a cigarette lighter in her Mom's new car, they went to a nearby pharmacy in search of some ointment. Holding up her injured

finger, she approached someone and said, “Fire, fire!” (Leah 1, LED 14). Eventually, they found someone who spoke enough Spanish to sort matters out. “But that was the first time that I knew I had to learn English” (Leah 1, LED 14).

The next day was not much better, and after a few days, she was lonely and depressed. Like Esther, she tried a language institute only to find “they [students] speak Spanish. When the teacher asked a question, one guy yells so loud, and I can’t participate. They are so fast” (Leah 1, LED 16). Soon, her boyfriend in Peru convinced her to come back. Without telling her family, she went to the airport and boarded a flight back home. When her mother and siblings found out, they begged her to stay, but she left in the end. “It was the worst decision I made. And I got on the plane. Thank goodness no was sitting next to me. I took the three chairs [to lie down]. I was crying and crying, and then I fell asleep. When I woke up, I had a terrible headache” (Leah 1, LED 16).

Back in Peru, she soon found out her boyfriend did not have their home set up as promised. After a few miserable months, her mother flew back to take her to the United States. “It wasn’t easy for her to convince me to come back. I told her that I didn’t know the language. And she said, ‘How is that?’ She paid for all those classes, and I said, ‘It’s different. In Peru, it’s just . . . simple conversations’” (Leah 1, LED 17). Upon returning to the United States, she found a job at a local grocery and started saving money. After six months, she returned to Peru again, but this time to finish her degree. “I wanted to finish because we [she and her Mom] had been working on this for so long” (Leah 1, LED 18).

After Leah had complete those degree requirements, she returned once more to the United States. As before, she worked at a few grocery stores, but several

confrontations made her realize she needed to focus on her English education. The first involved a co-worker who was accusing her of being a lazy worker, but she couldn't respond to the allegations. "I can't defend myself, and I was crying" (Leah 1, LED 20). The other was with a customer who was upset about something. "I called the manager, and she [the customer] said something like, 'Take it out!' But I said, 'Please the manager is coming.' But she was [angry babbling noises]. I was so embarrassed, and everyone was watching me. What am I doing here?" (Leah 1, LED 20).

Soon after these incidences, she enrolled at the research site. Her first semester in the Fall of 2014 went well enough, but a car accident compelled her to attend the satellite campus where the population is heavily Latinx. Despite this perhaps more comfortable environment, she struggled in her classes - both ESL and credit level because she could not understand the professors. She became so frustrated, she stopped attending courses. Due to misinformation as to when she could still withdraw from classes, she ended up receiving failing grades, which created difficulties with her academic status and financial aid. She was obligated to take a semester off in order to save money.

Returning again to the college in January of 2017, this time under the new program, she had a successful Winter session ESL class, which left two remaining ESL courses for her. However, once more tragedy struck. A drawn out situation with a domestic abuse case ultimately led her to withdraw again from her courses. She is planning on returning to complete these two final ESL courses in the Spring 2018 semester.

Hannah – the regretful one. *Remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered - How fleeting my life is* (Psalm 39: 4). "So many

years in the United States, and you didn't finish" (Hannah 3, LED 3). One of the first comments Hannah made during our interviews about her experiences with anxiety was how comfortable she felt at the college (Hannah 2, LED 1). Confident, outgoing, and educated, she does not outwardly exhibit much in the way of anxiety. In fact, I gave serious thought whether or not I could use her as a participant. However, upon listening to her experiences and reflections, she does indeed experience anxiety, and it has shaped her time at the college. Unlike Deborah who has a more pessimistic outlook on life in general - she uses the word *horrible* 14 times in the first interview alone - Hannah is much more optimistic in her outlook. It is not that she does not experience anxiety; it is simply that she perceives those experiences in a more hopeful manner – a theme that will be explored in greater detail below. Apart from Leah, she also has one of the more complicated paths to the United States and her college career.

Hers was a small family from Colombia that was both supportive and stable along the lines of Aaron and Esther. Her father was a professional business man and educator. Her mother began college, but shifted her focus to caring for the home when Hannah and her sister were born. "Everything at home was good. My Mom helped me every day in the morning . . . My father after his job always helped me with my homework. In high school, too. In college, too" (Hannah 1, LED 1). She has little to say about her little sister other than they never really connected. "We don't have a good relationship. I love my sister, but we have a different, always we have a different . . . She is not friendly. She is always angry" (Hannah 1, LED 2).

Her education through secondary school was in a private Catholic school, and so like Deborah, she appreciated the rigor of her education as well as the opportunities for

extracurricular activities. “I play flute, and guitar, and marimba. I was busy! Always” (Hannah 1, LED 3). Apart from the class content, she also found value in the moral principles that were a part of every class session. “You studied ethics, and love to God, and to everybody. I think it was a good experience. You learned to respect people, respect parents” (Hannah 1, LED 3).

Like all the other participants, Hannah was eager to learn and be competitive in her studies. Like Esther, her classes were all single-sex though that stopped when she went to the university. She also preferred the middle seat. “I want to know everything in the class. In the back, it is always talk, there is always a problem . . . I can’t sit in the front. Some girls have a problem, they have [squints to indicate a vision problem], and they put them in front” (Hannah 1, LED 4). She also indicated that she preferred teachers who were strict, and had some unfavorable comments about a math teacher who did not control the class. “He doesn’t say stop the talking. He doesn’t say anything, just, ‘Do this. If you pay attention, if you don’t pay attention, I don’t care’” (Hannah 1, LED 8). She found this frustrating because she was not getting the help she needed in order to pass the class.

Like Esther, she really only had one close friend during her school years. They met during the 7th grade when this person was a new student. “Nobody talked with her, and I am always friendly. After that, she thinks I’m so kind with her, and we get friends” (Hannah 1, LED 6). As it turns out, this school friend also immigrated to the States, but Hannah laments that they have not been able to re-establish much of a friendship. “She’s my best friend here. She lives in New York City. She’s a nurse, and she’s very busy. She has two children. Maybe next month. Sometimes she struggles with her time. Maybe next

month" (Hannah 1, LED 6). This lack of friendship and the isolation it causes becomes evident again in her experiences at the college.

One time she confessed to bending the rules with a fellow classmate. In her school, all students were required to attend a morning Mass, but one day she recounts, "We were in high school, and we had a big test, a final test. My best friend and I stayed in the bathroom and studied, and we didn't go to the church early in the morning. We skipped church! . . . We were so afraid because it was a big test" (Hannah 1, LED 5). Another classmate noticed them and told a teacher, and they were mildly scolded to not do it again. This temptation to bend the rules in times of stress would come up again in her studies at the college.

Upon completing her secondary education, she opted to attend a university that was far from her home and required her to travel long hours by bus. Only 17 at the time, her parents were not supportive of this choice, but she was insistent.

> Sometimes I feel I was a bad daughter. But sometimes I feel that I need it because I need to know everything about life and the world. My high school was in a Catholic school. I studied just with girls. . . . I fought with them [parents] almost one month. And they said okay. (Hannah 1, LED 9)

To attend the school, she had to work during the day and attend classes at night. "Eight to 12, 2 to 6. In the noontime, it wasn't lunch. I didn't have a break. I had to do my homework in the office . . . It was hard. Almost 18 hours. I don't see my parents all day" (Hannah 1, LED 10). She had to take the bus home alone late at night, but her father would be waiting for her at the station to take her home.

In her work, she began to meet local politicians and became active in their campaigns. She was happy, making connections, and finishing her college career in Business Law. Then, a series of events happened that curtailed her ambitions for a long time, and she confessed wistfully, "I lost a lot of time" (Hannah 1, LED 15) - a frustration that appears to be at the root of some of her current anxiety.

The politician she was working for did not win the election, and as a result she was suddenly out of work and disillusioned. Soon after, at her aunt's wedding, she met an older affluent man from Brazil, which is an interesting parallel to Deborah and how she met her husband. He offered to take her to the States where she could start a new life and career. Much like all the other participants, that first experience with life in the United States was not a positive one. For one, Hannah quickly discovered her fiancé was not the man she thought he was. "He was very jealous. I can't talk with anybody. I don't have money. I can't go out. I just stay in the apartment. Clean, make lunch, sleep in the afternoon. It's not my life!" (Hannah 1, LED 13). An altercation led to the police to come to their home and a realization that her English was not as good as she had thought. "The police talked in Spanish because I can't do anything in English" (Hannah 1, LED 13). Initially thinking of returning to Colombia, instead she left her fiancé and stayed with an aunt who lived nearby. However, this began a protracted time of Visa and legal difficulties.

When she first arrived with her fiancé in 2004, she entered the country with a temporary I 160 Visa. Since she did not get married, she applied for an extension due to domestic abuse, a waiver her future husband helped her to secure. He also attempted to arrange a fake wedding between Hannah and a friend of his. As Hannah later realized, "I

made a mistake. It was a fraud, and I had a lot of troubles with that. I went to many courts" (Hannah 1, LED14). The courts did not recognize the validity of that marriage and rescinded her Visa. Ultimately, however, she ended up legally marrying her husband.

Around this time in the Fall of 2007, she also enrolled in the college. Of the five participants, she started at the lowest level, the beginning level in the old program. In the following Spring semester, she became pregnant and stopped out of school after the semester ended. In 2009, she returned to Colombia in order to complete her degree in business law degree, but discovered that the requirements had changed, and she would have to essentially redo it. Instead, "I created a business. I concentrated on this. I have two stores" (Hannah 1, LED 15). Because of her past legal issues with her Visa, she ended up having to stay in Colombia for five years before she finally was granted her Green card and could rejoin her husband.

In the Fall of 2016, she re-enrolled at the college and started at the intermediate level in the new program. She has made very steady progress since then, even taking Summer courses. In the Fall 2017 semester she completed her ESL coursework though she has yet to take any courses in a major. Despite the fact that her life has seemingly finally gotten back on track, she struggles with a number of issues especially as she tries to speak English. She is also isolated from her family, who have remained in Colombia, and her few friends here are very busy with their lives. Lastly, as alluded to earlier, she has had numerous setbacks, but remains resolute in her goals. "I need to be complete. I have to finish this" (Hannah 1, LED 17).

Experiences with Anxiety

For the purpose of this study, anxiety is defined as the feeling of stress resulting from uncomfortable situations that can provoke avoidance behaviors, such as withdrawal and not seeking help (Brook & Willougby, 2015). The research question and sub-questions for this study ask what meaning ELL students make of their shared experiences with anxiety in terms of identity, connection, and agency. Since it is beneficial to first understand the contexts in which anxiety presented itself, and the responses students had to it, this chapter will focus on their shared experiences with anxiety. The meaning these students made of anxiety will be explored later in Chapter 5.

Rating experiences with anxiety. In all, the participants related 76 LEDs. From these stories, there are eight overarching contexts with 18 sub-contexts in which they experienced anxiety. In order to help the participants reflect on these experiences, I used the Children's Fear Scale (McMurtry et al., 2011; Appendix H). Where appropriate, the participants assigned each of their LEDs with an anxiety level from 1 – 5, with one being the lowest level of anxiety, and five being the highest. Because we all experience anxiety differently, it is not possible to claim anything more than an overall intensity of anxiety relative to each participant.

In addition, in the discussion that follows, there often exists a difference in the average anxiety rating for an experience and the number of times that experience was mentioned by the participants. As an example, Deborah ranked her one experience with embarrassment with the highest level of 5. However, she related six different experiences with anxiety in relation to threats to her progress. Although this overall anxiety average

was 4.5 and so lower than embarrassment, the very fact that she discussed it so often suggests that this anxiety experience was more powerful to her than embarrassment was.

Aaron. Overall, Aaron related 17 anecdotes with an average of 3.3 for an anxiety measure. Though the highest average of anxiety was from a perceived lack of family support, he only talked about this once. Other experiences may have been ranked lower, but he related more occurrences with anxiety in those experiences. For example, he spoke the most about threats to his academic progress, but those ranged from a low of 2 to a high of 5 on the Fear Scale. Powerlessness and embarrassment were also frequently mentioned situations in which he felt anxiety. Aaron was also the only participant to experience anxiety in contexts in which confrontation was a possibility.

Table 4

Ranked Experiences by Anxiety Level for Aaron

Rank	Experience	Occurrences	Average
1	Lack of Family Support	1	4.0
2	Powerlessness	4	3.9
3	The Unfamiliar	3	3.7
4	Confrontation	2	3.5
5	Embarrassment	5	3.4
5	Lack of BICS	3	3.3
7	Letting Others Down	3	3.3
8	Threats to Progress	6	2.8

Deborah. Deborah had fewer anecdotes to relate than Aaron with only 13; however, her perceptions of her anxiety were much higher at an average of 4.6. For her, the most significant sources of anxiety resulted from times when she felt shamed by others, when she perceived a threat to her progress, and when she felt powerless. Her

lowest level of anxiety was from a lack of conversational English with only one experience and a middle range level of anxiety. She also did not have any experiences with anxiety in terms of letting others down or from the potential of confrontation.

Table 5

Ranked Experiences by Anxiety Level for Deborah

Rank	Experience	Occurrences	Average
1	Embarrassment	1	5.0
2	Threats to Progress	6	4.5
3	Powerlessness	4	4.3
4	The Unfamiliar	3	4.0
5	Lack of Family Support	2	3.0
6	Lack of BICS	1	2.5
7	Letting Others Down	0	0.0
7	Confrontation	0	0.0

Esther. Esther had the lowest perception of anxiety at 2.7 from 14 anecdotes.

Table 6

Ranked Experiences by Anxiety Level for Esther

Rank	Experience	Occurrences	Average
1	Threats to Progress	1	5.0
2	Powerlessness	3	4.0
2	Letting Others Down	2	4.0
2	Embarrassment	1	4.0
2	Lack of Family Support	1	4.0
6	The Unfamiliar	4	2.9
7	Lack of BICS	0	0.0
7	Confrontation	0	0.0

Though she spoke the most often about anxiety and the unfamiliar, she did not rate those experiences very highly. Powerlessness and letting others down had much higher levels of anxiety but fewer mentions. She also did not relate any experiences with anxiety from a lack of conversational English or from confrontations.

Leah. Leah experienced most of her anxiety from embarrassment at her lack of English ability though she also felt strong anxiety from a sense of powerless in one experience. Moreover, she feared letting her mom down and not being able to support her, of which her English ability is paramount. She recounted 18 anecdotes with an average score of 4.0.

Table 7

Ranked Experiences by Anxiety Level for Leah

Rank	Experience	Occurrences	Average
1	Powerlessness	1	5.0
2	Embarrassment	4	4.5
3	The Unfamiliar	3	4.3
4	Lack of BICS	3	4.0
4	Letting Others Down	3	4.0
4	Threats to Progress	2	4.0
7	Lack of Family Support	0	0.0
7	Confrontation	0	0.0

Hannah. Despite her avowed feelings of comfort at the college, Hannah's average anxiety score was 3.6 from 14 different stories. Her strongest experiences with anxiety are related to the unfamiliar processes and practices at the college, her concerns about her ability to speak fluently, and the fear of disappointing others especially her

family. However, she spoke most often about powerlessness, but she did not rate those experiences as strongly as others.

Table 8

Ranked Experiences by Anxiety Level for Hannah

Rank	Experience	Occurrences	Average
1	The Unfamiliar	1	5.0
2	Lack of BICS	2	4.5
3	Letting Others Down	3	4.3
4	Embarrassment	3	4.0
5	Powerlessness	4	3.3
6	Lack of Family Support	2	3.0
6	Threats to Progress	1	3.0
8	Confrontation	0	0.0

When considered as a whole, we can get a sense of what experiences were most often experienced not only by all the participants, but also the level of anxiety they represent for the group. Table 7 illustrates the ranking of these experiences from highest to lowest in terms of how the participants as a whole related their anxiety.

Table 9

Ranked Experiences by Aggregated Anxiety Level

Experience	Aaron	Deborah	Esther	Leah	Hannah	Ave
Embarrassment	3.4	5	4	4.5	4	4.2
Powerlessness	3.9	4.3	4	5	3.3	4.1
The Unfamiliar	3.7	4.0	2.9	4.3	5	4.0
Threats to Progress	2.8	4.5	5	4	3	3.9
Letting Others Down	3.3	n/a	4	4	4.3	3.1
Lack of BICS	3.3	2.5	n/a	4	4.5	2.9
Lack of Family Support	4	3	4	n/a	3	2.8
Confrontation	3.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.7

Noteworthy is that the last four experiences in the table were not experienced by all the participants which resulted in a lower anxiety average than perhaps was true for those who did experience it. For example, a lack of conversational English was Hannah's highest level of anxiety, but received a lower anxiety average in part because Esther did not recount any experiences concerning this. Of the other four participants who did, this average comes to 3.6, a full point higher. This speaks to how even though these are by and large shared experiences, everyone has their own unique perception and understanding of these experiences. Nevertheless, anxiety from embarrassment, powerlessness, the unfamiliar, and threats to progress were the highest anxiety levels experienced as a group, and for the most part, the participants also ranked these high as individual experiences. The discussion that follows explores these experiences more deeply beginning with the lowest average anxiety level to the highest.

Anxiety from confrontation (0.7). *There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself* (Psalm 5:9). Only Aaron shared that he experienced anxiety from a threat of confrontations and trying to defend himself. For him, this was one of his third highest levels of anxiety - 3.5. Aaron had previously related in his years in India that he did not mind being punished for pranks or misbehaviors for which he was indeed guilty. However, he resented unfair punishment, and would do his best to defend himself in those situations. At the same time Indian students are at the mercy of Chairs and Principals. If a student angers them, they may deny that student permission to take a class, or even expel him or her. Therefore, those confrontational discussions must be handled tactfully.

Now at the college, those confrontations have to happen in English, a language in which he is less confident. As a result, his sense of justice was overshadowed by the anxiety of having to defend his position. When his professor demanded he buy a textbook by the next day, he felt this was unfair, but he did not protest his situation. "I don't like arguing with people. I'm bad at it. I just take whatever they say" (Aaron 2, LED 6). Similarly, he was reticent to approach a Chair over what he perceived was an unfair situation. "That's why I'm fear – what if I say something wrong and something bad happens?" (Aaron 3, LED 11). Later, Aaron's anxiety with his lack of conversational fluency will be discussed more thoroughly, but it would seem that his fear of confrontations was only exacerbated by his anxiety in his English speaking abilities. By not being able to express himself well, he could potentially anger a person in authority, and thereby suffer some form of punishment.

Anxiety from a lack of family support (2.8). *For my father and my mother have forsaken me* (Psalm 27:10). Each of the participants was largely dependent upon family to help them make that initial transition to life in the United States. They also benefitted from family help to complete the admission process and first registration. However, once their college careers began, most felt a measure of anxiety from the lack of support they received from family members. Esther relates how, "Everyone [sisters] has their own class. I didn't get any help from my friends. My Dad and Mom don't know a lot of English" (Esther 3, LED 10). As a result, she was forced to fend for herself. Leah, too, reflected this same isolation from family, "I felt bad because everybody here is at work and they don't have time" (Leah 2, LED 1).

Hannah, though, appears to have had the most difficult time. Her daughter and husband are both fluent English speakers, and they would seem to be natural allies in helping her to develop her own English skills. This has not been the case from either her daughter or her husband. “My daughter always say she wants to help me, but she has no time” (Hannah 2, LED 9). “My husband is too busy, and my daughter is a baby” (Hannah 3, LED 9). When she does try to practice her English with them, her daughter will tell her, “Mommy, don’t talk to me” (Hannah 3, LED 9). Her husband has the same reaction, “He is confused and says, ‘No, speak in Spanish please’” (Hannah 3, LED 14). Since much of Hannah’s anxiety is centered on her inability to speak fluently, as detailed later, her family’s reluctance to help her only adds to her anxiety.

On the other hand, both Aaron and Deborah experience anxiety not from a lack of support, but from not wanting family support. For Aaron, he does not want to be a burden on family. He opted not to go to another college that placed him at a higher level than where he was placed at the research site; meaning he could complete his ESL coursework more quickly and so work on his degree sooner. However, to do so he would have to live with a relative to go this school. This created an uncomfortable situation where he would need to rely on their support for room and board. Whether accurate or not, he worried that they would not appreciate having to care for him. “I didn’t like to be there in my uncle’s house. It’s my relative, but it’s annoying for them” (Aaron 2, LED 1). He even felt uncomfortable asking his immediate family to help him out while he was attending classes. “I don’t want to put someone in trouble for me because I know my grandfather is doing a lot for us. We’ve been there for three or four months doing nothing. He is just feeding us. I don’t want to give him more trouble” (Aaron 3, LED 3).

Deborah actually resented having to rely on her family, especially her in-laws for help. For her, the anxiety stemmed from dependence upon them.

> He [brother-in-law] helped me a lot. He pushed me to come here. My brother-in-law, we were fine that time. But he's annoying. I don't want to be friends with him. He thought I was going to be close to him and be friends. But I didn't even like him, and I don't want to be friends with you. So, he applied for me, and then I kicked him out. You did this for me, and I kicked him out. You did this? Okay, thanks. He thinks he owns me now. No. (Deborah 1, LED 15)

She would rather struggle on her own then be at the mercy of relatives who could control and judge her.

Anxiety from a lack of conversational proficiency (BICS) (2.9). *There is no speech, nor are there words. Their voice is not heard* (Psalm 19:3). A primary focus of the ESL program at the college is on academic English proficiency. Students are expected upon placement in the program to be fairly competent in their Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), or conversational fluency (Cummins, 2008). Having this comfort in informal interactions should lower their stress and anxiety when talking with fellow classmates and even their professors. However, all the participants except Esther expressed anxiety stemming from a lack of this fundamental ability. At the same time, every participant at some point in the series of interviews, sometimes in all three, apologized to me for their poor English skills. More specifically, these participants expressed anxiety from a lack of conversational ability in their interactions with classmates, with professors, and some as a general lack in any interaction they have involving English.

With classmates. Several of the participants struggled with interacting with their fellow classmates. With fellow students in their ESL classes, this seemed to revolve around trying to understand and be understood. Accented or less than fluent English breaks up the flow of the conversations, sometimes to the point of becoming an actual barrier to making connections with peers who would be the most sympathetic to English language struggles. Leah recounts how when trying to connect with non-Latinx students, a lack of English presented a barrier.

> When I was trying to make friends it was hard for me to understand them. Like I told you the accent is really difficult and the words are different. I didn't understand but I was smiling all the time. I couldn't make a conversation. If the first time they don't understand me, I'm thinking how will I make sense? (Leah 2, LED 15)

Leah did not have as much anxiety when talking with other Latinx students however. Deborah also related a measure of comfort from talking with other Egyptian students. "I didn't have too many Egyptians in class. Only one in 2015, she was Egyptian. She wasn't a different nationality. Different nationalities are hard because we have broken English" (Deborah 2, LED 17).

For Aaron, any interaction with a fellow ESL classmate, regardless if the student was Indian or not, was anxiety provoking. "I don't speak fluent English. Will they laugh? I don't want them to ask me something" (Aaron 3, LED 7).

When the context shifted outside the ESL classroom and participants were required to potentially interact with Native English speakers, then the anxiety became even more pronounced. "I don't know that stuff. It's in English, so they are talking

directly to the professor and ask questions. I don't ask questions because I am in ESL. If I say something wrong, they going to laugh" (Aaron 2, LED 16). Leah felt the same when thinking about going to the Tutoring Center to get additional help with her writing skills. "There were so many people, and they looked like American people [NES]. I think I shouldn't do it, and I left" (Leah 3, LED 24).

No matter the context then, either with fellow ESL students or with Native English speakers, anxiety from simply being able to converse created barriers. The self-isolation that resulted from the anxiety will be discussed in further depth later on.

With professors. Besides their classmates, the participants also had to interact with their professors, which also was a further source for anxiety. Often, this was connected to a lack of confidence in their speaking ability which served to silence a participant. Aaron struggled with a Psychology professor, "She speaks so fast. Sometimes, I couldn't understand. After the third time it seems weird to ask; that's why I don't ask her. It seems stupid in front of her. Oh, he doesn't understand that?" (Aaron 3, LED 8). Deborah had a similar experience in an ESL class, "Barely if I can understand anything. Every time, maybe this time, I didn't have the confidence to speak" (Deborah 2, LED 5). Leah, too, had the same worry,

> They [the other students] understood because they were doing what she was saying and I was the only one looking around. I couldn't say nothing. How was I going to communicate with her? I was afraid I would say something wrong in front of people. (Leah 2, LED 5)

The strategies these students used in order to cope with their anxiety and still be able to interact with the professors will be explored deeper in the over-preparation section later.

In general. For others, this anxiety from simply English conversations was more general in nature, and not necessarily tied to any specific context with classmates or professors. Leah had applied for a position as a guide for the college's new student orientation session. "It was like giving a greeting. I have to stay with these people and tell them about my experiences at the college. I won't make it! It's going to be random [questions]. I'm not ready for this" (Leah 3, LED 18). As a result, she left before she was even interviewed.

Hannah quite often experienced anxiety in any circumstance in which she needed to speak in English. "I feel like I can't socialize well with people, and I feel embarrassing for my husband" (Hannah 1, LED 17). For Hannah, she feels anxious not only because she feels as if she embarrasses her husband from her lack of fluency, but also because she recognizes her hesitations and mispronunciations when she speaks. When she talks, "I want to explain a lot of things, and I want to talk spontaneous, but I feel something in my neck [indicates her throat]" (Hannah 3, LED 8). She also admits, "I think its pronunciation and verb tenses. I think too much when I want to explain something in the past or present or continuous or comes from the past and continues in the present. I get confused when I want to talk" (Hannah 3, LED 3).

Anxiety from letting others down (3.1). *Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy and there was none and for comforters, but I found none* (Psalm 69:20). The five participants in this study are all very driven and committed to their studies. They were successful students in their home countries, some having earned higher education degrees. As such, that push to be successful was very evident in each of them. At the same time, this perception of needing to be successful was a source

of anxiety for them. This was evident in their interactions with other students, with their family, and with themselves.

Other students. Aaron was unique in experiencing anxiety with how his lack of English ability would impact other students. As a rule, he avoids interacting with students as shown above. However, he becomes particularly stressed when assigned to work in a group especially if that group consists of Native English speakers. He explains, "What if they get a low grade because of me, because I did not present well? They will think their whole lives, because of this guy, I got a low grade!" (Aaron 3, LED 14).

Family. For a number of the participants, the support their families have given them throughout their lives is very much valued. At the same time, this creates a sense of obligation that the students now "owe" their family success in college and a career. This anxiety is most pronounced in Aaron and Leah who have perhaps the strongest sense of connection to their families. Leah in reflecting on all her mother used to do to help her through school in Peru simply stated, "I didn't want to disappoint my Mom" (Leah 3, LED 2). She further explained, "My Mom doesn't like it when I start something but didn't finish . . . We worked hard to finish my career over there, and I didn't finish it. I feel so bad. I started something and I didn't finish. What kind of person am I?" (Leah 3, LED 13).

Aaron shares the experience when reflecting on the need to do well in his classes in order to live up to his family's expectations. "What if I get a low grade? Then my parents expect me to get a good grade, and even in my family, everyone is getting it. What are they going to think about it if I get a low grade?" (Aaron 3, LED 2). Once, he

was struggling with a grade change in a Math class in which his professor inadvertently gave him a C instead of the A he deserved:

> The whole time I was scared. I log into my account when no one is around me, because if someone see my grade, you got a C in math? Shame on you! My uncle's son she got a B in math in middle school. One day we had a dinner with my other cousins. You got a B? You are an Indian; you have to get an A! What are they going to say to me if they see my grade?! In India we have so hard math. Most of the people are good at math, so you have to get A. In my family, everyone is studying at a good level, doctor and all that. They expect a lot for everyone. (Aaron 2, LED 15)

Self. For other participants, they experienced anxiety from a perception that they were no longer "good" students because they had to struggle with their English. In fact, two participants overtly expressed how they continued to expect to be perfect. Esther was a successful professional in Jordan and pushed herself to excel at school. "If I study, I have to get an A or perfect" (Esther 3, LED 11). However, now that she was taking ESL classes, she found herself in an uncomfortable place. "Sometimes I felt like I was less than the level of the other students in the class" (Esther 3, LED 6). When the inevitable mistakes and slow progress occurred, her anxiety increased, "I always feel like I'm doing something wrong. I feel embarrassed" (Esther 2, LED 12).

Hannah felt the same way about the sudden realization of her lower English abilities. She also reflected on trying to start college at an older age, "I remember that I studied verb tenses a long time ago, and I take a lot of classes about grammar, and about writing. I think when you study and you stop for a long time, it's complicated. When you

are more old [laughs], it's complicated too" (Hannah 2, LED 3). Still, she has high expectations for herself, "I need an A! I want to be perfect" (Hannah 3, LED 7).

Finally, Leah was a successful student in Peru, who had taken English classes at a language institute. She felt she knew English reasonably well. However, when she arrived in the United States, she suddenly realized how little English she actually knew. She struggled on the placement test with the questions. "I was thinking, I should know this" (Leah 2, LED 1). She went on to explain, "After all those years learning English [in Peru], I couldn't talk here" (Leah 3, LED 1). For all three of these participants, the classroom was unexpectedly a more challenging and anxious place, and the expectations they had for themselves were not as easy to obtain as they once were.

Anxiety from a threat to progress (3.9). *My feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped* (Psalm 73:2). Higher education is a lengthy process. A full time student will need a minimum of four semesters to complete an Associate's degree. If further foundational courses, such as ESL, are added in as part of that student's required coursework that can extend the time to completion to three or even four years. Since a number of sequenced credit level courses are only offered in certain semesters, missing a class one semester can add another year to that timetable. With the promise of better employment as well as the ability to transfer to a four year university, timely completion of a program is often in the forefront of a student's mind. As a result, almost all of the participants expressed anxiety from threats to their academic progress, which can be subdivided into delays from having to take ESL, delays from not-passing a class, and delays as a result of perceived unfair processes.

From having to take ESL. Not many students look forward to taking ESL, and some view it as a potential waste of time. Aaron expressed frustration at being placed into ESL when he fretted, "I don't want to waste two years . . . Not waste, but I am studying so long, and I just want to complete that [degree program]" (Aaron 2, LED 1). This was further compounded by the relative ease he discovered in his initial ESL classes. "When I went to level 3, it was like they are teaching from the beginning. What is the tense? Simple past tense. It was so easy. I can think I can be in the 4th level. . . When I went in level 3, I was just doing nothing" (Aaron 2, LED 2). Deborah also felt she was falling behind in her progress from having to take unnecessary ESL classes: "It [first ESL class] was easy. I was wasting my time" (Deborah 3, LED 5).

From failing a class. Obviously, not passing a class requires the student to retake the same class the following semester. Retaking an ESL class further delays the progress a student can make in program degree courses since the gatekeeping English composition course cannot be taken until all ESL coursework has been successfully completed. Deborah felt this the most acutely. "I will fail. I was freaking out the entire semester" (Deborah 2, LED 15). For Deborah, failing meant having to repeat a class, which worried her that she would grow discouraged and stop taking classes. "I don't have time. You will fail. You will stop again. You don't have time" (Deborah 2, LED 19).

Connected to this anxiety from failing is anxiety from tests and exams. Many students suffer from test anxiety in one way or another, and ELL students are not an exception. All of the participants were very successful and competitive students in their home countries. Taking courses at the college in a new language added to the burden of

not just having to know the content, but also being able to understand the questions and provide the correct answer creating some of the most intense anxiety for them.

> In every exam I am nervous. If I don't know the subject, like Psychology, I feel like level 4 [on the Fear Scale] before the exam. If I sit in the exam, and I read the paper first, then I write it. When I read it, and I don't know half of the questions, then I am like level 5. If I know the stuff, then still I am nervous, like level 2. Still I get nervous and I make a mistake because of nervousness. (Aaron 2, LED 13)

This anxiety was echoed by Deborah, "Every time you give us an exam, I freaked out. Sometimes I didn't understand what you were asking for. Sometimes I don't understand your words. You use huge words. Fancy words. Not common, like in life" (Deborah 2, LED 6). Esther when talking about tests remarked, "Even at home, I couldn't eat, I feel like my stomach is very tight. Especially before the test. Oh my God. I got crazy" (Esther 2, LED 6). This adverse reaction to taking tests is echoed by Leah, "Let me start, anxiety for me is horrible. It makes me think about everything I do. It doesn't let me concentrate about something I am doing at the moment. If I'm trying to think about my classes, my tests, I'm so nervous about the grade I'm going to get" (Leah 3, LED 19). Even Hannah, who is typically very positive, gets rattled by tests. She related how she reacted to a test she had just prior to our second interview:

> Last night, I reviewed everything. I tried to rest because I feel stressed. It's better to rest because sometimes I couldn't sleep. I feel stressed and nervous, and I want to review, and review, and review. I slept for 4 hours. Last night, I couldn't sleep well. I woke up early in the morning and started to study for that test. (Hannah 2, LED 7)

In a subsequent section, this physical reaction to anxiety will be explored in greater detail. For all participants, however, tests and the fear of failure is an ever present and all too common phenomenon.

From injustice. A third sub-context in which a number of the participants felt anxiety from a threat to progress was perceived injustice at the hands of others. A common source of this injustice came from professors who did not treat the students fairly, jeopardizing their ability to succeed in the process. Deborah relates a time when she had to go to the hospital due a car accident. Although she had a doctor's note, her professor refused to accept it and did not let her do any of the missed work, "I disappeared for one week, and she didn't accept it. I don't know what happened. Maybe I went to her office and talked to her. I had a bad accident. She said, 'Okay, but I didn't hear from you.' How will you hear from me, I was in the hospital?" (Deborah 3, LED 12).

Aaron also expressed anxiety from being treated unfairly and potentially being punished by lower grades if he objected. In his first class, his grammar professor required all the students to have the textbook.

> She said you had to have the book the next class. She said that the next day she wants a book, and I said to her give me one more day. She got angry and said no I need it by tomorrow. . . I started a job, too, at that time. I used to go to work from 7:30 to 4. I had to take a day off. I just got a job one week before, and I asked for a day off. It's horrible. You can't do this." (Aaron 2, LED 6)

Although he felt mistreated, he did not feel he could object out of fear or reprisals, "What if she cuts off my grade from arguing?" (Aaron 3, LED 6).

Though Leah did not relate any personal experiences she had with professors and injustice, she did witness a fellow classmate being treated unfairly.

> This was a writing class. I remember it was the first time and everything was perfect. Then one of my classmates was late, and he had to explain why he was late in front of everybody. He [the professor] said, "If you don't take this as important, you shouldn't come." I understood that, but it's the very first week, don't be so hard! But he [the student] said, 'No, this is important. I'm sorry professor.' (Leah 2, LED 10)

She also explained, "You don't know what is happening to this guy. You don't know if he doesn't have a mother, or has to drop off his siblings. You don't know nothing about what is happening" (Leah 3, LED 10). The experience unsettled her so much, that a few days later when she was late herself to this class, she opted to skip rather than face being treated in the same way.

Professors, however, were not the only ones who were perceived to have behaved unjustly with the students. Aaron had a difficult time with a department chair who took his time signing a registration form so that he could take a Computer Science class.

> This is a class that runs in the Fall semester only, and there are only 2 sections so that class fills early. I couldn't register online because I am in ESL . . . There was five seats left in one class, and two seats in the second class. It was at 8 o'clock, then after 9 there were just 3 in one class, and 1 in other class. After five minutes, the one class gets full, and there are just 3 seats. I'm wondering what is going to happen? I was just walking around the office. Already I asked her two times when can I get it because it's going to get full. Then the Chairperson came, and he went

> inside his office. I didn't talk to him. So I ask her again, and she said, he just came in, I can't do anything until he calls me. So after 15 minutes, I check again and there are only 2 seats left. And I'm thinking I'm not going to get it. (Aaron 2, LED 11)

Eventually, the Chair signed the form, and Aaron was able to claim the last seat in the last section. Still, he complains, "He took half an hour to sign this one paper. He could do it in five minutes. Not even five minutes" (Aaron 2, LED 11).

Aaron was fortunate that this anxiety provoking process of getting a registration form signed did not ultimately delay his progress. However, Leah was not so lucky. Having troubles in classes one semester, she asked a staff person when the last day she could still withdraw from a class was.

> They told me, I had to wait to this time. I did that, but when I came, they told me you had to come before! I said, "But you told me I had to come then." But they said, "Oh no that was wrong; we don't know who told you that." Where is that person? I didn't find her. That is going to affect my FAFSA. I can't believe it. This person told me this; that's why I did it. (Leah 2, LED 13)

Because she was not able to withdraw in time, she received failing grades in all her classes and was placed on restriction. It took her a full year before she could be reinstated with financial aid and begin her coursework again.

Anxiety from the unfamiliar (4.0). *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion* (Psalm 137:1). A frequent comment made by all the participants was how different life in the United States is from their home countries. In fact, many of the participants struggled initially with the newness of life and how busy

everyone is. This was especially true for Esther and Leah who both joined family after a lengthy period of time. Esther remarked that three months after she had reunited with her family after eight years of living on her own that, "I started to miss Jordan . . . sometimes I cried, 'I need to go back to Jordan'" (Esther 1, LED 2). Similarly, Leah went to live with her mother after being separated for two years. However, on her second day, she remarked, "I came in December, so at 5PM it's dark. And the room doesn't have any windows to see outside, and everything was dark. I was texting with my boyfriend, but it wasn't like, 'I'm enjoying the United States'" (Leah 1 LED 15). This feeling of the unfamiliar can further be delineated into anxiety from unfamiliar cultural norms and practices, unfamiliar college processes, and unfamiliar classroom expectations.

Unfamiliar cultural norms and practices. Life in the United States is obviously different from life in other countries. Everyday activities that most Native English speakers take for granted can be confusing to new immigrants. Aaron experienced this in his first semester. Half way through his class, the professor gave the class a short break. Most students used this opportunity to use the restroom, get a drink of water, or buy a snack from the many vending machines. Aaron was hungry and thirsty because he had neglected to bring anything with him. When he saw his classmates coming back with chips and soda, naturally he was curious as to where they got them. He soon discovered the vending machines but was mystified as to how they worked. The obvious solution would be to ask someone, but he said, "the question is so stupid . . . I didn't even know how to use the vending machine. That day I didn't even eat. I never asked anyone" (Aaron 2, LED 12). So fearful of being teased for being ignorant of a ubiquitous vending machine, he preferred to suffer in silence until he got home and could get a snack. It was

only when he was with a cousin at a wedding that he asked how to use one. The question may still have seemed silly, but the fear was reduced by asking it to a more sympathetic relative.

Esther also relates an encounter with a classmate in her first semester at class. Having been raised in a conservative Muslim country, she had never had male students in a classroom before. At one point, she was working in a group with two other students, one of which was a Latino. After receiving a good grade on the project, he raised his fist to give her a fist bump.

> He did this [raises fist], and I was surprised and shocked. What is he doing? I don't know what that means. His face turned red, so I feel there is something wrong, but I didn't know what was going on. After we finished, he changed. He started not to talk to me or look at me. I don't know why. He's a very good guy. He helped me a lot in the class, and I don't want to do something that he would understand wrong. Personally, I don't like to hurt anybody, or feel embarrassed. (Esther 2, LED 12)

The experience unsettled her in part because she did not know what the expectation was, as well as the embarrassment she had caused the other student.

Unfamiliar college processes. Apart from cultural confusions, all the students experienced anxiety from the college processes. Their first contact with the college was the admissions and placement test requirements. In every case, the participants relied on other family members to help them with forms and procedures. "I had no idea what was going on. He [brother-in-law] did it for me" (Deborah 2, LED 2). Leah was alarmed by the admission's process, "They asked me so many questions, and even how to write a

check. I didn't know how to do it. Never in my life I knew how to do it. It was really hard" (Leah 3, LED 2). Esther, too, became concerned about being admitted to the college due to difficulties with the college accepting her transcripts.

> In the registration, I meet one staff member. She was a girl. The first day, she said that your certificate is not clear with the stamp like that. I'm thinking, 'Oh my God. They will not accept it. . . I feel like, oh my God, I cannot come here.' It's very scary. (Esther 2, LED 13)

The ESL placement test was also challenging both for the content that was asked and for the process in which it was done. Aaron was stressed by the tests that were computer based. "We don't use a lot of computers [in India], we just write on paper. I don't like that we had to type" (Aaron 2, LED 2). Leah also found the content of the tests stressful. "The placement test was so hard! They wanted me to write an essay, and I'm thinking, what is an essay? And the grammar – what is the past, and sometimes it's hard for me to remember all the verbs" (Leah 2, LED 2).

Even the semester system with constantly changing classes and classmates created anxiety for some. Esther (3, LED 16) remarked she felt lonely, "No friendship because the first and second semester, they [students] just came and take the class and go home." This is an observation echoed by Aaron (2, LED 11), "I don't have many friends, not like in India . . . Every semester the people get changed." This lack of continuity created a feeling of isolation and anxiety, a theme that will be explored later.

Unfamiliar expectations. Even though all of the participants had studied English to one extent or another during their school years in their home country, each of them were surprised, and alarmed, at how little English they knew, or even what would be

expected of them to develop those English skills. Deborah sums up the consensus well when she stated, “I felt I was going to be fluent right away” (Deborah 3, LED 4). Hannah amplified that sentiment, “I don’t know what happened to my English. I think I forgot” (Hannah 2, LED 4).

The classroom experiences were also quite different from the more typical rote learning done in their schools. There it was a matter of copying off a board, memorizing the material, and later repeating it for test. The more interactive approach adopted by professors in the classroom was unfamiliar and challenging for some. Leah was particularly anxious when the professor would randomly call on students to answer a question. “You had to pay attention because maybe your name is coming up and you had to say it [the answer]” (Leah 3, LED 7). Other classes, such as phonology courses, were completely new to their experiences. “I didn’t understand what was going on. I had no idea about the class” (Deborah 2, LED 12). For most, that first semester was the toughest as it required the most adaptations to “new styles of teaching, new cultures, and languages” (Esther 3, LED 1).

Anxiety from a sense of powerlessness (4.1). *My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws* (Psalm 22:15). All of the students experienced anxiety from a sense of powerlessness. A number of concerns were perceived as difficult barriers for them to overcome, including the cost of classes, uncertainty or inability of getting help, and difficult professors.

Cost. College tuition is expensive, and having to pay for the added courses from the ESL program creates an added burden. In addition, someone must live in the county of the college for one year to be charged the regular tuition and fee rate. In that first year,

students are considered out-of-county and so must pay twice the amount. When Deborah found this out, she opted to only take one class to make it more affordable. “I registered for one class at that time because I had to pay. I just started working. So I took one class. I believe it was $500 something. They said I wasn’t a resident. I have to be here like one year” (Deborah 2, LED 2). Aaron also reduced his class load that first semester. “I'm scared because it was out-of-county fees. It was too high. The next day, I registered for four or five classes. So, it was lots of money, so I couldn't afford. I just came and I dropped one class” (Aaron 2, LED 3).

Hannah had a slightly different experience with anxiety when it came to the cost of her education. “My husband helped me a lot because he was a student here. He graduated. In the beginning, I had to pay a lot of money, and he helped me” (Hannah 2, LED 2). However, she later explained, “I always pay for my things, and pay for my studies,” so her husband helping with these expenses was “nice, but it’s not comfortable” (Hannah 3, LED 2).

Getting help. More pronounced and prevalent experiences with anxiety and powerlessness resulted from the participants’ uncertainty or inability to get needed help. At times this anxiety was a generalized uncertainty of what to do. Hannah relates, “Sometimes I feel helpless. Sometimes with the professors, and I want to explain something but I can’t because I think my mind is blocked” (Hannah 3, LED 1). Esther had a similar lament, “I couldn’t reply or ask for help” (Esther 3, LED 3). Her classmates added to this uncertainty when they were not able to help her when she was confused about a topic.

> A lot of the students I found were not very serious. I tried once or twice to ask a classmate around me, "What does this vocabulary mean? What does this article talk about?" They say, "We don't know." And they didn't even ask or look in the internet. They didn't even care. But it made me more stressed because nobody understands, but how can we pass this class? If they didn't understand anything, I won't get help from them. It gave me more stress because I won't find another way to help myself. (Esther 3, LED 6)

Other times, the anxiety centered on a participant's reluctance to ask for help even if help were readily available. Aaron, for example, states, "I don't feel comfortable asking questions. I just reading again and again the same paper" (Aaron 2, LED 13). If he does work up the nerve to ask a question, there is the limit to how many questions he can ask. "I had already asked her more than four times. I couldn't ask again. What are they going to think - he doesn't have patience" (Aaron 2, LED 11).

For others, it was the perception that no one was willing to help when it was needed. Deborah remembered being in my reading class and having difficulty with a test; however, "asking [for help] was useless. You [the professor] didn't help at all" (Deborah 2, LED 14). She also felt her questions were not answered by the staff in the ESL department. "They don't care. They don't care about immigrants. Here nothing is helping" (Deborah 2, LED 16).

Difficult professors. Of all the contexts with anxiety and feeling helpless, having to work with a difficult professor was the most wide-spread. The participants were very quick to deduce if a professor was rude, mean, or difficult. "Some [professors] have attitude I know. They don't like to give answer kindly. Some professor get angry when

we ask question . . . they are angry, so I feel nervous to ask them" (Aaron 2, LED 8). The professor's physical demeanor was important to make this determination. "She is so strict . . . She barely smiled" (Deborah 2, LED 10). Leah describes a challenging professor she had that produced anxiety in her when the professor confronted another student in class, "He was rude! . . . Maybe you can say it another way. Just with that person, not in front of everybody. It was uncomfortable" (Leah 2, LED 10).

As noted above, Aaron felt he could only ask so many questions. This was especially true for professors he deemed angry ones. "I can ask up to three questions, but after three, no. It depends on the professor, if he seems angry or not" (Aaron 2, LED 13). One semester he had a golf professor who would get very angry at the class, and yell at them if they made mistakes. At one point, the professor asked Aaron a question he did not understand. "That was hard for me, and he would get angry, and I would say, 'What did he say?' I had to ask him more than two times, 'What, sorry?' I don't feel okay asking him because he got so angry" (Aaron 2, LED 10).

Deborah termed these types of professors as *strict*. "I only have anxiety with strict people. Only with someone strong like I told you that makes me stresses out in anxiety. Being with someone strong and is going to ask for too much work" (Deborah 2, LED 13). This was in reference to the professor she had that would not accept her doctor's note. "She's strict also. Not about the subject. Not about the theory. I remember I had an accident, and I disappeared for a while. I came back, and she didn't accept the doctor's note" (Deborah 2, LED 12).

Esther struggled with a difficult professor one semester. She had been warned that the professor was tough. "Everybody said, 'No, don't take him.' I don't have a choice. If

I wait more than this, I will lose the semester" (Esther 2, LED 5). Mostly, she struggled with the lack of help to better understand the course content from this professor. "He didn't help in any way" (Esther 2, LED 7). She would ask him for help, "How can I study the material? 'You have to read the article and find the answer.' I know that!" (Esther 3, LED 7). Hannah also struggled with a professor who was not helpful,

> She doesn't use the board. She doesn't use the videos. She just sits and talks. She puts out homework every day. The next class, she just corrects for everybody, and read everything in the book. That's it. She doesn't explain too much. I feel nervous because it's my last level of ESL, and I want to learn the rest of the ESL. I feel uncomfortable. (Hannah 2, LED 6)

Anxiety from the threat of embarrassment (4.2). *All day long my dishonor is before me and my humiliation has overwhelmed me* (Psalm 44:15). Closely related to anxiety from conversational English, all of the participants expressed anxiety from the potential of embarrassment. In fact, this was the highest average level of anxiety for these participants. No one can learn a new language without making mistakes. Mistakes can be helpful when they serve to focus the students' attention on weakness in their abilities. However, when those mistakes are followed by laughter from others, the resulting shame and embarrassment is difficult to bear. It is this potential of being embarrassed that provokes the participants' anxiety. This threat of embarrassment was manifested in a variety of contexts: from the feeling that everyone was watching the participant, from the classroom, and even from future events.

From all eyes on me. When the participants were required to speak in front of the class, either from a presentation or to answer a question in class, they felt the

uncomfortable sensation that everyone in the classroom was watching them - watching them, and waiting for them to make a mistake. Presentations are particularly difficult. "I get nervous because I have to be there [in front of the class]. I could do something wrong like a grammar mistake, and someone will laugh at me" (Aaron 2, LED 5). This is a sentiment that Deborah shares, "I'm always scared how I react in front of everyone" (Deborah 3, LED 1). She further explains, "I'm feeling horrible. My hands were cold. I was very nervous. I want to say everything to look good . . . and I don't want to fail" (Deborah 2, LED 8). Hannah simply puts it, "When I did the presentation, I blocked" (Hannah 2, LED 8).

Besides speaking in front of the class, being asked a direct question requiring the participant to respond in front of everyone also provoked anxiety. This was especially pronounced for Leah. One time she was caught off guard at a difficult moment.

> In the middle of the class, you have to go to the bathroom. My professor told me, "You don't have to ask me to use the bathroom. You can just go." . . . One time, she said, "Can I ask you something?" in front of everybody, and I was like, "Yeaaah." [laughs] I understand everything, but I wasn't prepared in front of everybody, and I don't know what she's going to say. Am I going to understand? And she said, "I figured out that all the time you go to the bathroom at this time. Is there somebody you are seeing outside?" Am I like, "Noooo. [laughs] I just need to use the bathroom." And she said, "Okay. Sorry, I was just wondering." And I said, "Can I go?" and she said, "Yes." I left, but I was thinking, "No, no, no." It was early. I didn't expect that she would ask me in front of everybody. I

was thinking about it all the time, "Why, why, did she did it?" I was so afraid. (Leah 2, LED 6)

In a different class, she was running late to class because of bad traffic.

I was five minutes late, and I was running from the bus stop. I was at the door, knocking on the door [pantomimes soft knocking]. I wouldn't talk - I didn't know what I would say if he asks me something in front of everybody. When I was knocking on the door, if he was listening, he was going to open the door, and I was afraid. So I didn't put all my effort to knock. I know if he opened the door, he was going to talk to me in front of everybody I was so nervous. Now, it was 15 minutes, and I couldn't go to class. I went to the cafeteria, and I didn't go to class. I was afraid. (Leah 2, LED 10)

From the classroom. As mentioned earlier, even the supposed empathy of fellow ESL classmates did not create anxiety free contexts. Some of that anxiety from interacting with their classmates is directly tied to the fear of being laughed at by them. Aaron remembers his first day of class at the college and having to introduce himself to the rest of the class. "You have to introduce yourself was like first impression you are going to make in class, and I was thinking to myself what if I say something wrong? The whole semester they will laugh if I say something wrong" (Aaron 3, LED 4).

Esther also mentioned a first class and interaction she had with a student who laughed at her mistake. She was unfamiliar with the word *mortgage* and wanted to ask the professor for an explanation. Instead, she got unexpectedly embarrassment.

I asked him, and he wanted to reply, but one student, a girl, she started laughing. She was living here ten years, but she just started taking the classes. She's not

> educated in English, but she learned English from her daughter and son. So when she came . . . maybe because she speaks fluently, not fluently, but she understands more than me and can say more than me. She said, "There isn't anyone in the United States that doesn't know what mortgage means!" (Esther 2, LED 3)

Hannah, with her anxiety at her inability to be fluent, felt this sting of humiliation at the hands of her friends in class. "They laugh a lot at my accent" (Hannah 2, LED 3).

Leah explains well the reaction many of the participants had to embarrassment from their classmates. "I feel people are laughing at me when I'm talking . . . My hands usually get wet. I get confused, and I stop thinking" (Leah 2, LED 4). She also explains why this laughter is especially difficult to bear. "No one is saying, no, no, no. You have to say it this way. No one is saying that. They are just laughing at me. They don't help. They just make me feel less" (Leah 3, LED19).

Not unsurprisingly, humiliation at the hands of Native English speakers was also anxiety provoking. "I feel nervous to talk with them [NES]. I feel I am ESL, and I couldn't express myself sometimes. I used to hide, and I hope they don't ask me" (Aaron 2, LED 16). Most of the other participants had not yet taken any classes with other Native English speakers, but when they considered those upcoming classes, several remarked a level of anxiety. Deborah reflected, "I'm a little anxious about being with native English speakers" (Deborah 2, LED 16). And Hannah hoped, "Maybe they [NES] will be patient with me" (Hannah 3, LED 12).

Apart from being potentially laughed at by their fellow classmates, two of the participants were concerned about the potential humiliation from their professors. Aaron

was reluctant to ask his professors questions even though he did not understand the points they were making. “But if I same something wrong, it's going to seem stupid” (Aaron 3, LED 5). Likewise, Leah describes the efforts she takes so she does not embarrass herself in front of her professors. “I write it all out. Then I’m going to talk with the professor and tell her. Make sure I’m not going to say something wrong” (Leah 2, LED 7).

For the future. For one participant, anxiety from embarrassment even extends into the future. Aaron, when reflecting on his placement test, was anxious about his low scores and subsequent placement at an intermediate level of English, remarked, “I was nervous. Someone could look back at my education and see” (Aaron 3, LED 2). For him, simply always being labeled as an ESL forever on a transcript was embarrassing. This sense of diminished identity from being an ESL student will be explored more deeply in Chapter 5.

Responses to Anxiety

All five participants had multiple experiences with anxiety in a variety of contexts while engaged in their college coursework. To cope with that anxiety, they adopted a variety of strategies. When confronted with anxiety, the typical reactions are fight or flight – to stand up to the anxiety or to attempt to circumvent it. For the five participants this generalized behavioral pattern in response to anxiety can be further demarcated into physical responses, avoidance behaviors, extensive preparation, and determination.

Physical. *I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids* (Psalm 132: 4). Anxiety can often provoke a physical response (Mauss, Wilhelm & Gross, 2004). This is the body’s attempt to manage the stress. Not unsurprisingly, a number of the participants described how their anxiety made them feel physically.

Leah had a very strong physical reaction when in a stressful situation. “When I get nervous, my hands usually get wet, I get confused, and I stop thinking. Everything is black for me. I’m trying to breath” (Leah 2, LED 4). Anxiety can also prompt her to have to use the restroom, “I don’t know why but when I’m nervous, I need to go to the bathroom – not many times, but one time” (Leah 2, LED 6). Unfortunately for her this led to a confrontation with a professor in front of the classroom that only increased her anxiety. “It was hard for me. I don’t know how I didn’t pee myself there” (Leah 3, LED 6).

Esther has a different physical reaction to stress and anxiety. For her, the worry of not doing well in a class, and the drive to do her best led to a lack of sleep,

> The first day of class was a reading class. Before I went to the class, the night before, I couldn’t sleep very well. I was very nervous, very afraid. What will that class be like? How will be the professor, the students? Especially because I didn’t speak English very well. (Esther 2, LED 1)

Later, when she was taking a difficult class, her sleep deprivation was accompanied by a loss of appetite. “I lost weight because of stress. I lost a lot of weight. I couldn’t eat because my stomach was very tight. Before the exam, I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat. If I need to eat, my stomach hurt me” (Esther 3, LED 6).

Deborah, on the other hand, experienced headaches from anxiety. “It wasn’t easy. That’s why I was always sick. I had a migraine headache a lot. I don’t go home. I had to come here to do my stuff before class. I was struggling to reduce my stress before class” (Deborah 2, LED 14). She also admitted that even though she would study long hours, her anxiety before a test would be so great that she would forget everything, “I go over

the vocabulary like hundred times. And I get your test, and I don't remember anything" (Deborah 2, LED 14).

Finally, Hannah also had struggles with her mind going blank when in anxiety producing situations. She talks about a presentation she was assigned to do:

> I reviewed it at home with the mirror. I did it. I remember everything. I felt like I was talking about something I know in my own words . . . When I went to the front [of the class], I feel like, "Oh my, God! How can I answer?" I tried to joke, "Hi guys." When I did the slides, I felt like I can't talk and point to the slides. I forgot information. At the end, I said the part that I forget. It was different than the way I reviewed it. (Hannah 2, LED 8)

Avoidance behaviors. *Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper* (Psalm 124:7). When the anxiety reaches a point that is unbearable for the student, they may opt to find a release from that anxiety through avoiding those anxiety provoking situations. Though these flight reactions may not be deemed a positive response, at the very least, they served to lower the anxiety until the student was able to confront it at a later date.

Cheating. Cheating can be a temptation for students when faced with a stressful situation especially in regards to a test or a project. Failing a test can jeopardize the success in the class, and for students who are driven to succeed, the pressure to do well can be overwhelming. Hannah was the only participant to admit to cheating as a way to deal with the anxiety she was experiencing. For a particularly difficult test, she had studied multiple hours the night before, but she still did not feel prepared. "I met with [a friend]. We reviewed the exercise together, and she helped me. And on the test,

professor! [laughs/mimics her friend writing on her test]. She helped me!" (Hannah 2, LED 7). Yet, even in telling this anecdote, she was anxious and asked that I not tell her professor what she had done.

Skipping. Another common avoidance behavior to anxiety is skipping a class should the anxiety become too much (Cox, 2009). Leah related an experience she had with a professor she deemed rude. This professor had previously confronted a student for coming late to the class, and had done so in front of the entire class. This proved too much for her when she arrived late to the class a subsequent day, and waited too long outside the classroom door trying to build up her courage to face her professor. "Now, it was 15 minutes, and I couldn't go to class. I went to the cafeteria, and I didn't go to class. I was afraid. I knew I was going to lose a lot of information, and I felt bad" (Leah 2, LED 10).

She had a similar response when she was having difficulties another semester. She was not getting any help from her professors or her fellow classmates. To make it worse, her mother was pushing her to continue with her classes. "She said, 'Leah, I believe in you. You are smart.' So, I said, 'Okay, I'm going to take the classes'" (Leah 2, LED 12). However, "I started lying to my mom, and I didn't go to class. Yeah, I'm going, but then I go back to my house because I know she wasn't home. I'm going out and coming back. I'm crying. It was the worst semester" (Leah 2, LED 12).

Stopping out. Related to skipping is stopping out of classes for a semester or more. Of the five participants, only Aaron has persisted every semester he has been enrolled at the college. Deborah stopped out for two years after completing all but the last level of ESL because she could no longer deal with the pressure of work, family, and

class responsibilities. Similarly, Esther stopped out for work purposes for three years also after finishing the penultimate ESL level. Hannah had the longest stop out lasting eight years. After she had completed the first level of ESL, she returned to Colombia. This was in part due to her legal problems with her Visa. In each of these three cases, all the participants eventually returned to the college and either have since completed their ESL coursework or are in the final courses. For the most part, these decisions to stop out seem less related to anxiety in the classroom and more to outside circumstances.

However, Leah, who had already skipped classes at times when faced with anxiety, has also stopped out twice at least indirectly related to her experiences with anxiety. The first occurred as result of her skipping classes and not withdrawing in time. Though she attempted to see an advisor to see what she could do to be reinstated, she explained, "but it was hard for me to communicate. He's saying something, but I'm just like [confused noises] Okay, bye. I came here to the Admissions Building. I went home, and I lied to my Mom. They said there is nothing I can do, so I have to work really hard and save my money. I didn't start again until the next semester" (Leah 2, LED 14). She did indeed return and had one successful semester, but then complications with a domestic abuse case resulted in further anxiety and stopping out again. "I couldn't concentrate. All of this was in my head. I was living with people that you don't know. You keep crying all the time. I was working and sometimes studying. So many things all the time. I couldn't make it. I had to drop" (Lead 2, LED 17). With only two classes remaining, she plans on returning and completing them in the Spring 2018 semester.

Self-isolation. Rather than skipping or stopping out, all but one of the participants at various times elected to self-isolate themselves as much as possible from situations that

incited anxiety. Aaron avoids contact with others if he can, "I can't talk with anyone. If they tell me, ask me anything, whatever, then we can have a conversation. Otherwise, I don't ask anyone anything. I feel nervous, so I don't ask anyone" (Aaron 2, LED 7). Likewise, Esther found trying to interact in English too uncomfortable, "Even the first day, I didn't talk to anyone. Almost the whole semester. . . . Sometimes I'm comfortable talking to them, but not very much" (Esther 2, LED 15). Leah, too, prefers isolation over initiating conversations to avoid anxiety, "That happens all the time. The first time in my class, I don't talk to nobody" (Leah 3, 20). Hannah, though willing to engage, will self-isolate if others begin to laugh at her mistakes, "When they laugh and don't say nothing [constructive], I feel like I don't want to talk with you anymore" (Hannah 3, LED 16). Only Deborah seemed immune to this strategy. This strategy of self-isolating behavior as a way to manage anxiety will be discussed further in the next chapter when exploring the meaning these participates made of their anxiety in terms of making connections.

Extensive preparation. *Do not love sleep, or you will become poor* (Proverbs 20:13). When students register for their first ESL classes, they are often told that at a minimum they should set aside an hour each day for study, practice, and homework. One way that students managed their anxiety was to be as prepared as they possibly could. Quite often this preparation went above and beyond the typical extra hour a day for study, and they would spend multiple hours getting ready for tests and presentations. Deborah details the steps she would take getting ready for a test, "I remember every time I had a test in your class. I finished work at 3, and I don't go home. It's far from work. So, I drive to here. Every time. And I stay and study, study. Two hours. If I came at 2, I stayed

two hours in library" (Deborah 2, LED 14). She also worked diligently on getting ready for a 10 minute presentation:

> My kids helped me. They said you have a nice topic. They made me practice in front of them so many times. They said, "Mom, don't look at the paper. Mom, you still have time." Because you timed us, they said, "You didn't make the time he says." So I redo it, redo it so many times. A lot. A lot. I'm not good at talking in front of people. I don't talk too much in general with people. I'm not a social person. It took me every day for a week before the presentation, two hours. I got so tired. And my daughter said, "You're still bad." I said, "Okay, [daughter] just move on." She said, "No, no, no. Redo it." (Deborah 2, LED 7)

Esther also would work long hours so she would be as prepared as possible for the next class.

> I continue to study and study and study, I try all my best, and I start to find here, here, here. Even by looking in the internet about the article, put the name of the article, and see what the people say about the article. If I can find something similar in the article, so I can understand what the article is about. This helped me on the final exam. (Esther 2, LED 8)

Often this preparation resulted in a loss of appetite, headaches, and sleeplessness for both Deborah and Esther.

Extensive preparation is also evident in the steps one participant took before she would approach a professor with a question. Leah describes the process she would take when she needed help. "At the end of my notebook, I wrote what I'm going to tell her. It's Spanish, English, and how it's going to sound. I did that all the time because I was

afraid to say it" (Leah 3, LED 5). In this way, she could be as prepared as possible to ask the question in a way that the professor could understand.

Determination. *Our heart has not turned back, and our steps have not deviated from your way* (Psalm 44:18). To each participant, I posed the question how they managed to cope with their anxiety without ultimately just leaving the college. Each one had very similar answers. They faced their anxiety because they had to; failure was not an option in other words. As has been discussed above, for both Aaron and Leah success for the sake of family was important to them. However, all five readily admitted that their persistence in college in the face of anxiety was largely a matter of will; a phenomenon noticed in other college students who demonstrate grit, or the "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly, 2007, p. 1087).

Aaron explains, "I have a thing inside that I want to be something. I already started at this level, and I don't want to have to do any more. I want to do something. I don't want to do that level again" (Aaron 3, LED 20). For Deborah, achieving independence is the end goal.

> I have to finish no matter what. I don't want to call anyone to help me, to go with me to the hospital. Anything, you have a job to do, and I don't want to call anyone to help me. I want to go by myself. So I have to come here. I don't want to be uneducated. (Deborah 3, LED 22)

Similarly, Esther sees the ultimate goal in improving herself. "If you make yourself strong and want to be good and better you have to start from yourself. To make yourself strong. Don't care about anything. Always think, I can do it, I can do it. If you didn't do this, anybody cannot help you" (Esther 3, LED 21).

Leah, who has suffered more than her fair share of setbacks, remains adamant about persevering. “I have goals, and I don’t want to stop them. Even if something bad is happening. They say the people who are smiling more is because inside they are sad. It’s true. So many things have happened to me, I won’t be weak. I won’t be like. I can’t be like that” (Leah 3, LED 25). Finally, Hannah, ever mindful of age, stipulates, “If I’m not ready, I have to try! It is my dream. My time is now. My opportunity is now. I don’t have to work. I can stay at home with my daughter. If I don’t do it now, maybe later I won’t have time” (Hannah 3, LED 12).

Anxiety and Marginalization

All who see me sneer at me (Psalm 22:7). Part of the theoretical framework of this study is the threat of marginalization ELL students may encounter. This can be due to the perception by others that ELL students are cognitively deficient due to their linguistic and cultural challenges (Fuentes, 2012; Shapiro, 2012; Smith, 2010). This can be manifested in a variety ways from unfair practices and treatment to insensitive words such as micro-aggressions. In order to complete an examination of the participants’ experiences with anxiety, it was necessary to also examine how they experienced anxiety with connection with marginalization.

From my past experience working with ELL students as well as my own experiences in cross-cultural settings, I was expecting the participants would have some experiences to share about being marginalized. Therefore, I was surprised when each of the participants roundly denied that at any time did they feel mistreated in terms of their linguistic, cultural, religious, or gender identity on campus. However, there are several

interesting experiences that they shared which indicate that marginalization did occur outside the college and in certain college contexts.

From outside the college. Although the scope of this study was focused on the participants' experiences within the college, several of the participants related experiences with marginalization either in their formative years or in their time in the United States. Esther made a passing remark at one point about the difficulty she faced trying to find work in a pharmacy when she immigrated. Although she has the education and experience, it seemed to matter little here. "I hope to find a job. But maybe the English, or maybe the scarf [hijab]" (Esther 1B, LED 12). Though she avows to have been treated fairly in other stories she shared, she does seem to sense that others view her in a diminished status due to her English abilities and religious beliefs. This may in turn have contributed to some of her anxiety when in the classroom and her own perceptions of her ability to be successful.

Leah had a more confrontational experience where she was treated unfairly due to her weaker English skills. A coworker made unfounded accusations against her about her work ethic and integrity. She eventually tried to speak up for herself when the matter was brought to the Human Resources manager. "I had to say something. In the way that I could, I was saying so many words, 'Don't be a liar. You on the phone all the time. You never help. You drink. You smoking. I'm a good worker.' I was saying everything I saw in sentences. I couldn't say all this in English" (Leah 1, LED 20). Although the experience was traumatic enough that she quit the job, it did motivate her to focus more seriously on her English skills and apply to the college. Those memories in turn could have fed into her determination to persist when her anxiety became difficult to manage.

Deborah, however, had the most prolonged experience with marginalization. As a Coptic Christian in a small Muslim town in Egypt, she felt excluded from educational and work opportunities. "If you apply for a job, and they see you have a cross here [a tattoo on her wrist], or you don't have the thing [hijab], so you can't find a good job" (Deborah 1, LED 4).

She also experienced a physical attack because of her status. "I was sitting on the transportation, and one guy was behind me, and he pulled my hair. He pulled my hair, and I said, 'Oh my God.' And he cursed me, 'Oh, you're Christian'" (Deborah 1, LED 4). Like the other two participants, she did not passively accept this mistreatment but did her best to fight back. In the end, though, this incident led her to immigrate with her family to the United States. One of the strongest reactions Deborah continued to have while at the college was anxiety and her perceptions being judged by others.

From the college community. Only two students related any experiences with marginalization at the college. Aaron wrote in his journal that he felt Indian students' transcripts were not evaluated fairly, and alluded to this when he talked about coming to the college.

> I took the placement test. I have some of the credits from my college, and I gave a transcript to them. Then they transferred some of my credits, like 33 credits. I was not satisfied with that, so I went to [another county college] for admissions . . . Over there, I got a higher level, but they didn't transfer my credits . . . So I decided to come over because I have some credit transferred" (Aaron 2, LED 1).

He also felt he was treated unfairly as an ESL student due to a laborious process in which he had to secure another department chair's permission to take class he needed and was

only offered periodically. “I couldn’t register online because I’m in ESL. That’s why I didn’t like it. You should be able to register it online, and they check it over here. If you an ESL student, and you don’t have permission, you could cancel it. You should have a system like that” (Aaron 3, LED 11).

Deborah had the harshest comments to make about her experiences. Perhaps due to her sensitivity to being treated unfairly earlier in her life, she was more acutely aware of injustice when it occurs. She had hard words to say about the ESL program. “All classes at Middlesex, if you don’t want to teach yourself, they don’t care, the ESL staff. They don’t care about immigrants” (Deborah 2, LED 16). She especially felt that the program and the college did not truly consider the situation of immigrants:

> You’re dealing with people who most of them have problems. More than 70% with problems. We aren’t here for fun. I’m here for helping myself. Don’t put pressure on me. You’re to help me. Just help me is all. I want to stay in your country to talk. You don’t test me. You don’t kill me with papers. I just wanna talk to help myself in the country. I don’t need to go through all of that. It wasn’t fair. (Deborah 2, LED 16)

She summed up how she felt at the college, “They don’t care. It’s just a business” (Deborah 2, LED 16). This disconnect from the college from marginalization has left her unsure of her next steps. Though she is the first of the five participants to finish the ESL program, she remains unclear if she wants to continue. “I hope I can take at least 121 [English Composition]. I don’t know. I haven’t decided anything” (Deborah 3, LED 19).

Summary

This chapter has set out to detail the focused life history of the five participants, the contexts in which they experienced anxiety at the college, and the strategies they used to manage that anxiety. They experienced anxiety in a number of contexts at the college: confrontation, a lack of family support, a lack of conversational fluency, letting others down, a threat to progress, the unfamiliar, powerlessness, and embarrassment. In response, they utilized a variety of means to manage this anxiety including both positive and negative actions. Despite the frequency of their experiences, every one of the participants have persisted in their studies.

Their stories are interesting in and of themselves and provide a glimpse of what it is like for some ELL students as they have embarked on their journeys in their college careers. The focus of study, however, is to understand the meaning these students have made of these experiences with anxiety. Therefore, the next chapter will be devoted to the hermeneutical study of what meaning these participants made of their anxiety in terms of their identity, their connections, and their agency.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis: Meaning and Anxiety

Search me and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts. Psalm 139:23

Chapter 4 provided an in-depth examination of the background and experiences of the five participants with anxiety. In a hermeneutical phenomenological study, this description is only the first step. For Heidegger and other interpretive phenomenologists like van Manen, people do not just experience phenomenon; they attempt to make meaning from it (van Manen, 1997a; van Manen 2014). This chapter, then, explores the question of what meaning did the participants make of their experiences with anxiety for their identity, their ability to connect, and their agency?

Answering the question, "What does this experience with anxiety mean to you?" is a difficult task. The first step towards this understanding was to reflect on my own experiences with anxiety and language learning, my professional experiences working with ELL students, and any biases I have. This had a dual purpose. By understanding my own my experiences and how I made meaning of my anxiety I could better gain insights into the participants' experiences as shared experiences, but then I also needed to allow them to express their own thoughts and allow for divergence from my understanding. It is through listening to their responses and their reflections upon their experiences in relation to their historicity that meaning can be revealed.

Meaning of Anxiety and Identity

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I am strength (Proverbs 8:14). *I am too stupid to be human, and I lack common sense* (Proverbs 30: 2). Developing an identity as a capable college student who can succeed in the classroom is

an important step toward success in an academic career. Kuh et al. (2006) would say that students need the background, attitude, and behaviors to be successful students; something all five participants demonstrated in their academic lives prior to coming to college. At the same time, the institution must also support these students and engage with them to help them maintain and develop that identity. For ELL students their college identity can be undermined by the deficit attitude others may have towards them as capable students and by the micro-aggressions they may suffer due to their perceived lower status as immigrants (Fuentes, 2012; Yosso et al., 2009) The reflections of the five participants on their experiences of anxiety would indicate how these ideas are manifested in understanding their identity as true college students.

Prior identity as competent students. All five participants had been successful students in their home countries. Esther has a degree and work experience in pharmaceutical technologies; Deborah earned a degree in psychology; Leah a degree in international business; and Hannah, a degree in business law. Hannah has been involved in political campaigns, and has run several successful online businesses. Only Aaron had not completed a degree; however, he had been working on one prior to coming to the United States. In school, they all professed to be competitive and proud of their coursework.

Though Deborah had difficulties with school at times in Egypt, there was a high value placed on education in her family, "A lot of girls don't really go to school, but all of us [siblings] went to school because he [father] was educated. All of us went to school . . . All of us had a good score" (Deborah 1, LED 7). Esther's family also had high expectations for the family, and there was very little she did not enjoy about school.

> We studied Arabic, English, religion, sports, science, history, geography . . . what else? Math. My favorite subject was Math! Math and English I liked, And science. Math is fun to do these calculations. You will try to find something, right or wrong. It's fun. I like science because . . . I don't know, but I like to know about the human body. How they work. My dad used to tell us when we were kids about how the body [works] when you eat food, how the food travels. All the body. I like these materials. It makes me wonder what does this organ do? How does it help the body to live? (Esther 1, LED 6)

Leah routinely got good grades in school. "At the college I had really good grades. Everyone was copying me [laughs]" (Leah 1, LED 2). When she did receive lower grades, she used them as an incentive to do better. "I was second once a few times, and another girl took my position. I was crying! [laughs] I like competition, so I studied more because I wanted to do better" (Leah 1, LED 8). Hannah was also very competitive and proud of her academic work. "I was the first in everything [laughs]" (Hannah 1, LED 3).

Only Aaron professed to have struggled in school at times. "Until 7th, I got good grades, but from 8th grade it got harder and harder. I just pass with a C grade in high school. And my grades got lower because of English" (Aaron 1, LED 15). English was admittedly difficult for him, whereas math he understood well, "I took math because I used to like math and got good grades every time" (Aaron 1, LED 17).

All of this is not to say that those school years were easy ones. In fact, most struggled in one way or another. Aaron had difficulties with his college being taught in English. "I didn't go to English medium school, so I don't understand anything. It makes

me scared sometimes" (Aaron 1, LED 12). Deborah felt her Coptic Christian identity blocked her from the better schools in her town. "[All] of us had to go to small college in our city. Every one of us have dreams. But when anybody apply for this college, we don't get in" (Deborah 1, LED 7). Leah struggled on her own in college when her mother left to live in the United States. "I had to start living by myself. It was the worst time. I was 18 years old. And it was a huge house just for me . . . All the time it was home, study, sleep" (Leah 1, LED 12). Hannah, too, struggled in college for a while. "I was 17 years old, it was not easy. I never stayed late at night alone. I feel afraid sometimes because I have to take public transport, it was a bus. I finished my classes at 10:30 at night. It was late" (Hannah 1, LED 10).

Despite their struggles, they were successful, and often overcoming those hardships made them feel confident in themselves. "It made me feel strong. It made me feel confident" (Hannah 1, LED 10). Plus, it gave them a sense of accomplishment. "I was finishing my career at the university. I told my mom I wanted to finish because we had been working on this for so long" (Leah 1, LED 18).

Throughout the interviews, their determination to succeed was clearly evident. "I just want to show everyone I can also do that" (Aaron 3, LED 20). "You can do this! Everybody is doing it. It's not like you are the only person in this situation" (Leah 3, LED 1). "Always think, I can do it, I can do it. If you didn't do this, anybody cannot help you" (Esther 3, LED 21). "I think next year I can graduate in December. I can do it in one year, and I feel better about this. I have to be determined with those classes and I have to do my best everyday" (Hannah 3, LED 12). Such determination shows a healthy self-

identity as college students. This was the identity of themselves as capable successful students as they began their college careers in the ESL program.

A new identity as less competent students. Despite this self-confidence, each participant experienced anxiety in a number of different contexts. What then does this anxiety mean when considering their academic identities? The literature would suggest that ELL students can suffer from a poor self-identity based on external pejorative attitudes directed towards ELL students (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). However, this was not evident in these five participants. Instead, their weaker self-identity as students was much more internal and based on their self-perceptions of their lack of English fluency. In short, their anxiety is related to an awareness that they may not be as competent as they once were.

All of the participants entered the college with an expectation that they would need ESL coursework before being able to focus full time on their degree bearing programs. "My uncle said to me, when he was in college, he had ESL in college, too. And high school, too. They say you gonna have ESL. I said, okay. I wasn't surprised" (Aaron 2, LED 2). As such, being ESL was not so much of a pejorative label as it was a necessary first step toward their college goals. However, for Deborah, her placement was not so positive, and her anxiety was evident in a sudden loss of her identity as capable. That day was a difficult and discouraging beginning. "I wasn't happy to start with level 2. I felt like more scared because now I'm 0. If I had one percent confidence in myself, he killed it. It made me scared, more anxiety. 'Oh wow. I'm horrible, and I have a long way to go'" (Deborah 3, LED 1).

Inadequacy. Placement testing is one thing; actually having to study and work in English proved to be a much more daunting task. Cummins (2008) maintains it can take up to five to seven years for a student to master academic competency. The new ESL program at the college is intensive, and students are expected to rise to a college level in reading and writing in four semesters, or two years.

Those initial ESL classes gave the participants their first experience with how difficult their courses would be and served to introduce a sense of inadequacy in themselves, as Hannah exclaimed the obvious, "Everything is in English! [laughs]" (Hannah 3, LED 5). Aaron observed how the desire to do well was countered by his feelings that he could not perform as he wished. "I was thinking, what if I get a low grade? Then my parents expect me to get a good grade, and even in my family, everyone is getting it. What are they going to think about it if I get a low grade?" (Aaron 3, LED 2). Deborah also remarked, "I felt I was going to be fluent, right away [laughs]! I didn't know it was going to be hard" (Deborah 3, LED 5).

Esther, too, felt this sudden inadequacy, "I was new and speak English a little - not like an American or people here . . . This makes me very stressed, and feel very nervous" (Esther 3, LED 3). Leah explained what it felt like to struggle at the onset of the ESL program and to have a diminished sense of herself:

> In the beginning it was so hard, I was thinking I should give up because I won't learn ever. I'm trying to understand. My pronunciation is sometimes so terrible, they don't understand nothing I'm saying. I'm just saying word that make me . . . I'm saying bad. No one is saying, no, no, you have to say it this way. No one is

saying that. They are just laughing at me. They don't help. They just make me feel less. (Leah 3, LED 19)

For two of the participants, perfectionism helped contribute to their anxiety and their English struggles. The need to be the best in coursework can be a strong motivating influence on a student's push to be successful. However, when perfectionism is unattainable, as is often the case in language learning, then students have to grapple with the fact that they are not as "competent" as they would like to believe. Esther certainly struggled with this frustration of not being perfect in her classes. "I have to understand everything. If I didn't understand, I couldn't do good in this material" (Esther 3, LED 11). Hannah was the other participant who was driven and frustrated by perfectionism. "A B? I say no. I need an A! I want to be perfect. I have more time than other people to study. During the day, I have more hours free. It's my double responsibility. If you have time, you have to have a great grade" (Hannah 3, LED 7). For these two students, then, some of their anxiety was exacerbated by this need to be perfect while no longer being able to be the best in the class.

As detailed in Chapter 4, all the participants continued to struggle with anxiety from this pervasive sense of a lack of proficient English throughout their ESL coursework and how that impacted their views of themselves as capable students. However, it should also be noted, that as the participants progressed through courses and levels, this anxiety began to lessen. "Now I can understand" (Leah 3, LED 5). "Now I know I can do it" (Hannah 3, LED 6). Esther, who used to experience a fair amount of anxiety about her knowledge of English, pointedly declares, "Now, I don't care, I don't care. Even if they [students] say anything, even stupid, I don't care. Because I need to

learn" (Esther 3, LED 3). Lastly, Deborah, who expressed such a devastating loss of confidence from her placement, can attest, "Every time I am being here I am different. I'm improving, improving" (Deborah 3, LED 22).

NES and identity. Only Aaron seems to continue to experience stronger anxiety connected to a diminished identity of a capable college student. Interestingly enough, he is also the only one who has actually passed credit level courses with Native English Speakers (NES). Whereas the other four participants can mark their progress and growing confidence in comparison to other ELL students, Aaron has experienced the wider gulf that still separates his English abilities from his other non-ESL classmates. This in turn feeds into additional understandings of his anxiety and his sense of self. He may be capable, but he is not as capable as those NES students, and so he continues in his feeling of anxiety when around them.

> I want to tell you one day in Psych class, my professor wasn't there. So, I was just using the computer. One guy came in and hadn't seen the email [about the canceled class], and he was asking me for something, I didn't understand for three times, and I keep saying, sorry . . . he was speaking so fast. I couldn't understand. That made me nervous. (Aaron 3, LED 7)

Because Aaron perceived himself as a lesser student in terms of his language abilities when compared to his classmates in credit courses, he was anxious that he would actually harm their academic careers. "What if they get a low grade because of me, because I didn't present it well. They will think their whole lives – because of this guy I got a low grade! I don't like that" (Aaron 3, LED 14). This led him to believe that these classmates

would shun him. “In psychology, I have the students [NES] – I don’t want them to say, ‘I don’t want to work with you’” (Aaron 3, LED 4).

Several of the other participants when asked about taking classes with Native English speakers were unsure but cautiously hopeful. Hannah, ever optimistic, reflected, “Maybe they [NES] will be patient with me. I need to be self-confident and create a personality. If I’m not ready, I have to try!” (Hannah 3, LED 12). Esther, though, was a little less confident when thinking about her first credit level class:

> This will make me a little bit nervous. Maybe they will be a little very professional talking, and maybe writing too. Maybe I will feel hard a little bit in the first. I will try to put myself with them, and try to learn from the English, and making friends to help me to practice English, too. And I still have the one class [last ESL writing class]. Three months! (Esther 3, LED 16)

Identity, then, for these five participants is a continuously evolving process. Their experiences with anxiety demonstrate the realization that the classroom which was once enjoyable and challenging is now fraught with difficulties. Suddenly, those easy As and Bs they used to get have become Cs or Ds. Progress is impeded, and success more elusive. Their anxiety arises because they no longer see themselves as completely capable, and failure is a new, unpleasant possibility. However, as they have progressed through their college careers, that anxiety has lessened as they have realized success, albeit maybe not with As and Bs, and they have regained a fair measure of their original identity as a competent college student.

Meaning of Anxiety and Connection

I have become like a lonely bird on a housetop (Psalm 102:7). A major theme in Student Engagement Theory is helping the students to make connections with the college so that they are actively engaged with their classmates, professors, and the institution (Kuh, 2001). This study probed the question what meaning did the participants make from their experiences with anxiety in terms of their ability to connect. Whereas their understanding of self was weakened as evidenced by their anxiety over their lowered competency in the classroom, the participants' anxiety in connection with their inability to connect with classmates and professors was more dramatic.

Anxiety with classmates. It would seem that ELL students would readily make connections with their fellow ESL classmates. After all, they are all in the same position and facing the same challenges as they struggle with a new language and culture. However, all the participants reported an increased sense of isolation and loneliness in the ESL classrooms. By and large, their classmates were not seen as allies, but as adversaries to be avoided. Classmates were sources of shame and embarrassment, and the participants' anxiety was a reaction to that realization.

Fellow ESL classmates. One common source of anxiety was the participants' fear of being embarrassed or teased by their classmates for mistakes they made. Esther related being embarrassed by a classmate who laughed at her when Esther asked what *mortgage* meant, "It was very embarrassing for me. I feel, oh my God, so embarrassing, very nervous" (Esther 2, LED 3). As a result of her understanding of this anxiety, she opted to isolate herself, "Sometimes they prevent me from asking questions, the students. I will not get embarrassed again" (Esther 3, LED 3).

Aaron also shared this fear of being teased or embarrassed by his classmates. “I’m just hearing them, oh, they are so good! I was just thinking, how am I going to talk with them? They are speaking so good. That scared me because my English is not so good. How will they think? Will they laugh?” (Aaron 3, LED 7). Leah, as well, did not find any comfort from her ESL classmates, “They are laughing . . . That makes me feel uncomfortable that I know tomorrow they will laugh again because I couldn’t do it” (Leah 3, LED 4). Like Esther, in reaction to their anxiety from further ridicule, they chose to isolate themselves.

Even Hannah, who seemed to have made the most connections with her ESL classmates, struggled at times with their insensitivity to her English struggles. “When they laugh and don’t say nothing, I feel like I don’t want to talk with you anymore” (Hannah 3, LED 3).

This anxiety from being embarrassed in front of classmates extended beyond the ESL classroom for two participants. As discussed above, Aaron actively isolated himself from Native English speakers over a fear he would harm their academic goals. Leah, too, once chose to avoid making connections with Native English speakers at the Tutoring Center. Rather than risk being embarrassed, she never entered to get help (Leah 3, LED 24).

Making friends. The anxiety from doing or saying something embarrassing led to the participants to self-isolate themselves as a protective measure. However, this self-isolation resulted in further anxiety by making it increasingly difficult to make friends and develop a support group with their classmates.

Part of the difficulty in making friends is a result of the ever changing nature of the semester system. With so many sections and times to choose from, it was difficult for the participants to take classes with other classmates from one semester to the next. "I don't have much friends over here, not even one who is the best, a best friend. In India, I have a lot because we studied for so long in the same class" (Aaron 3, LED 7). Students also found it difficult to connect because of the busy lives their classmates had. "They have jobs in the afternoon, or they don't have a car and I have to bring them and go back. It's too much" (Hannah 3, LED 9).

If they did make friends, it was much easier to connect with someone from the same ethnic group. "Because you know immigrants are grouping. Spanish to Spanish. Indian to Indian. Egyptian to Egyptian. I feel comfortable, but they don't give you a chance. They are with the others more" (Deborah 2, LED 17). Leah also found it easier to connect with fellow Latinx students both from a cultural bond, as well as greater ease in understanding their developing English. "Spanish people are different than American people. Spanish people feel like friends. You speak one time, and you feel so comfortable talking. You're my brother" (Leah 2, LED 9). Therefore, for some, similar language and cultural backgrounds reduced the anxiety of being teased and allowed for some connections to be made.

Participants also found barriers in making connections due to their age compared to their younger classmates. Deborah expressed frustration with being in a classroom with students who were 15 years younger than she was. "And I'm older. Last semester, I'm older, and they were young, really young. The best semester is all old, old, like my

age" (Deborah 2, LED 17). Hannah, on the other hand, had an easier time connecting with her younger classmates, but had problems with classmates more her age.

> I don't follow them [older classmates] [laughs]. I think they don't want to have a connection with me. I try with some ladies, but they are so [shrugs]. One day, we say we can take a picture, and the lady says no, no, no. It's not appropriate. I'm an old lady! (Hannah 3, LED 5)

Another barrier to making lasting friendship was due to the differing goals of their classmates. Not everyone in an ESL classroom is working towards a college degree. As such, they may take a class or two, and then stop coming. Deborah had made such a connection with a fellow Coptic Christian. However, "she stopped a long time ago. It's not really her type. She was not successful at home. She was not a school person. She just wants kids, be a wife, clean, and that's it. She wasn't interested in Middlesex, and she left" (Deborah 2, LED 17).

Connections with classmates, then, were difficult. Anxiety from being laughed at made it problematic for them to take those initial steps to develop a friendship. At the same time, their resulting self-isolation further provoked anxiety from an understanding of how isolated they were. "Everybody came, take the class, and go. No friendship" (Esther 2, LED 15).

Anxiety with professors. As discussed in the previous chapter, the participants were challenged to connect with professors. Part of this was due to their anxiety in their perceived lack of English and saying something incorrectly. Another critical factor in their ability to connect with professors was whether or not the professors were seen as friendly or not. Difficult, rude, or mean professors were to be avoided as much as

possible and interactions with them were kept to a minimum. The fear of being disrespected or punished was too great to overcome even when they had questions about the coursework. “I couldn’t ask. He would get angry. He would yell!” (Aaron 3, LED 10).

However, at some point in their program, most of the participants found a professor who was meaningful to their success. Once found, they typically returned again and again to that professor for help even if that professor was not teaching a class the participant was taking. “I ask the professor who has helped me before” (Aaron 3, LED 19). Because I had Esther in a prior class before this study, she was familiar with me and my teaching style. When asked where she goes to get help, she remarked, “I know you. I will come to you with any questions. Even if it’s wrong, you will understand me” (Esther 3, LED 19). As a whole, the participants realized the need to interact with their professors, and that connection was made more difficult or easier based upon the level of anxiety they associated with that particular person.

Anxiety and the institution. Apart from classmates and professors, students should also be able to connect with the college as a whole. Here is where mentoring, tutoring, clubs, and other student resources become important in helping the students feel they are a true part of the college. However, given the busy lives the students had, making those connections outside of class was not easy. None of the participants are involved in any college clubs, nor do they typically linger after class. Family and work responsibilities often obligate them to arrive right before class starts and to leave soon after.

Though their comments were for the most part were neutral or mildly positive with their interactions with other offices and staff, Deborah had some harsh words to share about her experiences with the college beyond the classroom. She perceived the college as essentially a business and not at all concerned about her or immigrants' needs.

> This is the problem with the ESL and immigrants. It's a different quality. We have to be in a different place. You're dealing with people who most of them have problems. More than 70% with problems. We aren't here for fun. I'm here for helping myself. Don't put pressure on me. You're to help me. Just help me is all. I want to stay in your country to talk. You don't test me. You don't kill me with papers. I just wanna talk to help myself in the country. I don't need to go through all of that. It wasn't fair . . . Nothing helps here. (Deborah 2, LED 16)

Though she may have been the only one to express this, and was difficult for me to hear without trying to defend the program, her accusation is important to consider. For her, the college had failed to help her. Rather that come alongside and help her with her struggles, she felt abused and disconnected. It surely must be a frightening experience when the very people you expect to help you are in fact the ones who create the most obstacles. For Deborah, ever sensitive to judgement, she understood much of her anxiety from the institution's insensitive treatment which led to isolation and disillusion.

Anxiety and family. With so few positive connections occurring within the classroom or the college, all of the participants valued the connections they had with their families. This will be explored again in the next section on agency, but it is worth noting here that some of the participants found meaning in their anxiety from a lack of family support.

For Hannah and Esther, they felt the sting of their families rejecting their need for help. Already anxious from the potential abuse of some of their classmates and professors, now family members only add to that anxiety by their dismissive attitudes. Hannah talks how her daughter and husband grow impatient with her attempts to speak in English:

> My daughter speaks English, but she doesn't like to talk in English with me. She's not patient. She's so frustrated with me. She says, "Your English is not good sometimes mommy." She breaks my heart! [laughs]. My husband is really busy all the time. When I try to explain something to him in English, I do it well. But sometimes he is confused and he says, "No, speak in Spanish please." I feel frustrated. (Hannah 2, LED 14)

Esther, too, can be shut out by her family. "They won't sit down and explain everything because everyone has their own class. They have to finish their homework" (Esther 3, LED 10).

Making connections, then, was a difficulty for each of the participants. In part, this was from their desire to self-isolate in order to avoid anxiety from embarrassing situations. At the same time, this isolation made connections difficult to establish; connections that would have eased some of that anxiety. Anxiety, as a result, led to further isolation and disengagement.

Meaning of Anxiety and Agency

He who watches the wind will not sow, and he who looks at the clouds will not reap (Ecclesiastes 11:4). Agency, or the student's ability to access and make use of institutional resources, can also be a challenge for ELL students (Fuentes, 2011). The

institution's role in providing necessary support for students is critical for their success (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2005); however, if students are not able to access that support, or receive it in a timely manner, then their agency is diminished. This was readily evident in the five participants. Because of anxiety and their lowered identity and reduced ability to make connections, the participants' level of agency was also hampered. Their anxiety shows their understanding of themselves as less capable students. Plus, their anxiety at the possible embarrassment by fellow students and some professors led to self-isolating behaviors. It follows, then, that their anxiety is further understood as the inability to find support in other resources on campus or in their personal lives.

College resources and agency. The college offers a number of ways to support ELL students with their studies. One is New Student Orientation (NSO). NSO is a recognized means of helping new students make those first initial steps towards transitioning to college life (Noel-Levitz, 2013). The ESL program at the college offers a NSO for all new students at the start of each semester. When new ELL students are placed and registered in their first semester classes, they are encouraged to attend this session. The session itself covers basic information such as how to use the college's learning management system, how to find resources on campus, and how to ask for help.

When asked if the participants had attended the NSO, only one, Leah, said she had. However, rather than find it helpful, it only added to her anxiety at the start of the semester.

> I was trying to pay attention. The PowerPoint, I guess is more to help you guys and not us to help you what is the next you have to say. It was a lot of information, and I understand just a couple of things. I know that it was a

> presentation of some of the teachers that were around, and you guys showed the buildings, but I didn't understand more than that. I don't know if you gave information about FAFSA, I'm not sure. I was lost. I was so nervous because it was the first time for everybody. (Leah 3, LED 5)

She went on to suggest that having handouts with the information on it rather than on a hard to read PowerPoint would have helped her better.

Three of the other participants had no idea orientation was even offered to new students. Hannah simply claimed, "No, no orientation" (Hannah 2, LED 4). Esther could not recall if she had been offered to attend, but felt it would have been helpful, "I don't remember if I went to orientation. I think no. I like that [having an orientation session]. The first time I didn't know anything" (Esther 3, LED 17). Deborah was the bluntest about not knowing about orientation:

> I'm still surprised you have something like that. It happens before every semester? This thing I don't think it exists. No one ever told me about this. You need to follow up with your staff. I told you my friend, when she registered, she never knew. We keep asking each other, and texting about the course. (Deborah 3, LED 3)

The ESL NSO clearly was a missed opportunity for the participants in the study. Rather than lessening anxiety at the start of those first classes with some sense of what to expect and what to do to get help, they began uncertain and unsure of what to do or how to get assistance.

The other important resource that is offered to ELL students is the Language Resource Center where students can go to get a variety of help including free tutoring.

Several of the participants did express appreciation for these services. Deborah especially was grateful for one of the tutors. "She [tutor] went through every writing, it doesn't matter how long or short, she went through every word, and corrected it. She showed me. . . . Every morning twice a week I went for tutoring before or after. Every week I would go. But she was my savior" (Deborah 2, LED 11). She was especially grateful that this tutor treated her as a person, it was "not a routine, but she wants to help me" (Deborah 3, LED 11).

Other participants utilized this resource in a limited fashion. As an evening student, Esther was disappointed both in the availability of the tutors as well as what they could offer her. She went "one time, but I don't have time to come early. The second reason is I didn't get a lot of help. They are good, but not like what I need. Something is general. That's it" (Esther 3, LED 21). For Leah, she was unaware tutoring was offered; plus, distance was a factor in her not going, "When I moved, it's like 25 minutes to come here. I didn't know there were tutors" (Leah 3, LED 24). Finally, Hannah went a few times, but only to use the computers. "She always says, 'Come on, welcome, do you need something?' I said, 'No I just need to work on the computer'" (Hannah 3, LED 16).

For a variety of reasons, then, the participants did not make extensive use of the department's or college's resources. What is particularly troubling for the program is that although there are resources available, there seems to be a lack of awareness on the part of the students. Though the participants would not have necessarily used the resources, at least they would have known that the resources exist. Instead of providing needed help, these participants' struggled with greater anxiety from a lack of direction and potentially diminished success.

Family and agency. All of the participants relied heavily on family at least initially. Quite often it was family that encouraged the participant to enroll in the college in the first place and help with the initial admission's application, placement process, and registration. That early support was crucial as the participants were mostly dependent upon family to get started.

Leah describes her feelings at getting started, "I was embarrassed of myself. I couldn't do it, and I brought my brother, and he was translating everything. It was back and forth, back and forth. I was thinking, I should know this" (Leah 2, LED 1). This spilled over to when it came to take the placement test. "I was moving my appointment two or three times because I was so scared to take it. I didn't want to disappoint my mom if I go to the first level. What should I do, what should I do?" (Leah 3, LED 2). If not for the help of her family, her anxiety could have derailed her college career before it even began.

Both Aaron and Deborah relied on family members for those first steps staring at the college. Aaron explained how an uncle helped him out with the admissions form:

> The form [Admission's Form] for me was hard. When I came here, there were lots of questions; we had to fill out lots of things. My uncle, who did Computer Science, said we're going to fill out the form. We were at his house, and I was just watching when he was filling out the form. But I didn't understand half of the questions. It's hard for people who came from a country and don't speak lots of English, so they don't understand. They have to get help. (Aaron 3, LED 1)

Similarly, Deborah tells how her brother-in-law came to her aid at this time, "My brother-in-law took me. He drove me here. Everything was nervous. He try to teach me how to

use the map to get to know the buildings. He wants to know where is the ESL, the library, and where is this and that, so I can I figure out the buildings myself" (Deborah 2, LED 1).

Esther was having difficulty getting her transcript accepted at the Registration Office. A staff member there had found something irregular in her file, and was asking some difficult questions. Fortunately for Esther, one of her sisters had come along and provided the necessary help at the right time:

> My sister is very . . . [laughs], not like me. She is more than [another sister]. She said, "Okay, if you need any proof, we will give it you. Don't worry. Just register my sister. If there is any other problem." She said, "Okay, okay. I will register her." She spend maybe 15 minutes going like this [shuffles papers around]. She bothers me a lot. I feel like, oh my God, I cannot come here. It's very scary. (Esther 2, LED 13).

Hannah as well needed the help of her husband, "He came with me my first day here. He registered online" (Hannah 3, LED 2).

This family support acted as a means to initially lower the participants' anxiety by helping them clear the first few challenges of their new college career. However, once the participants got started, they each came to rely less and less on their family to help them with problems they had at the college. For Aaron, he felt his family had done so much already to help him, he did not want to bother them any further. "I don't drive, so my grandfather used to drop me and my uncle used to pick me up, so it's annoying for them" (Aaron 2, LED 3). As a result, he became more independent, "After I started college, then I do it by myself" (Aaron 3, LED 19). For Aaron, anxiety arose from being a bother to his family and a sense he needed to be more independent.

Deborah actually resented needing her brother-in-law's help, and once her first semester started, she confessed, "I tried to get away from my brother-in-law" (Deborah 2, LED 4). Though married, her husband has not done much to help her, and her two daughters are not always available for her. "They are annoying. I can't take them anymore. Only they think of themselves" (Deborah 3, LED 21). Anxiety, then, for Deborah was associated with a lack of power and independence.

This is a sentiment shared by Hannah. She wanted to be able to pay her own way in college and not need her husband's help, "I always pay for my things, and pay for my studies. I feel like, now is someone is helping me. It's nice, but it's not comfortable" (Hannah 3, LED 2). At the same time, she laments that there were times she could have used her husband's and daughter's help, but they either are too busy or too impatient to do so. "I have a desk, too, near to my daughter's desk. We work together, but separate! [laughs] I talk to her, but she says, 'Mommy, don't talk to me. Let me concentrate' . . . My husband is too busy, and my daughter is a baby" (Hannah 3, LED 9). For Hannah, her anxiety is a mix of wanting independence but also needing and not getting support from her family.

Leah and Esther are the exceptions to this. Leah continues to find great strength and support from her mother. "She's the only person next to me, and she's the only person I want to take care of. I don't feel bad about it. I don't feel, oh my God, I can't have more help. No. All these years since I can remember, she was the only person who connected to me" (Leah 3, LED 22). At the same time, the rest of her brothers and sisters seem to have little time for her. "Nobody is next to us. My mom knows that my sister has trouble with something, she runs to her. But they don't know about us. For them, it's not

family problem. I don't know why" (Leah 3, LED 8). Though her Mom cannot help her with her studies, she at least is there as a comforter and encourager, and this helps to alleviate some of the stronger feelings of anxiety that Leah has.

Esther, too, has found encouragement and support in her family, especially her mother. When she was struggling with a difficult class and professor and felt ready to give up, her mother was there for her.

> My Mom always said, "You will do a good job. Don't worry. Just focus and try to understand everything. Ask the questions." Always she cared about me, and said, "You will do very good. You will do very good. Don't worry." And always she prayed for me when I go to the class and come back. (Esther 3, LED 21)

Like Leah, therefore, Esther's mother may not be a resource for her studies, but she is a source of strength as Esther works through her courses. In both case, key family members helped reduce anxiety by their very presence.

Self and agency. With anxiety limiting help from college resources, and sporadic help from family, the participants were essentially left to themselves. As Esther succinctly put it, "I have to help myself" (Esther 3, LED 10). If the participants wanted to be successful, they would have to find a way on their own. This self-reliance is an admirable trait and speaks much to their success in their college careers. Yet, at the same time, when realizing they were essentially on their own, some of their most acute experiences with anxiety were with contexts in which they did not know how to help themselves.

Aaron had a situation in which a professor had made a grade error and had given him a C in a math class when he really deserved an A. As he explains,

> People make mistakes, so I don't blame him [the professor] that he lose my paper somewhere. I'm scared that you can't mistakes like that. You have to be careful. What if you miss somewhere else, and you couldn't find it? He found it, and that's good, but what if he don't? I don't know how to prove it with them. He didn't take attendance. How am I going to prove I was in that class? It helps it have anything we can prove that we are in class because we don't have anything? How am I going to prove this? He lose my paper, and then I went somewhere to complain. They ask me, and he didn't take attendance. He's going to say, "Oh he didn't come to class." I don't have any proof. Still that scares me, right now! How would I prove it?! (Aaron 3, LED 15)

His continued anxiety from this situation demonstrates how helpless he truly sees himself.

One of Esther's strongest experiences with anxiety resulted from a class she was taking in which the professor had very high expectations, but did not offer much in the way of guidance or help.

> What do I have to do? I try to understand everything he said in these explanations, and even I went to his office and asked him. I said, "Professor, I didn't pass this exam. I need to know how to study these vocabulary. Why is this wrong? What is the right meaning for this word?" I need to know because I need to get better." But he said, "No, this is just . . . sorry [laughs] . . . this must be with this and this must be with this. You have to read the article and answer the questions. Read the question and try to find the answer in the article." So, he didn't help me in any way. What do I have to do? (Esther 2, LED 7)

Like Aaron, Esther's anxiety is her helplessness, and as a result she suffered a number of physical effects such as sleeplessness and weight loss. She rather poignantly expresses her situation, "Always I was thinking, oh my God, what do I have to do?" (Esther 2, LED 6).

Hannah, too, felt this anxiety from helplessness in a class where the professor not only did not explain the material well, but also did not answer Hannah's questions to her satisfaction. "She doesn't explain too much, and I feel afraid about this . . . I do [ask questions] but she always has a joke. 'Ha, ha, ha, just kidding.' I think she is too relaxed. Always I have to go home to answer my question" (Hannah 3, LED 6). For someone who has to be perfect as discussed previously, not getting the help she needs and not knowing what to do only serves to increase her anxiety.

One of Leah's worst semesters occurred when she had a number of professors who were not helpful. "Oh my God! I didn't understand nothing. I didn't know what they were saying! Not any of the words! . . . I'm taking a class, and I don't know anything. I can't participate, and I can't do the homework" (Leah 2, LED 12). At the same time her classmates were not interested in helping her. "Then this girl was talking to me in Spanish. I asked her in English to let her know I'm trying to learn. But they kept talking to me in Spanish" (Leah 2, LED 12). Her inability to advocate for herself resulted in such extreme anxiety that she took the ultimate avoidance measure and started to skip class.

Finally, Deborah felt intense anxiety from a class she took with me that she felt was unfairly hard. She studied long hours for a test and physically suffered headaches and sleeplessness in the process. However, the actual test only increased her anxiety. "When I look at the test, I freak out. I feel like I don't know anything" (Deborah 2, LED

14). Her anxiety from her helplessness was intensified by a further lack of guidance when she tried to ask for help, "You didn't help at all! Asking was useless" (Deborah 2, LED 14). Much like Leah, so helpless and discouraged did Deborah become that she considered dropping the course. "I didn't want to fail. I was so, so overwhelmed. If I didn't pass, I'll retake it, reregister" (Deborah 3, LED 15).

Each of these participants had little choice but to rely on their own initiative and drive to overcome difficult classroom situations. This in itself demonstrates an understanding that they needed to be self-advocating. However, in each case, their typical resolve and self-reliance were not enough for the situation, and they were faced with the prospect of diminished success or outright failure. Questions went unasked or were not answered sufficiently. Their self-advocacy was in a sense hampered by their anxiety, which in turn increased their anxiety. All of the participants ranked these experiences with some of their highest levels of anxiety, a telling statement to the helplessness they felt, cut off from any source of support whether from classmates, the professors, or family, and left only with their own determination, but with the uncertainty it would be enough.

A Cycle of Anxiety

The meaning the participants made of their anxiety with identity, connection, and agency is visually represented in Figure 2. These students began to doubt their ability to succeed due to their perceived lack of proficient English which creates anxiety. A lowered sense of their identity as capable students drives a desire to self-isolate in order to protect themselves from ridicule or even retribution. However, this isolating behavior creates additional anxiety from an inability to seek help and access the college's

resources, which further cast doubts that they can indeed be successful students. At times this cycle led to disengagement and stopping out. However, because of their determination to succeed either for self and/or family, they were able to manage their anxiety and find success.

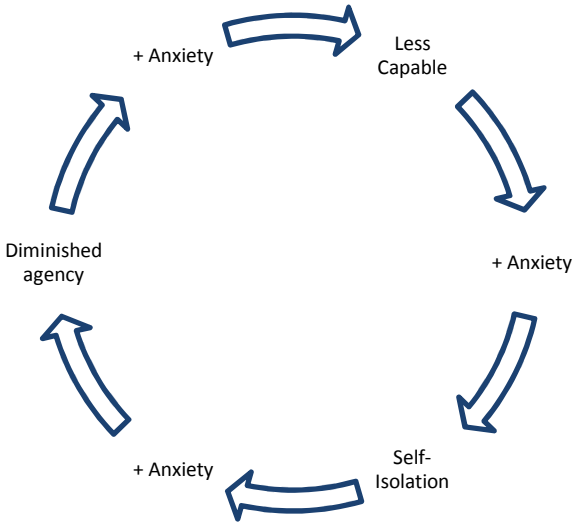

Figure 2. Cycle of Experiences and Meaning from Anxiety

This cycle illustrates the interconnectedness of identity, connection, and agency that the literature has suggested. The five participants struggled with developing an academic identity in part from their perceptions that others would see them as deficient from a lack of conversational or academic proficiency. They did not want to risk being laughed at by their classmates or risk their professors thinking less of them for making mistakes when speaking. Halic, Greenberg, and Paulus (2009) observed a similar response with international students who began to doubt their intellectual abilities and even their self-worth as a result of a lack of English proficiency. The five participants

also indicated that the most difficult time for them was during the first semesters as they struggled to adapt to a new college culture and English as the language of instruction, but then found renewed confidence as they began to have success in their studies which was a pattern also noted in the study by Dema (2015).

The participants' anxiety over their identity as capable students often resulted in disengagement and silence. However, this strategy only served to inhibit their ability to make connections with classmates or professors. They were further blocked from building connections from classmates because of the difficulties in building a cohort of fellow ELL students. Classmates change from class to class, semester to semester; plus, they often have work and family obligations before and after class and are unable to meet up for as a study or social group. This is in stark contrast to McCloud's (2015) study that discussed the value of being able to partner with another ESL student to act as source of support and encouragement. With the more fluid classroom environment of college, the participants in this study had difficulty in making these connections.

Connections with faculty were also challenging to make. Rude or mean professors were to be avoided as only creating more anxiety and further isolation. However, most of the participants eventually were able to find someone who they felt safe going to with questions. The studies by Wassell, Fernández, Hawrylak, and LaVan (2010) with high school students and Ravichandran, Kretovics, and Ghosh (2017) with international students confirm how a trusted teacher, staff member, or professor can be a tremendous ally for ELL students. This important connection both affirms their identity as valued students, and also does much to help them with agency.

Without a trusted staff or faculty ally or friendship with their classmates, the participants' isolation and anxiety increased. Knowing they needed help but not having anyone to go to, their agency, or their ability to take advantage of needed resources and opportunities, was diminished. Though family was able to help them get started in their college careers, all too often their relatives had their own obligations to tend to and could not offer further help or direction. Their classmates were not often the allies that ELL high school students often develop with other ELL students to build agency (McCloud, 2015). Interestingly enough, some of the participants actively avoided contexts in which they would be tempted to slip back into their first language because they expressly wanted to learn and improve their English. This runs contrary to the experiences of other ELL students who found enhanced agency from being able to ask and receive clearer directions with another student in their first language (Kobayashi, 2003).

As a result, each participant all too often struggled on their own to find success and were essentially shut out from resources and opportunities the college could have provided them. From their diminished agency, the participants realized how difficult success would be, raising doubts in their competency as true college students, and continuing the cycle of anxiety.

Summary

The participants' understanding of their anxiety and their identity is a mixture of self-confidence and self-doubt as they struggled to see themselves as competent students that they once were. Anxiety also is derived from their overall inability to connect well with classmates or professors, and in some cases their families, leaving the students for the most part on their own. Finally, for agency, anxiety limited the participants' ability to

take advantage of available college resources leaving them feeling helpless and only able to truly rely on their own abilities and determination. The final chapter of this dissertation will give a summary of this study and discuss how it can help to inform theory. Next, it will address several recommendations for practice and policy, and conclude with suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Implications

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.

Proverbs 31: 8-9

Summary of the Study

New college students, and in particular English Language Learners (ELLs), face a number of challenges when they first embark on their college careers. They may be underprepared in terms of academic readiness as well as be unfamiliar with college processes and procedures (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010). They may have financial burdens and struggle to pay for the high cost of tuition and fees (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Lastly, they may have added responsibilities of work and family that distract them from their studies (Almon, 2012). Any of these can impact a student adversely, jeopardizing that path to success (Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Almon 2010).

Student Engagement Theory (SET) advocates that student success is a combination of a student's willingness to engage with the college, and the institution's ability to facilitate that engagement (Kuh, 2001, 2005). As such, students who are highly motivated and focused can still struggle if the college context is isolating and unresponsive to their needs. At the same time, a college can offer many services in terms of advising, mentoring, student activities, and interactive curriculum, but students may still struggle if they are unwilling or unable to take advantage of those services. Paramount to their success is their ability to see themselves as capable college students, their ability to make connections with other students, faculty, and staff, and their ability

to seek and find help from other resources (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1988; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that students of color can be confronted by an additional layer of disengagement. A college environment that is insensitive to students of color' needs, and especially one that belittles or demeans their experiences through micro-aggressions (Solórzano, 1997), will create barriers for these students. In effect, they are silenced and marginalized by the institution, and students can feel as if they are unimportant and unable to receive the help they need.

All things considered, a number of new students in higher education can struggle with anxiety (Cox, 2009). Anxiety can often provoke self-defeating behavior when students seek to avoid their anxiety through disengagement, missed work, and dropping or stopping out. Often, these strategies result in decreased success, perpetuating further anxiety, and a feeling that the student does not really belong in college after all.

ELL students can have a particularly arduous time with college (Almon, 2012). They may have all of the difficulties of first generation college students, and they may also be subjected to alienation from the judgmental attitudes of others. Finally, they must deal with language and cultural obstacles. Consequently, success can be elusive; not so much from a lack of motivation, but from the overwhelming number of obstacles that must be overcome on a daily basis (Brook & Willoughby, 2015; Holmes et al, 2012; Marshall, 2010; Pappamihel, 2002).

This study was a hermeneutical phenomenological study that set out to understand how Generation 1 ELL students experience anxiety, and the meaning they make of those shared experiences. Specifically, I sought to answer the questions:

1. What meaning do ELL students make of their shared experiences with anxiety while attending college?
    a. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of identity?
    b. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of connection?
    c. What meaning do they make of their experiences in terms of agency?

Five ELL students from the research site's ESL program volunteered to participate. Each one meet with me three times over the course of several weeks to share their experiences prior to beginning their college career at the research site, their experiences with anxiety while on campus, and their reflections on what that anxiety meant to them. All the interviews were personally transcribed and then sorted into coherent Lived Experience Descriptions (LEDs) (van Manen, 1997a). For the sake of confidentiality, these five participants are referred to as Aaron, Deborah, Esther, Leah, and Hannah.

Following van Manen's (1997b) suggested methodological approach, I conducted a three-phase textual analysis of each LED from holistic to sentence to word to identify themes. From this analysis, I devised overarching themes and subthemes looking for convergence and divergence in their experiences and the meaning attached to them. From this, we can catch a glimpse of how these students understood their anxiety.

Review of the Findings

Not unsurprisingly, all the participants experienced anxiety at a variety of levels and contexts. All found ways to manage that anxiety – not always positively through isolating behaviors or stopping out. Most significantly, all five have persisted with their studies despite this anxiety. Though some are ready for the next steps beyond ESL, others

are unsure of what the next semesters have to bring. When they considered what their anxiety means, they all had thoughts on their identity, connection, and agency.

Anxiety and identity. The first research sub-question was what meaning do ELL students make of their experiences with anxiety in terms of their identity? Though I did not set out to work with ELL students who had had previous higher education experiences in their home country, all five participants did indeed study in an international college or university. As successful college students in their home countries, these five participants actually had an advantage over many first-generation college students in that they knew they could be successful in college, and they knew what it would take to continue to be successful. At the same time that inner sense of confidence in themselves was shaken by the new context of having to study in an institution with different practices, and most significantly in a language they were not completely fluent in. Suddenly, these successful students were confronted by the uncertainty whether they could continue to be successful or not. Esther expressed this succinctly, "I don't know what I have to do. I couldn't understand anything" (Esther 2, LED 6); as did Hannah, "When I want to use what I know, that I learned, I can't do it" (Hannah 2, LED 3). Though their initial identity as capable students was weakened by these more challenging contexts, the fact that they all persisted despite this is a credit to their determination. As a result, for most the participants, they have regained much of that confidence in themselves as capable college students.

There is little discussion in the literature on how ELL students develop their identity in college. Some studies have demonstrated that not all ELL students are comfortable with being labeled ESL students and will not self-identify at times to avoid

this stigma (Marshall, 2010). Of the five participants, Aaron has had the most interaction with NES students in his credit level courses, and he did admit to avoiding interaction with these students for fear they would laugh at his lack of English (Aaron 2, LED 16). Another participant attempted credit level courses but ending up dropping the courses because she could not understand her professors. The other three participants so far have confined their coursework to just ESL classes, but neither did they suggest that they felt ashamed of being an ESL student.

Pappamihel's (2002) study of middle school ESL students revealed some of these students also engaged in self-deprecating behaviors, seeing themselves as less worthy students compared to their other classmates. Interestingly, this attitude was a frequent admission of the five participants, regardless if the other students were fellow ESL students or NES. Much of their anxiety was related to this feeling they were not as good students as they once were. As their time, and success, at the college has progressed, these feelings have lessened, and most would agree with confidence as one participant said, "I can do it!" (Leah 3, LED 13). This correlates with Kuh's ideas on how the students' background and willingness to engage with the college will lead to greater success (Kuh et al, 2006).

Anxiety and connection. In the second research sub-question, I wanted to understand how these five participants experienced and understood their anxiety in terms of their ability to make connections. One of the most pervasive experiences with anxiety these participants faced was the fear of saying something wrong and the subsequent humiliation at the hands of their classmates and professors. This anxiety made it difficult to connect with classmates, including fellow ESL classmates, but especially Native

English speakers, and with their professors. The most common response to this anxiety was self-isolating behaviors. "I'm always scared how I react in front of everyone. How I talk . . . Being alone solves my problem. They don't judge me how I talk" (Deborah 3, LED 1). Aaron explains his desire to isolate himself from others to avoid embarrassment, "The whole semester, they [students and professors] will laugh" (Aaron 3, LED 5). Paradoxically, by self-isolating, they only increased their anxiety, especially when it came to seeking necessary help, which is discussed below in agency.

Cox (2009) addressed how self-isolating behavior was a common strategy to deal with anxiety for first semester students. In addition, both Brook and Willoughby (2015) and Jalili-Greeneir and Chase (1997) discovered this same limited engagement on the part of ELL students with students and professors. Though this behavior is understandable to a certain extent with first semester students, such as the ones Cox worked with, these five participants continued to self-isolate even as their own identity as competent college students grew over time. This pattern suggests a more pervasive fear that success alone is not able to remedy. Kuh (2009) and Rendon (1994) would agree that the validation of students is critical to positive engagement and success. Validation would appear to be a struggle for these students. Whether it was through their discomfort from insensitive classmates and professors (Sue et al., 2007), or from their ongoing struggles with a positive identity as competent college students, these students made concerted efforts to avoid making connections. Here is where Kuh would advocate the college becoming more validating for these students by being more purposeful in creating engagement (2009).

Anxiety and agency. The third and final research sub-question I asked was to understand the meaning these ELL students made of their anxiety in terms of their agency. Colleges provide a number of resources for students who are seeking help. However, when ELL students have chosen to self-isolate because they are not confident in their language abilities, those avenues for help suddenly become much more challenging. Even when they are comfortable approaching a fellow classmate for help, that help is not always forthcoming, "A lot of students I found were not very serious . . . They don't even care. But it made me more stressed . . . Because I won't find another way to help myself" (Esther 3, LED 6).

Asking for help from professors can also be difficult, and Leah explains the lengths she would go through before mustering the courage to approach one her professors, "I try to look up words and then write out the sentences in my book . . . Make sure I'm not going to say something wrong" (Leah 2, LED 7). Even family was not always there to help when needed. "Everyone [sisters] has their own class. I didn't get any help from my friends. My Dad and Mom don't know a lot of English" (Esther 3, LED 10). In effect, many times the participants found themselves on their own, cut off from the support of family, classmates, and professors. This lack of support was evident in their anxiety in their uncertainty how they would get the help they needed.

The research suggests that it is often the institution that does not provide the necessary help that these students need (Fuentes, 2012). When this happens, students can be faced with the dilemma of knowing they need help, but being unable to receive it. However, for these five participants, helps were there, but it was not always sought out successfully. Certainly, difficult professors and uninvolved classmates do not help, but at

the same time, other resources are readily available. Their anxiety, however, limits their access to these institutional resources.

In all, the anxiety of these five participants was an all too frequent phenomenon. Fearful that they are not capable, and especially fluent, they self-isolate from classmates and professors. As they are becoming increasingly alone, their anxiety continues as they do not know where to get the help they need or are unwilling to risk embarrassment seeking it out. This pattern has the potential to become a continuous cycle of anxiety and isolation. Fortunately, for the five participants, they were able to overcome this cycle, through sheer determination, and in some cases for the sake of family, find success in their coursework, and persist with their studies.

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

Theory. Kuh's (2001, 2005) engagement theory recognizes that the institution must provide a welcoming environment so that students feel comfortable engaging with the college. This engagement is achieved through timely advising, clubs and organizations that keep students involved on campus, collaborative learning experiences in the classroom, and validating diverse students. Kuh also acknowledges that the students have to seek out that engagement. Much of the research on engagement has been done at four-year schools where engagement can be more accessible for students who live on campus and are full time students. On the other hand, relatively little research has involved community colleges, and even less with ELL students. These students are more likely to be commuters and part time students. Though the college may attempt to promote engagement, the students may not be in the position to take advantage of these

opportunities. Knowing what these students are expecting and needing for engagement is critical for their continued success.

This study would suggest that for these five participants that positive engagement was elusive. Despite the opportunities provided by both the ESL program and the college in terms of orientation, advising, clubs, and tutoring, by and large these were not utilized by the participants. In part this was from a lack of awareness, and so there is a need to do better at promoting these. However, promoting engagement for ELL students needs to be more than simply offering opportunities; there needs to be a concerted effort to seek out ELL students and develop supportive relationships so that they feel welcome to seek out and utilize these resources (Jalili-Greenier & Chase, 1997; Szelényi & Chang, 2002).

Critical Race Theory addresses the prevalence of racism in higher education. In particular, it is argued that students of color often face a number of barriers that make engagement challenging. The CRT tenet of Whiteness as Property contends that much like owning property, being white is equated with status and privilege. The opposite can be said of students of color who can feel ashamed of their non-white identity and not have the same opportunities offered to them as their white classmates (Hodara, 2015). Certainly, the five participants experienced shame, but this was not due to their perceptions of their ethnicity in relation to other white students. Instead, their shame arose from their lack of English fluency, and the perception that professors and students would view them as lesser students as a result. More recently, CRT has expanded beyond a Black-White dichotomy to consider other factors that students of color must cope with including gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. The experiences of these five participants suggests that the tenet of Whiteness as Property could be amplified to

consider English as Property, and what that could mean for students whose first language is not English.

Esther, for example, remarked how she suspects she was denied opportunities in pharmaceutical work when she first immigrated to the United States because of her English (Esther 1, LED 12). She certainly had the education and experience. What she was lacking, however, was proficiency in English, and this blocked her from those opportunities. Deborah, too, felt her lack of English proficiency kept her from advancing in her work despite her experiences and work ethic (Deborah 1, LED 13). Apart from the workplace, Aaron felt his lower English proficiency denied him opportunities to work with Native English Speakers in his credit bearing classes (Aaron 3, LED 4). For these three participants, the English language represented a valuable commodity – one that promised success and opportunities. Without it, they were at a disadvantage.

Another tenet of CRT is Educational Inequality. An all too common complaint by professors when they evaluate their students is that they do not try hard enough, or they just do not care about their classes to put the effort in. This was a perception that at least one participant was aware of when she felt despite her efforts to the point of headaches, exhaustion, and intense anxiety she was constantly confronted with the danger of not passing her classes. She passionately remarked a number of times, "you are here to help us immigrants, not judge us with C, D" (Deborah 2, LED 16). She felt her efforts deserved a better recognition of the work she put into it rather than a dismissive evaluation of just good enough at best. In the case of these participants, their prior education was for the most part excellent; they had good schools, teachers, and opportunities to advance themselves and be successful. Yet, for some, they felt that was

all for naught, and their professors did not recognize these students' efforts in the classroom, or the value they placed on their education. This judgmental attitude illustrates the presupposition of Educational Inequality that students of color are not successful students because they do not work hard enough, or value educational opportunities (Capper, 2015). Clearly, Deborah did, but she was given credit for it.

Practice. Despite the successes these participants have had, it is clear they have not had an easy path. This study, then, has prompted my reflection on a number of ways how the ESL program at the college can better support its ELL students. These are related to programmatic changes, enhanced pedagogy, and institutional improvements.

Programmatic changes. Even though the ESL program at the college has made a number of significant changes in recent years, there are always improvements to be made. From hearing these five participants relate their experiences with anxiety, a number of changes could be made to better help the program's students have greater engagement and success.

New Student Orientation. One surprising revelation to me was only one of the five students participated in the ESL New Student Orientation. If fact, four professed they were not aware there was an orientation, and the one who did attend was only more confused and anxious at the end of it. Clearly, this is a lost opportunity, and there are a number of changes we can work on to make it more accessible to our new students.

For one, a New Student Orientation packet is given out to the students during the orientation session. It covers a range of topics pertinent to new students including resources that are available to them, what to expect in the classroom, using their college email, and how to navigate the college's learning management system. During the actual

orientation, this is supplemented by a PowerPoint presentation that leads to questions and discussions. However, realizing that so few students seem to actually attend the orientation, at the very least this informational packet could be handed out when new students register for the first time. Additionally, there is no reason that this initial welcome to the college cannot be translated into some of the more common languages of the program including Spanish, Gujarati, and Arabic.

Another consideration would be to find out when the students would be able to come. Currently, there are only two sessions at the start of the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters; one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. Should a student not be able to attend either of those sessions on the given day, there is no other opportunity for them. By seeking their input, we could potentially be able to offer sessions that truly are the most convenient for them.

As a final consideration, an online orientation could be created and made available to all new ESL students upon registering for classes. Developing an online orientation would seem to remove the positives of making some early connections with students and professors. However, it could actually serve to reduce that initial anxiety in a number of ways. For one, it would give these students a readily accessible way to discover important information in a timely manner, and at a location more convenient to them. Additionally, it would allow students to work through the content at their own pace instead of a quick, one hour presentation. An online orientation would also facilitate periodic review throughout the semester. Lastly, it would give new students a practical and simple way to become familiar with the college's learning management system.

Relevancy. The ESL program at the college is promoted as an academic English program and designed for students who want to pursue a degree at the college. For some ELL students this aligns with their college goals. For others, they may be looking for enhanced language skills beyond the simple conversational fluency that many adult education ESL programs offer, but not necessarily advanced academic reading and writing skills. Typically, they hope to improve their abilities for better employment opportunities. This was true for Deborah. She already has a job she likes that provides a decent salary and benefits. However, her ability to advance is limited by her English. She came to the ESL program looking for improvement in her skills, but not the rigor or intensity of what is currently offered. Other students I have worked with have expressed similar goals. A college degree is not what they want, but more sophisticated English is.

This becomes a challenge for the program. For students to receive financial aid, they need to be enrolled in classes that lead towards a degree. Therefore, though it could be possible to offer a secondary path that is not so rigorous and perhaps less intensive, it would not be eligible for financial aid. The very cost of tuition and fees could push the affordability of these classes out of the range of most students. A better strategy would be to work with the Adult Education Division at the college and develop ESL courses that go beyond conversational English and further develop better reading and writing skills. This would alleviate some of the cost, as well as provide for language development more in keeping with the students' goals.

Transitioning out of ESL. Just as the ESL program needs to do better to help students begin their college careers with a better orientation process, it also must do more to help students transition to coursework beyond ESL. Aaron was the only participant

who had successfully taken credit courses along with his ESL classes. For one semester, Leah had enrolled in two credit courses with her ESL classes, but ultimately stopped going due to difficulties she was having interacting with her professors. The other participants by and large had little understanding of what would be required of them after ESL. Because ESL students are required to register in person at the ESL office, they receive a fair amount of guided advising. However, once they leave the ESL program, they are on their own. In fact, some former ESL students continue to return to the office hoping for the help and support they had previously benefitted from. To better support these transitioning students, the ESL Language Resource center could develop tutorials on necessary skills such as how to search for and register for classes online, what other resources are available beyond ESL, where to go for advising, and how to work with NES students and non-ESL professors.

Conversational fluency. The above programmatic changes would definitely help ELL students to be more successful in their time at the college. Yet, there is one critical programmatic support that needs to be offered, and that is helping students gain greater confidence in their conversational abilities. It is telling that every participant in this study expressed anxiety over the fear of embarrassment for simply saying something wrong or being misunderstood. The new ESL program eliminated those courses that were focused just on discussion skills, and though this helped reduce the credit load and time to completion for the program, it also removed a necessary support for many students.

One simple way that the students' conversational fluency can be enhanced is by organizing and offering conversation partners. A conversation partner is an informal chance to allow ELL students to interact with NES students or other professors and staff.

Practicing conversational skills can build greater confidence in their speaking ability and work to lower anxiety with identity, connection, and agency. Indeed, several studies have shown that the helping ELL students improve on their socialization skills does lead to greater classroom success (Campbell, 2008; Lee-Johnson, 2015). Though the ESL department could organize and administer a conversation partner program, the entire institution could participate in it. Faculty, staff, administrators could all become a conversation partner with an ELL student.

Pedagogical considerations. The research has shown that learning communities can be especially effective for ELL students because they provide for greater collaboration and connection with other students and professors (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). In the old program, there was one learning community offered to students which combined the Advanced Reading class with the Advanced Writing class and the college's Introduction to Psychology class. Those students who did take it, professed it helped them to be more successful students. However, it was often difficult to run on a regular basis. The schedule was rigid and not every student could commit to it. The learning community also gained a reputation for being more difficult to pass than if students took the classes separately. Despite these concerns, this is a pedagogical change that should be re-considered. Apart from providing the students with a cohort with which to bond, and thereby enhancing connections, it would give students who are reticent to take an independent credit level course the necessary language support to be successful, reinforcing an identity as an able college student.

Institutional Improvements. Institutional changes are harder to implement especially when it comes to unseating attitudes towards students of color. As CRT

explains, the ideas of meritocracy and color-blindness have the underlying assumption that all students are basically the same, but does little to acknowledge the barriers these students of color may encounter (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Capper, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It seems fair on the surface to claim every student has an equal opportunity to succeed in a class, but ignores the actual individual struggles. This is especially true for ELL students who can struggle with language and cultural difficulties, such as the five students experienced in this study. Part of the focus of CRT is to allow for students on the margins to tell their stories and express their realities. By making these experiences better known, perhaps there can be greater sensitivity to ELL students.

An additional consideration for institutional change is how professors and departments handle requests from ELL students. Two of the most anxious moments for Aaron were from experiences in which he felt powerless to gain timely permission to enroll in a course he needed for his major and a grade change for a math class. In both instances, there was an almost cavalier attitude on the part of the department chair and professor respectively to respond to his simple, yet reasonable requests. Though this may be endemic beyond the ELL context, other NES students may not have the same sense of helplessness as ELL students who do not necessarily have the persuasive language or the cultural knowledge skills to know how best to advocate for themselves.

Leadership. As a servant leader, I want to be responsive to the needs of the students in the ESL program and help them to have the resources to be successful. Programmatic and pedagogical changes seem relatively easy to do since the above changes do not require anything beyond the commitment to develop and institute. No additional monies will be required.

However, convincing faculty to adopt pedagogical changes can create difficulties. In addition, convincing the institution to accept these changes can also be problematic. People do not like to have to confront their biases, or be willing to change in effective ways to overcome them (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Schein, 2004). One of the strengths of qualitative studies is that it gives voice to the participants. In particular, from a CRT perspective, the stories of ELL students are counter-stories that help others better understand the struggles that are part of the experiences of students of color (Bell, 1995; Capper, 2015). The first step toward increased sensitivity to the needs of ELL students is to create awareness of what it means to be an ELL student. Through this research and my role as Chair of the ESL program, I can be an effective advocate for the needs of ELL students by sharing their experiences and pushing for policies and procedures that are needed.

Senior leadership. Deans, Vice Presidents, and Presidents can have a significant impact on the institution's retention strategies to help ELL students become better engaged. Since it is a mistake to assume that faculty and staff are aware of the challenges students of color encounter, one straightforward practice is to provide for pertinent professional development opportunities in understanding and working with these students. Professional development can also be directed to help faculty develop better pedagogical approaches, such as learning communities, and provide incentives like release time to implement them.

A further initiative would be to develop enhanced advising for ELL students. Several studies have shown the value of proactive or enhanced advising especially for developmental students (Woods, Richard, Park, Tandberg, Hu, & Jones, 2017; Bailey,

Bashford, Boatman, Squires, Weiss, Doyle, . . . & Young, 2016). Under these modalities, advising can be in person or online, but always students are closely monitored and are required to attend several interactive sessions throughout the semester. Furthermore, the approach of the advisor is more as a mentor in which actual relationships are developed allowing for more personalized advising. Bailey, et al. (2016) cite several examples of institutions that have employed this method with developmental students with positive results in terms of student success and engagement.

Similarly, several recent studies in strategies to increase engagement and success among students of color and ELL students in foundational coursework (Holt, White, & Terrell, 2017; Methvin & Markham, 2015) demonstrate the effectiveness of a holistic approach to advising and support services. Methvin and Markham advocate for an inclusive support system which gives ready access for the student to professors, peer mentors, advising, and counseling. Similarly, Holt et al. point to the effectiveness of a wellness center in which gives students support to help them face their specific challenges beyond academics. In both these studies, the students experienced greater success in their academic coursework precisely because the respective institutions were addressing their needs as people, not just as students. This hearkens back to the principle of validation that Kuh (2009) and Rendon (1994) say is so important for students of color.

Conceptually, enhanced advising makes sense, but practically it will take resources in staffing and office space to truly be effective. It will also entail greater communication between offices so that struggling ELL students will receive timely support. A one-stop center for registration, advising, financial aid, and other services is a

step in the right direction, but unless leadership can continue to push for open communication between these offices, students can still be shuffled from one place to another and never really receive the help they need.

The literature and this study demonstrate the link between student success and a sense of belonging at the institution (Lee-Johnson, 2015; Reeves, 2009; Smith, 2010). Kuh (2001, 2005) emphasizes the importance of student-faculty interactions. Similarly, a very simple way for senior leadership to enhance that feeling of belonging for ELL students is to connect with them (Holt, et al., 2017). Visiting orientation sessions, classrooms, or other events demonstrates to these students that the college actually does care for them as individuals and not as revenue sources. Taking time to listen to the stories of the students and to share their own stories can do much to inspire and encourage students.

Policy. Finally, apart from programmatic and institutional changes, there is a need for senior college leadership to consider how it serves the ELL population at a state level. The NJCCC ESL White Paper (Friedman & Lown, 2013) called for a number of changes in ESL programs. One of those was to push for acceleration to allow for students to complete ESL coursework more quickly. Given the length of time it takes for students to become academically competent in English (Cummins, 2008), expecting an ELL student to do this in four semesters at the most is a tremendous burden for these students to bear. All of the participants were working at the same time they were taking classes, and several had family obligations on top of this. The very intensity and expectations placed upon the students was difficult for them to manage. These students were successful, but others may not have been able to do this.

Earlier, it was recommended that there be consideration given to alternate ESL programs beyond the typical conversational classes offered by adult education programs and the academic ESL programs. In addition, there needs to be deeper consideration as to how ELL students could earn an ESL certificate upon completion of their ESL coursework. For a student who is looking for a credential that demonstrates completion, a certificate could be a valuable achievement for employment purposes. Some colleges in the state have been working on a certificate of achievement, but have been obligated to include 12 credits of credit level course work in order for it to be approved. Because these 12 credits are in effect another semester's worth of work beyond ESL, not every student will want this. There is at least one college in the state that does offer a college certificate of completion for their ESL students. These are signed by the president and department chair, and are presented to the students at a special ceremony. This is a model worth imitating as there are a number of ELL students like Deborah, who are seeking enhanced English for better work opportunities, but not necessarily a degree. Though Deborah has completed ESL at the college, she has nothing tangible to show for her efforts.

Finally, there needs to be greater cohesion and continuity among ESL programs at the state level. Currently, there is a tremendous diversity among these programs with differing placement processes, a variety of levels, and divergent pedagogical approaches. Aaron experienced this when he first considered enrolling in college. One ESL program placed him higher in their program, but the institution did not transfer many of his credits. Instead, he came to the research site even though he was placed lower because

the school transferred more of his credits. More uniform ESL programs would eliminate much of the current arbitrariness from one college's program to the next.

Furthermore, ESL courses do not transfer. This means a student may complete an ESL program at one college, but then be obligated to retake a placement test and risk further ESL classes by going to another college. This lack of cohesion among programs is confusing for both administrators and students. Understanding that every college has its unique context, there still needs to be a greater discussion about how these programs can work better together for the sake of the students. Improved standardization could lead to the development of an ESL Certificate of Completion that would be transferable from one college to the next thereby both eliminating this potential barrier and providing a tangible credential for students.

Limitations

By necessity, there are several limitations with this study. The first concerns the ability to generalize the findings from this study to suggest all ELL students experience and interpret anxiety in the same ways. This study has demonstrated that the five participants all derived meaning from their experiences with anxiety in the context of the research site. This is in line with the literature that indicates that ELL students in general face a number of academic, linguistic, and cultural factors when attending college which can lead to anxiety, isolation, confused identity, and an inability to seek help (Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Pappamahiel, 2002). However, the resultant themes from this study cannot be generalizable to other programs which are unique onto themselves. Yet, the ability to generalize findings is not the ultimate goal of a phenomenological study; rather it is in the insights I have gained from these five participants' experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; van Manen, 2014).

Similarly, the sample size of five participants can also be seen as a limitation. Though this number is within the recommended range for a phenomenological study (Englander, 2012), like the setting for this study, this number does not allow for any generalization to occur. Again, the resultant themes from these five participants are not intended to generate an overarching theory (Evans & Hallett, 2007; Jasper, 1994). Instead, they reinforce how experiences with anxiety are unique to the individual (Magrini, 2012)

Another limitation concerns the ELL students who participated in this study. These students needed to fulfill a specific set of criteria as Generation 1 ELL students, in the last level of ESL courses, and had persisted in their course work. These ELL students were chosen because of the presumed greater complexity in their lives as well as potential for increased language proficiency concerns and cultural misunderstandings in their college coursework (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004; Kanno & Varghese, 2010), and so their potential to have experienced anxiety was also amplified. This sampling eliminated ELL students who were currently in lower levels of ESL coursework at the time of this study. Their further reduced linguistic proficiency would conceivably lead to even greater experiences with anxiety. However, in order to develop a more conducive relationship during the interviews, having had participants who were able to comprehend and express their experiences without the aid of an interpreter reduced any communicative frustration and allowed for rich experiences to be shared.

Moreover, I chose to limit this study to a specific ELL population, Generation 1 ELL students. As a result, several ELL groups were not represented and did not have a chance to reflect upon their experiences and understanding of anxiety. These include Gen

1.5 students, international students, and undocumented students. Each of these ELL populations has a particular set of challenges: Gen 1.5 students more often struggle with the stigma of being in ESL classes (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008); international students have the added pressure of following and fulfilling the requirements of their F 1 visa (Crandall & Shepherd, 2004); and undocumented students have the burden of a fear of discovery and subsequent deportation (Chen et al, 2010; Hernandez et al, 2010). For the sake of a greater understanding of anxiety of one particular ESL population, I opted to work with Generation 1students.

Lastly, this study was limited in that I worked with ELL students who have persisted in their studies. A case could be made that this ignores the experiences with anxiety of those students who were unable to complete the ESL program. That would be an insightful study in itself to understand what meaning these students make of their experiences with anxiety. However, the experiences with anxiety of students who have persisted were also just as interesting. These are students who were able to manage that anxiety without disengaging completely from college. They interpreted that anxiety in terms of inadequacy, from disempowerment, or exteriority, and yet they were able to counterbalance it enough to persist. Theirs are worthwhile stories to hear.

Implications for Further Research

Since this study was inclusive to the research site, one area of further research would be to study how the ELL students at other institutions experience anxiety, and what meaning they make of these experiences in terms of their identity, connection, and agency. This would allow the themes and subthemes of this study to be amplified and discover areas of convergence and divergence. This in turn could highlight more specific

institutional practices and policies that are connected to those anxiety creating experiences.

Furthermore, this study concentrated on Generation 1 ELL student. Different groups of ELL students comprise Gen 1.5 students, international students, and undocumented students. Each subset potentially has different experiences and meaning from anxiety. Gen 1.5 students can struggle with the stigma of the ESL label, and so they might experience anxiety with identity not so much as feeling as less-capable college students but as being perceived as deficient students. International students can have increased cultural difficulties as being brand new students to US institutions. In turn, they might experience more anxiety in their ability to make connections. Lastly, undocumented students often are fearful of discovery. This could lead to greater anxiety in both making connections and in agency.

Finally, these five participants all were successful in their courses. All but one of the participants is either taking credit courses full time, or are looking to do so in the following semesters. Despite their anxiety, they have persisted in no small part to their self-determination. On the other hand, many ELL students do not persist (Almon, 2012; Belcher, 1988; Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Additional studies could seek to investigate these students' experiences with anxiety and how they understand their identity, connection, and agency accordingly, and what role, if any, determination played in that.

The Journey Continues

Give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am stranger with you, and a sojourner like all my fathers (Psalm 39:12). In the final moments of Leah's last interview, I asked her what she thought about her future at the college. She thought for a moment

and talked about how it would be important for her to find the right professors to be successful, but then she concluded, “Here is going to be okay. I’m very sure I can make it.” She paused and then laughed, “If not, I’m going to look for you!” (Leah 3, LED 26).

The ESL courses that each of the five participants have taken merely represent their first steps of their college career. Since this study has come to an end, Aaron, now no longer in the ESL program, has finished his first semester taking all credit courses. Esther and Hannah successfully completed the last of their ESL coursework, and have registered for their first credit level courses. Leah will take her final ESL classes this Spring 2018 semester. Of the five participants, only Deborah remains uncertain of what her next steps are beyond ESL.

As they continue their journey, they will inevitably encounter further experiences with anxiety from their identity, connection, and agency. It is hoped that they will also continue to fall back upon their determination to persevere in the face of these obstacles. Hopefully, too, they will find allies – fellow classmates, professors, or others - who will recognize that they are still strangers in a strange land and come alongside to offer the support they need.

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Appendix A

Email Contact

Good morning <Student>,

My name is Gary Abbott and I am a Co-Investigator with Dr. Monica Kerrigan at Rowan University. We are conducting a research study that will examine how English Languages Learners experience anxiety while attending classes at college, and the meaning they make of those experiences. I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be confidential.

If you are interested, please contact me at abbottg2@students.rowan.edu, and I will get back in touch with you with more information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at abbottg2@students.rowan.edu or Dr. Monica Kerrigan (kerriganm@rowan.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Gary Abbott

Rowan University

Appendix B

Classroom Visit

Good afternoon,

This is an invitation to see if you would like to help me with a study I'm doing on how English Languages Learners, such as yourself, experience anxiety, fear, or stress while attending classes at college, and the meaning they make of those experiences.

To be able to participate, you have to meet a few conditions:

1. You graduated from a foreign high school and/or college.
2. You are in the US as a resident immigrant.
3. You have had at least two semesters of ESL coursework (including this one).
4. You are comfortable talking to me about your experiences with anxiety. This will involve three separate interviews, about a week apart, each one lasting between 60 and 90 minutes.

I want to assure you that your participation is completely voluntary, so please don't feel pressured in any way to participate. Also, your identity will be kept private between you and me. However, if you do think you would like to help, you will receive a $50 VISA gift card for my thanks.

If you are interested, please contact me at gabbott@middlesexcc.edu . You can also come see me in my office in IRC 205. Or you can use my Rowan student address, abbottg2@students.rowan.edu. Either way, I will get back in touch with you with more information.

Since this a dissertation study through Rowan University, you can also reach out to Dr. Monica Kerrigan (kerriganm@rowan.edu), who is my Chairperson, if you have questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and good luck in your class.

Gary Abbott

Appendix C

Participant Informed Consent

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE OF STUDY: Strangers in a Strange Land: ELL Students' Experiences with Anxiety

Principal Investigator: Dr. Monica Kerrigan

Co-Investigator: Gary S. Abbott

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you still wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

Mr. Gary S. Abbott will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

A. Why is this study being done?

This study is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation. It will examine how English Language Learners experience anxiety while attending college classes, and the meaning they make of those experiences.

Why have you been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to participate in this study as you have valuable insights in how English Language Learners experience anxiety.

B. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?

ESL students who are recent immigrants to the United States may participate in this study.

ESL students who are International Students or have graduated from a US high school may not participate in this study.

C. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?

This study will enroll 5 students.

D. How long will my participation in this study take?

Your participation in this study will take place over a month. As a participant, we will have three interviews scheduled roughly a week apart. Each interview will last between an hour and an hour and a half.

E. Where will the study take place?

We will work together to find a location that is comfortable and convenient for you.

F. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

You will be asked to sit down with a member of the investigative staff to discuss your experiences with anxiety while attending classes at college.

G. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

There are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

However, since you will be telling me about your experiences with anxiety, should at any time feel you would like to talk further with a professional counselor about your anxiety, I will be ready to provide you with contact information to Middlesex County College's counseling services and even help you to arrange a time with them if you desire.

H. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

The benefits of taking part in this study may be increased understanding of how you have experienced anxiety, and what that has meant to you. This may lead to greater self-confidence in the ability to face difficulties and overcome them.

It is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study. However, by understanding how ELL students make meaning from anxiety, the ESL department and college may create initiatives to lessen that anxiety or develop strategies to help ESL students to cope with it. Furthermore, other colleges may consider these findings in how they can better support their ELL student population.

I. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?

There are no alternatives available. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

J. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

K. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?

There will be no cost to take part in this study.

L. Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study. However, you will be offered a $50 gift card for your participation.

M. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out, if required by law. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name and other personal information. Records will be stored in a safe and secure location only accessible to the investigators and names will be changed in all electronic transcriptions of interviews.

N. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with the study staff will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Gary Abbott – abbottg2@students.rowan.edu

O. Who can you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can contact the investigators:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Monica Kerrigan - kerriganm@rowan.edu

Co-Investigator: Gary Abbott – abbottg2@students.rowan.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance - (856) 256-4078 – Glassboro/CMSRU

P. What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name:_____ Subject Phone:_____

Subject Signature:_____ Date:_____

Signature of Investigator/Individual Obtaining Consent:

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject and those of his/her parent or legal guardian have been accurately answered.

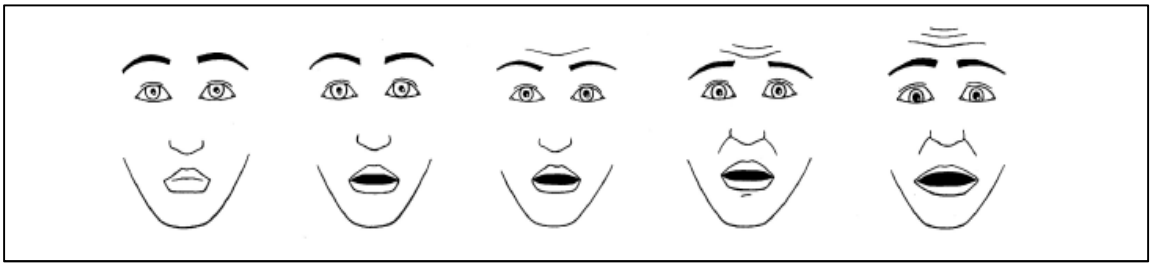
Investigator/Person Obtaining Consent:_____

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Graphic Elicitation Protocol

The Children's Fear Scale (McMurtry et al., 2011) was used to help the participants identify a level of anxiety they may not be able to express adequately due to a lack of vocabulary.



Appendix E

Interview Protocol 1

You have just signed a consent form in which you gave me your agreement to participate in this project. This will be the first of three interviews that we will do. In each interview, I will be asking you several questions, and in order for me to be able to hear everything you have to say I will be taping our conversation. If at any time, you do not understand a question or would like me to explain it more, please let me know.

I want to understand your experiences with anxiety while you were taking ESL classes at the College. Please be as detailed as you can be as you tell me about those times. So that I might better understand your experiences, from time to time, I might ask you a question to add more detail, or to have you clarify something you said. At any time during this interview, if you would like to take a break, please let me know.

Remember, I will not be using any information that could identify you when I turn in the results of this study. Do I have your permission to record our interview? Do you have any questions before we start? Let's begin then.

1. Origin background.
    a. What is your country of origin? First language?
        i. What do you miss about your home country?
    b. Tell me about the people in your family when you were growing up.
    c. Tell me about your experiences in school in your home country
        i. What were your teachers like?
            1. Who was a teacher you had that you liked? Disliked?
            2. How did that teacher act towards you?
        ii. How were your fellow students?

1. Who did you spend time with?
2. Who did you avoid?

iii. How did you see yourself as a student?

iv. How did you go about getting help?

2. Life in the United States
    a. How did you come to live in the United States?
    b. Do you remember your first day in the United States?
        i. How do you feel now about living here?
    c. Who are the people in your home now? Tell me a little about them.
    d. Are you working? If so, tell me about your boss and coworkers
        i. If you had a friend wanting to work there, what would you tell him/her about your job?
    e. Besides your family or coworkers, who or what else is important to you?
        i. How do they help you?
3. College experiences
    a. How did you decide to come to college?
    b. Tell me about the moments before your first day of class at college.

In another week, I would like to continue our conversation about your experiences at the college. In the next few days, I would like you to think about any experiences you had at the college when you felt anxious, nervous, or fearful. It could be in the classroom, in an office, or anywhere other place connected to the college. Try to think of as many times and details as you can.

In order to help you with this, we will use this diagram (Children's Fear Scale). It has pictures of a person's face becoming more and more anxious. What type of situation do you think would result in a person looking this way or this way? (Discuss a few examples of fearful situations). As you think of those experiences you have had with anxiety, think about this diagram and how you felt.

Appendix F

Interview Protocol 2

I want to thank you again for your participation in this study. This is the second of three interviews. Now that you have had a chance to think about some experiences at the college when you felt nervous or scared, I would like to ask you some more questions about those experiences. These questions will be more about your experiences while attending the college. To help us to know that level of anxiety, we'll continue to use this diagram (Children's Fear Scale), and I may ask you from time to time to indicate which face matches how you were feeling at the time of the story.

If at any time, you do not understand a question or would like me to explain it more, please let me know.

As before, I would like your permission to record this interview. Is this okay?

Thank you. Let's begin.

General Questions

1. You've had a chance to think about some experiences you've had with anxiety while attending college. Please recall the first story you would like to share.
    a. For this story, where on the scale would you say you felt?
    b. Was this a time you felt nervous in the classroom or on the campus?
2. Do you have another story when you felt nervous or fearful?

For Experiences with Anxiety in the Classroom

1. You've indicated that this experience with anxiety happened when you were in a classroom. As you tell this story, I may ask you for more details. For now, imagine you are back at that time this happened and especially think about the classroom, your fellow classmates, and the professor. Tell me that story now.

2. Can you tell me of another time when you experienced anxiety when you were in a classroom?

Experiences with Anxiety on the Campus

1. You've indicated that this experience with anxiety happened when you were on campus. As you tell this story, I may ask you for more details. For now, imagine you are back at that time this happened and especially think about where this happened and who else was present. Tell me that story now.
2. Can you tell me of another time when you experienced anxiety when you were on campus?

Prompts (based on van Mane's lifeworld framework)

1. When did this happen?
2. Where were you when this happened?
3. Who else was with you at the time
4. What were you doing when this happened?
5. What else were you doing?
6. What happened after this?

Clarification Prompt

1. I don't think I understand what you mean by that. Could you help me to understand better what you are saying?

Thank you for telling me these stories. We'll talk again in another week. Please take some time to think again about these experiences and what they meant to you in your understanding of yourself as a student and as a person.

Appendix G

Interview Protocol 3

This is the third and final interview in this study, and I thank you once more for your invaluable help. From our first two interviews, I have several stories you have shared with me about your experiences with anxiety while at the college. Now, I would like to share these stories with you and ask you how you felt about those times.

Once more I would like to record our time together. Is this okay?

For Each Lived Experience Descriptions

1. Last time you told me about the experience you had when <LED>, how did this make you feel as a college student?
    a. How did this make you feel about your cultural/ethnic identity?
    b. What do think of your professors?
        i. How have they helped you (or not) be successful?
    c. What do you think of your classmates?
        i. How have they helped you (or not) be successful?
    d. What do you think of the college from this experience?
    e. How have your thoughts and beliefs about yourself changed from this experience?

For a Broad Perspective

1. You've shared some very personal stories about yourself and anxiety. Some students who experienced something similar may have decided to leave school. How have you managed your anxiety so that you could continue in your studies?
    a. Tell me about some people who have been important to you while at college.

i. Can you relate a time that this person was particularly helpful?

b. How do you go about getting help at college?

i. Think of a particular difficult problem you had, and what you did?

c. College can be challenging to our self-confidence; how do you remain positive about yourself?

You have been very helpful, and I appreciate the time you have spent with me and sharing your experiences. I would like to meet with you one last time to share your stories to make sure they are true to what you have told me.

Appendix H

Member Check Email

Good evening <student name>,

I hope you enjoyed your holiday and the New Year is off to a great start.

I want to thank you again for your time and willingness to share with me your experiences with anxiety at the college. As I am approaching the finish of my study, I wanted to reach out to you one last time to make sure that I have been accurate in recording your thoughts and especially your understanding of how anxiety has shaped your sense of identity, ability to connect, and ability to seek and get help.

I've attached a summary of what I have discovered along with key quotes from your experiences. You'll notice that in order to protect your true identity, I've changed your name to <student identifier>.

Please look through what I have down for you, and let me if this "rings true" or if you would like to change or even expand on any of these ideas.

My deep thanks again for all your help.

Kind Regards,

Gary