

The Relationship Between Gender Roles and Second Language Acquisition
Among Adult Immigrant Women ESL Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to investigate the relationship between gender roles and second language acquisition among adult immigrant women ESL students. Data was collected over a period of two months at a community college in an urban setting. Participants were two adult women ESL students in the level one, or low beginning, ESL class. Qualitative methods were applied to data collection, which consisted of student artifacts, classroom observations, and interviews. The findings of this action research project revealed that isolation and few opportunities for English language acquisition, as well as powerlessness and lack of familial support for English language acquisition, were major barriers for participants. The principal conclusion was that classroom models which support women immigrant's second language acquisition must be implemented by community colleges and community-based organizations. In addition, these establishments must communicate and share resources with one another so that women immigrant's needs are met.

Keywords: second language acquisition, women immigrants, gender roles

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Chapter One: Literature Review

What is the problem?

Many adult immigrants attend ESL classes at community colleges or community centers to learn English. For many immigrants, English proficiency is vital for their success in the United States as they seek greater access to jobs and community resources. However, many immigrant women are unable to attend ESL classes because of duties in the home, such as cleaning, cooking for the family, and taking care of children. Many of these women work long hours outside the home in exhausting jobs, such as housekeeping, only to come home after a hard day's work to perform the duties of a housekeeper for their own family. Coming to English class after essentially working two jobs is nearly impossible for these women. As a result, the process of developing English language proficiency is especially challenging for immigrant women. In order to examine this challenge, my action research project will explore the pedagogical strategies that best support their English language acquisition.

The research: meeting the needs of adult women English language learners

Mitchell and Myles (2004) argue that humans "should be able to learn as many languages as they need or want to, provided...that the time, circumstances, and motivation are available" (p. 13). Immigrant women's goals and dreams for themselves and for their children are strongly connected to learning English. These women are highly motivated to learn a new language. However, immigrant women often lack the time and circumstances to learn English. Many immigrant women work outside of the home, often in physically demanding jobs such as housekeeping. These women also tend to perform all or most of the housekeeping duties in their own home,

in addition to caring for their children. Finding time to attend English classes is often impossible for many immigrant women. Immigrant women's varied circumstances often hinder learning English. For example, many immigrant women are met with resistance at home, sometimes in the form of domestic violence, when they attempt to attend English class (Rockhill, 1990). Immigrant women's motivation, lack of time, and individual circumstances will be discussed later in this chapter.

Mitchell and Myles (2004) also argue that language learning is essentially social. Language learners take part in social practices and social networks. Mitchell and Myles contend that because learners are social beings, their "relationship with the social context in which their language learning is taking place, and the structuring of the learning opportunities that this makes available" (p. 27) influences language learning. Many immigrant women left rich social networks, in which household duties and the day to day activities of women were a social affair, when they immigrated to the United States. In this country, immigrant women often work in or outside of the home in isolation. If they do work with others, often this is in an environment where English language learner opportunities are minimal or even discouraged. I will discuss more about the rich social networks and practices immigrant women left behind and about the lack of language learning opportunities in immigrant women's work later in this chapter.

Despite this lack of language learning opportunities, immigrant women continue to have goals and aspirations for themselves that are connected to learning English. Lambert (2008) interviewed and gathered information from immigrant men and women from diverse countries of origin and linguistic backgrounds. Participants

answered questionnaires about their goals, attitudes, and experiences about learning English. Lambert found that two-thirds of the participant's goals were related to competence in the community, such as going to the doctor without the need for an interpreter and upward mobility, such as getting a better job. Important milestones related to learning English were students being able to get a better job or engaging in social interactions in English. These milestones were selected as most important in the questionnaire portion of the study by almost two-thirds of the participants.

For many immigrant women, learning English is a priority because they want to be able to give their children a better life. Waterman (2008) interviewed Mexican mothers that were attending adult ESL classes as part of a parent program in an urban Colorado school district. Waterman asked the Mexican mothers about their dreams for their children and what they would like to do to help their children realize their dreams. Participant's responses revealed that their children's education was a key goal and commitment. The mother's wanted their children to reach a high level of academic achievement so that they might be qualified for professional work. As one mother, Sara, explained to Waterman (2008):

The only work I can do is clean houses. Why? Because I don't know anything else, because I was not able to study past the 6th grade...so what else can I do? And I don't want this for my children! No! So, I tell them, "I want you to do something more, something much bigger! (p.149).

For these Mexican mothers, studying English was a key method of helping their children reach these goals, because they would be better able to help their children

with homework. Because of their attendance at the parent program, these mothers became more involved in their children's school and education.

Not only are immigrant women highly motivated to acquire a new language, but some theorists and researchers have assumed that females are superior in terms of language development (Davis K. & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004). For example, Larsen-Freeman and Long report that females learn a second language at a faster rate, at least in the beginning stages of second language acquisition. Larsen-Freeman and Long's work cites two studies that show female superiority in some aspects of second language acquisition (as cited in Davis, K. & Skilton-Sylvester, E., 2004, p. 384).

Though some researchers believe that females are superior to males when it comes to acquiring a new language, immigrant women's gendered identities often hinder second language acquisition. In Rockhill's (1990) interviews of 35 Latina women from various Spanish-speaking countries, she found that women had a strong desire to take English classes, however women tended to frame going to school in terms of desire, not rights. Women who started attending ESL classes tended to stop attending. Participants explained that they stopped attending English classes because of too many pressures in their daily lives, including resistance at home. In addition, Rockhill found that women who were separated or divorced were more likely to develop English literacy skills. Violence was common for the women Rockhill interviewed, sometimes directly linked to the women going to school. Rockhill describes the daily fear of one of the women she interviewed, Julia, who was so frightened of her husband that she was able to talk to Rockhill only once. When she was finally able to talk to Rockhill, Julia said:

And there were three things that I wanted, like I wanted to eat: to know how to work, to know how to earn money, to understand what my children spoke in English and to know how to drive. These three things I wanted, like I wanted something to eat. He (husband) said, “No. The women here who work are just like any women and that these do this, here the women are like that, they start going out with others: I want my wife all for myself, not for others” (p.94).

Husband’s fears seemed connected to the worry that their wives would be influenced by contact with *gringos*, both men and women, in which group women in general experienced more freedom. Women learning a few words of English for survival purposes was fine, however, once learning English was connected to upward mobility, men felt threatened. Men who had higher education levels and daily contact with the English-speaking world tended to be more supportive of their wives’ learning English.

Rockhill also found, in most cases, both the women and their husbands said the husbands knew more English. Men had more of a public life, which meant they had more opportunities to use spoken English. In contrast, women ventured into public only when necessary: to go to church, work, or attend to family necessities. In addition, the type of work available to men had more contact with the English speaking public. Such jobs include construction, gardening, and work in small restaurants and stores. The range of work for women was more limited, such as domestic and factory work. Factory work usually meant working with other Spanish speakers at tasks that did not require interaction. In domestic work, the woman was confined to the home where she worked, often alone. In these types of jobs women only learned the few English words specific to the job.

However, Rockhill found that women did most of the literacy work in the household, such as purchasing goods, transactions with social services, public utilities, health care, and the schooling of children. When women enter the public domain, they do so for specific transactions in situations that do not occur on a regular basis. Therefore, they do not experience repeated contact in linguistically similar situations. Whenever possible, women go with someone who can help them with English (Rockhill, 1987).

Gordon (2004) echoes Rockhill's findings about the English speaking limitations of factory work in her in-depth case studies of two Laotian women, Pha and Viseth. Pha worked full-time at Empire Foam, a factory that produced sponges. Empire Foam employed about 100 workers, nearly half of which were Spanish speakers and half Laotian speakers. In order to limit communication problems, Empire Foam separated the Spanish speaking workers and the Laotian speaking workers by floors. Each floor had a bilingual supervisor. In addition, female workers mostly worked separating sponges and packing them into boxes, while male workers mostly worked with forklifts and large machines. In such a work environment, Pha had no need to learn English. Since females were confined to a separate working sphere, there were limited opportunities to increase their status in the workplace.

Gordon's case study of Viseth, however, produced different findings. Viseth was a stay-at-home mother. Viseth became the family spokesperson because she was the only family member at home during the day and her English proficiency was better than that of her husband. Viseth interacted with school personnel, dealt with bills, and negotiated with an English speaking landlord. In addition, Viseth took responsibility

for selling the family car, a task which required her to receive phone calls and negotiate with native English speakers. She also had to navigate the court system when her son was arrested and deal with a bankrupt landlord in order to prevent her family from being forced to move. Though Viseth may have preferred her husband to manage these situations, he could not because he was at work most of the day (Gordon, 2004).

The amount of household duties immigrant women are expected to perform, whether they work outside the home or not, is daunting. Haddad and Lawrence (1994) studied 20 working class Italian immigrant couples who had been living in Canada since 1970. Haddad and Lawrence found that most of the husbands and wives agreed that the division of household work and power dynamics was gender segregated in Italy. In Italy, wives were entirely responsible for the daily cooking, dusting, weekly shopping, laundry, ironing, sewing or mending clothing, keeping an eye on children, diapering children, serving meals, and washing floors. Most wives also paid the bills, though some couple said that the husbands were partly responsible for this chore. Men were responsible for household repairs, gardening and yardwork, washing the car (if the family had one), disciplining children, and taking out the garbage. Both the wives and husbands tended to perform their chores with other women or men, usually family members. While women's household duties could not be put off, men could complete their household duties with more freedom, and postpone them if needed or wanted. As Haddad and Lawrence state:

For the men, upon returning home from work, often exhausted, they were received by clean children, a meal and a clean house, products of a full days'

work which was not yet over for women, work which the men did not see nor often cared to hear about, as long as it had been done upon their return home everyday (p.174).

All the Italian couples that Haddad and Lawrence interviewed agreed that the decision to immigrate was mainly made by their husbands, who sometimes took counsel with other male relatives. The wives rarely played a major role in the decision making process. Indeed, husbands had the final say in most household decisions.

Life in Canada was not very different from life in Italy. The women's lives mainly differed because they needed to work outside the home, mainly to meet the economic needs of the family. Though the wives now went out to work, there were no major changes in the division of household work. In Canada, husbands participated more jointly in shopping and paying the bills, though their participation often meant driving their wife to the supermarket. For the most part, the wives viewed paid work as an addition to their household chores. In fact, they received even less help at home because many relatives, who would have helped with housework, were left behind in Italy. However, there was a change in the family power dynamics and wives had more of a say in household decisions. Haddad and Lawrence's study suggests that even after immigrants have lived in the host country for many years, division of household chores and power dynamics change only minimally from that of their home country, if at all.

Haddad and Lawrence's findings differ from other those of researchers (Gordon, 2004 and Foner, 1997). These researchers are quick to highlight immigrant women's emancipation due to greater financial independence because they were

working outside the home. In addition, these researchers highlight a decrease in domestic violence towards women because of more laws protecting women in the United States. Gordon and Foner's findings conflict with those of Rockhill (1987), as mentioned previously in this chapter. Foner herself explains:

There is some question of whether some of the changes in family relations I have mentioned here, such as women's increased power in dealings with their spouses, are simply a temporary phase and that if circumstances allow, premigration forms will be constituted (Foner, 1997, p. 972).

Norton Pierce (1995) argues that women immigrant's investment in the target language and development of their own identity that will further English language acquisition. Norton Pierce interviewed, visited homes, and analyzed English language experience diaries of five immigrant women from Vietnam, Poland, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), and Peru. All participants were recent immigrants to Canada. Norton Pierce was interested in these women's gender roles and language acquisition. After collecting data from all participants, Norton Pierce focused on two women, Martina from the Czech Republic and Eva from Poland. Norton Pierce chose to focus on these two women because their stories more clearly illustrated her research question.

Norton Pierce found that Martina and Eva's lived experiences illustrated how relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers. Martina performed a variety of English language tasks at home and in the community, such as getting the family established in Canada, a task which included finding schools for her children and a place to live. Martina also collected

unemployment for her husband, among other duties. Martina had an investment in English as the primary caregiver in the house. Despite Martina's capabilities in the home, earlier in the study she referred to herself as stupid and inferior because she could not speak English well. Two occasions finally built up Martina's confidence in herself and in dealing with native English speakers. In the first incident, Martina had an hour long conversation with her landlord over an unfair lease agreement. Her role as caregiver propelled her to be able to fight for her family's rights in English. In the second incident, extremely young coworkers at the fast food restaurant she worked for were taking advantage of Martina's low social status as an immigrant by making her do most of the work. Martina used her role as a mother to be able to see her coworkers as just children, not dominant to herself, and was able to stand up for herself in English.

Eva worked at a restaurant called Munchies, where her coworkers were native English speaking Canadians. At first, Eva avoided speaking with her coworkers and did not engage in conversation with them. Eva felt that she was not Canadian and stupid because of her limited English skills. She assumed that if people treated her badly, as her coworkers did by giving her the hardest work to do, it was because of her own limitations. As Eva started to see herself as a multicultural citizen (she had lived in Italy before immigration to Canada and spoke fluent Italian), she started to challenge her status in the workplace as an illegitimate English speaker. With her identity, she developed the right to speak, and was able to stand up to a rude customer who criticized her accent.

Tran and Nguyen (1994) interviewed 1,384 female and male Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and China. Tran and Nguyen studied the participant's satisfaction with their new life in the United States, as related to housing, neighborhood, and life in general. Of the sample, men tended to have a better English ability than the women, and men tended to have a higher education level. Men's satisfaction in all three areas was related to their connection with the outside world – their financial worries, English ability, etc.

Meanwhile, the women's satisfaction was more tied with their previous life in their home country – whether or not they had lived in an urban environment, education level in home country, etc. It seems that, upon arrival in the United States, the men readily connected with the community in terms of jobs, English ability, and health care, and were either satisfied or dissatisfied with what that connection yielded. Women, however, did not build those same connections, but were rather yearning for their life back home.

What Strategies Support Language Acquisition Among Adult Women ELLs?

Rockhill (1987) argues that literacy programs must be reconfigured with the politics of gender and literacy in mind, however Rockhill does not offer insight as to what these reconfigurations would look like. In her 1983 article, Rockhill also found that the more integrated instruction is in a person's daily life, the more apt the person is to participate. Rockhill argues that this concept suggests that education is best when informal, because most adults prefer to orchestrate their own learning and think they learn best when they are in control (Rockhill, 1983 p. 22-27).

Cuban and Stromquist (2009) analyzed six policy documents for ABE, or Adult Basic Education. The researcher's content analysis of the documents revealed that women immigrants and their needs were rarely featured in these documents. The six policy documents did not highlight the changing demographics of ABE, though, at the time this article was written, approximately half of the student population was Limited English Proficiency students. As more immigrant women participate in ABE programs, they increase participation figures and thus resource requirements, yet their needs and interests are not met and even ignored. These documents framed literacy and language learning as related to job skills, though many immigrant women are stay-at-home mothers, rather than "full and active citizenship in communities and daily life" (p. 168).

Cuban and Stromquist's analysis of the ABE policies revealed two important themes. One of these themes, which relates directly to immigrant women's needs, is a narrow view of the required literacy and language learning content. Such narrow views focus on educating illiterate mothers so that their children will be highly educated and literate, rather than focusing on teaching mothers for their own benefit. In addition, the focus in these documents is on short-term work-related goals in the ABE system, which discounts the lives and dreams of immigrant women who seek literacy for many reasons, some not related to work.

While ABE education policies need to change to support the needs of immigrant women, program models also need to be reconfigured. Researchers such as Keffallinou (2009) and Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004) have highlighted classroom environments that support immigrant women and their gendered identities

in and out of the classroom. These researcher's findings, along with those of Novick, Runner, and Yoshihama (2009) will be further described in the fourth chapter of this action research project.

The Need for Further Research of Persistence Among Adult, Women ELLs

Though there is adequate research on the relationship between English language acquisition and gender, few researchers have studied how gender relates to student persistence among the adult ESL population. In this paper, I will answer the question: In what ways does gender identity influence adult ESL student's educational persistence and English language acquisition?

Chapter 2: Methods and Analysis

Setting

This study was conducted at Lakeview Community College in western Washington. Lakeview Community College is situated in an urban area with great economic disparity. Million dollar homes with waterfront property lie a mile from the school, while pawn shops and rundown apartment buildings are just a few blocks away. Lakeview Community College serves many of the ESL students who live in these apartment buildings. Most students are of low socioeconomic status and from Latin American countries, such as Mexico and El Salvador, or Korea. However, there is a recent increase in Vietnamese and western African ESL students at Lakeview Community College.

Lakeview Community College's ESL program serves students from levels one to six, or low beginning to advanced English proficiency. The program does not have the resources to serve preliterate students and sends these students to an independent, nonprofit ESL program across town, which is better equipped to meet these student's needs. However, due to recent budget cuts, staff at Lakeview Community College are reluctant to turn these students away and sometimes place them in level one. ESL classes are 25 dollars for one quarter, though classes are free for students who receive government assistance, such as food stamps or medical coupons. Though many students receive government assistance and therefore should be waived tuition, due to recent budget cuts the ESL program is limiting acceptance of tuition waivers to

students with the most need. This recent policy change will likely decrease student's ability to attend ESL class.

Participants

Participants for this action research project included students from the levels one and two, or beginning, ESL class I taught at Lakeview Community College from 2009 to the summer of 2011. During the 2011 to 2012 school year my position at the college changed. During this school year I taught an educational interview class, which is a class that focuses on setting and achieving academic and personal goals, in addition to connecting student's with services at Lakeview Community College and the surrounding community. For this new class, I visited all the ESL classes on campus once a week and taught for one hour and visited all of the college's ESL sites once a quarter. As a result of this new position, I taught hundreds of ESL students during a short class time, which made it difficult to build a rapport with these students. Therefore, I used students from my previous levels one and two class as participants because I have already built a rapport with these students and am familiar with many of these students' lives.

Initially, I selected all of my previous female students who were still in the levels one and two class, but with a new instructor, as my participants. Participants included five immigrant women, two of whom were from Mexico, one from Nicaragua, one from Ivory Coast, and one from Congo. Three of the participant's first language was Spanish and two participant's first language was French. Though I selected five participants at the beginning of this action research project, two stopped attending class before I could collect data. Therefore, my participants were narrowed

down to three women and collected data on all three participants. However, I focused on two participants, Rosa from Mexico and Sandrine from Ivory Coast, because their lived experiences with gender roles and student persistence more closely answered my research question.

Data Collection

Data was collected during the fall 2011 quarter for a period of two months. Data consisted of student artifacts, classroom observations, and interviews. However, more data that answered my research question was gleaned from student interviews, therefore I focused primarily on that data set. Rosa was interviewed for one hour and a half, while Sandrine was interviewed on two different occasions for one hour and a half and one hour, respectively. Sandrine was interviewed for a longer period of time because she was more forthcoming and provided lengthy answers to interview questions while Rosa was more reticent and provided short answers. Interview questions were the same for both participants and can be viewed in the Appendix A section of this action research project.

All interviews were conducted in English, though Rosa's daughter, Elisabeth, accompanied her mother to the interview in order to translate questions in Spanish. In addition, my husband, a native French speaker, translated questions and answers in French during Sandrine's interviews. All interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed. I then coded all transcriptions looking for common themes related to gender roles and English language acquisition, which included isolation, few opportunities for English language acquisition, language as power, and a lack of familial support regarding English language acquisition.

Though most data was gained from participant interviews, I also obtained some data through classroom observations and student artifacts. These data sets were also coded for the same themes as described above. Classroom observations took place while I was teaching the educational interview course to the level one and two class. Observations were recorded as field notes in a journal. These observations helped me see firsthand perceptions of genders roles as related to classroom participation and persistence.

In addition, student artifacts, such as assignments, tasks, and writing samples were another source of data. I focused on student artifacts related to the goal and goal barriers work I did with my educational interview class. Examples of participant's goals included getting a better job or being financially independent. Barriers to goals included access to reliable, safe transportation and family support. This goal and goal barrier work was useful in providing more information on the participant's circumstances that impacted the English language acquisition process.

Limitations

One limitation to this action research project was my position as an instructor at Lakeview Community College, which limited my objectivity as a researcher. For example, Rosa viewed my interview with her as a test of her speaking and listening abilities. This viewpoint, likely brought on because of my role as her former instructor, may have influenced some of her responses. However, my rapport with participants facilitated a more comprehensible picture of the participant's gender roles and identity as related to her English language acquisition.

Another limitation of this study was the language barrier between myself as a researcher and the participants. All of the participants were in level one at the time of the interviews, and therefore had beginning English proficiency. Though I am proficient in Spanish, I have little knowledge of French. Due to this limitation, all participants were given the option of using a family member or friend who was English proficient as a translator during the interviews. In addition, all interview questions were written in level appropriate language. I asked questions both orally and in written form, which aided in comprehension.

In addition, I had a limited number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of this study to other adult ESL students. Though participants were from such diverse countries and linguistic backgrounds as Mexico and Ivory Coast, their lived experiences would likely differ from ESL students from other countries and linguistic backgrounds. Participants also only had a beginning level of English proficiency, which contributed to feelings of isolation and powerlessness. Had participants included advanced ESL students, those participants may have had these feelings to a lesser degree.

Though the factors described above limit the findings of this action research project, these limitations were overcome by triangulation of all data sets.

Triangulation involved “checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (Mertens, p. 258). Data collected from participant interviews, classroom observations, and student artifacts was compared with one another and with the findings from other researchers

described in the first chapter of this action research project. Several common themes emerged, which will be explained in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Findings

Participant One – Rosa

The interview of my first participant, Rosa, took place on October 24, 2011 and lasted for one hour and a half. Rosa was from Mexico and her first language was Spanish. At Lakeview Community College, she had been in the ESL levels one and two class for about four months, or one quarter and a half. On intake, she was placed in level one. She was still in level one at the time of this interview. At the time of the interview, Rosa was in her early 50s. Her daughters were ages 23, 21, 20, and 16. All of the daughters, with the exception of the 23-year-old, lived at home. The family had been living in Washington for only eight months, although the oldest daughter, Elisabel, had just moved from Arizona to be with her family. Elisabel had only been in Washington for one month. Her English proficiency level was significantly higher than her mother's, helped translate the questions and some of the answers for her mother.

Rosa arrived in the United States six years ago. Her husband had been working as a construction worker in Arizona. When he became established, Rosa and her four daughters moved to Arizona. After over five years in Arizona, Rosa's husband lost his job and contacted a cousin who was living in Washington state. The cousin told him that there was construction work in Washington, so the family moved.

Education and work experience

Rosa finished secondary school in Mexico, but had to stop at age 15, because her family did not have the money for her to continue. She dreamed of going to a university but this dream was unrealized. Her husband, however, was able to study industrial engineering at a university. Though he did not take the final exam needed to receive his diploma, he was able to earn his diploma while in the United States. When Rosa stopped going to school at age 15, she secured a job in a kindergarten classroom. Her job was as a teacher's assistant, which she enjoyed. At the age of 18, she secured a new job as a sales assistant at a baby clothing store. She walked to work everyday, a commute which led to Rosa meeting her husband. When she passed by the house where he was living while studying at the university, he would make an excuse to go out into the street, where they would meet.

Rosa quit her job at the baby clothing store when she married her husband. She and her husband moved to the *frontera*, or the border between Mexico and the United States, in order to be closer to his parents. Rosa did not seek work in the border town because, according to her daughter, Elisabel, "She's a strong mom, um, woman, and she's like, everything she wants to do, she tries to do it. So she didn't work because she have four kids and the town we used to live, um, was no work. So, she used to sell like makeup and all this stuff."

Rosa had been a stay-at-home mother since she married. Though Rosa stayed at home with her children in Mexico, she ran the family business, a grocery store, out of her home while caring for her children. The grocery store was in a separate room

in Rosa and her husband's house. Elisabel said that the room was about half the size of the classroom where this interview took place, or about XYZ square feet. Though Rosa owned the grocery store with her husband, most the day- to-day duties of ownership fell on her. Rosa said, "In this time, he was alone in Arizona and we were there [in Mexico]. And he left [Arizona] on the weekends on Friday and went back on Sunday afternoon." During this period, the oldest daughter, Elisabel, would have been 17 and the youngest 10. All of Rosa's daughters would have still required a great deal of care, which Rosa was able to provide while still running the family business. The grocery store was a place of busy activity in their tiny town, where neighbors would come and gossip while getting their groceries. At this time, Rosa was at the center of this activity and had a strong sense of community, which greatly contrasts to her feelings of isolation in the United States, as will be described later in this chapter.

Household duties

In Mexico, Rosa's day was filled with household chores and caring for her children, as well as running the family business. When I asked Rosa, with the help of Elisabel, what a typical day was like in Mexico, her daughter immediately asked whether I meant before or after she was married. I was primarily interested in Rosa's life after marriage, but Elisabel's quick reaction to my question suggests that Rosa's life, and the lives of many Mexican women, are quite different as a single woman and a wife. Indeed, Rosa worked outside the home in the baby clothing store and later as a kindergarten teacher's aide as a single woman. Once she was married, however,

she was mostly confined to the home. The world came to Rosa via the family grocery store, rather than Rosa going out into the world as she did while single.

In Mexico, Rosa woke at six o'clock every morning in order to prepare her children for school. After she took her children to school, she returned home to clean the house, prepare the food, and wash all of the family's clothing. At the end of the day, Rosa picked up her children from school. When I asked Rosa if she went outside the house or whether she visited friends during her day, she replied, "No one more than the family of my husband." Her in-laws, however, did not help her with the housework or food preparation. Her reply contrasts with the Italian women immigrants research by Haddad & Lawrence that was reviewed in chapter one, which revealed that, for many immigrant women, daily chores were a social activity where relatives worked together side by side (1994). It is unclear whether Rosa's isolation in her daily chores and activities is because only her husband's family was in the *frontera*, while her own remained in the big city. After a busy day, Rosa went to bed at nine o'clock.

In Tacoma, Rosa woke at five o'clock in the morning in order to prepare her husband's lunch. Her husband left for work at six o'clock everyday, and therefore his lunch had to be ready early. Rosa no longer needed to take her children to school, since her children were all older now. After preparing the lunch, Rosa cleaned the house, washed all of the family's clothing, prepared the food, and went to the grocery store. After a full day, Rosa went to bed at ten or eleven o'clock. I asked Rosa about the difference in her schedules between Mexico and Tacoma, especially about the times she woke up and went to bed. She replied that she has less time to sleep than in

Mexico because “It takes me longer to clean the house than there.” In addition, Rosa replied that, “I’m less tired here. There [in Mexico] everything was more turned off, darker, more....boring.”

Participant Two – Sandrine

Sandrine was a 31-year-old student from the Ivory Coast. Her first language was French. She had been enrolled and regularly attended ESL level one at Lakeview Community College during the previous fall and spring quarters, or fall 2010 and spring 2011. She gave birth to a daughter during the winter 2011 quarter, and therefore was unable to attend class. Sandrine was also unable to attend summer 2011 quarter because she needed more time to care for her newborn baby. At the time of the interview, Sandrine had returned to Lakeview Community College and was enrolled in level one.

I interviewed Sandrine for 90 minutes on November 7, 2011 and for one hour on November 16, 2011. Prior to the interview, Sandrine asked that my husband, a native French speaker, translate for her. I suggested that Sandrine might feel more comfortable if one of her family members translated for her, but Sandrine preferred my husband. This preference may be because Sandrine did not want her family to know some of the information she would give my husband and I. About one week prior to the interview, Sandrine broke down in class and said that her husband did not treat her well. I sensed during this encounter that there was a domestic violence situation going on with Sandrine. My instincts were confirmed during the interview. Sandrine’s domestic violence situation helps to answer my research question and therefore will be further described in this chapter.

In addition to her baby, a girl who was nearly one at the time of the interview, Sandrine had one other son. At the time of this interview, her son was three-years-old. Sandrine also cared for her eight-year-old stepdaughter. Sandrine had one other male stepchild, but at the time of these interviews, he was living with friends in Montana. Sandrine's husband was also from the Ivory Coast and almost 20 years her senior. The family lived together in Tacoma.

Family life in Ivory Coast and Tacoma, Washington

I first asked Sandrine, with the help of my husband, about her life in Ivory Coast. Sandrine immediately started to cry. She said that she "suffered from a lack of affection from her parents." After Sandrine was born, her mother left her in the care of her father. Sandrine's mother eventually started a new life in Guinea, although it was unclear from the interview exactly how soon her mother left after Sandrine's birth. Her mother and father were not married when Sandrine was born, which probably contributed to her mother's choice to move to Guinea.

In 1984, her father married a woman who became a kind stepmother to Sandrine. Sandrine was age six when they married. She did not describe her earliest years alone with her father. This stepmother singlehandedly raised Sandrine and said that she was "her only hope to continue living." After her first stepmother died, Sandrine's father married again. Though Sandrine's father was "nice in general...some problems appeared: not [with] my father's affection, but my step mom was not [affectionate with me]." Sandrine did not get along with her second stepmother and moved out at the age of eighteen. She lived alone in Abidjan, the former capital city of the Ivory Coast, which she told me is quite unusual for a young

woman in her culture. Sandrine joked that children in the Ivory Coast, and indeed in many parts of Africa, live with their parents until they are married, even if they are still single until age of 40. Between her father's first and second wives, Sandrine had 11 siblings.

Sandrine reconnected with her biological mother in 2006. In that year, she travelled to Guinea to meet her mother for the first time. By then, her mother had had six other children. One of Sandrine's sisters, who was 27, was married and living in Abidjan, the same city where Sandrine lived as a young woman. She described the visit as joyful, but did not go into further detail. This short description leads me to believe that though Sandrine was happy to see her mother, the visit did not make up for her "lack of affection" in childhood.

Sandrine met her husband during that same year, 2006. She met her husband when she was dropping some clothes for the needy at her friend's house. Her husband had been living in Washington since 1996, but was visiting the Ivory Coast at that time. He was talking to her friend when Sandrine arrived. He later asked Sandrine's friend for her phone number and called her. In addition, Sandrine's father also knew her husband. Her father was a mechanic and her husband went to her father's garage for an oil change and to fix his car. After Sandrine's husband returned to Washington, they kept in touch until their marriage in 2008. Her husband took care of the paperwork for her fiancé visa. The paperwork and waiting period took a total of eight months. Sandrine arrived in Washington state on February 10th, 2008. They had a marriage ceremony in Abidjan and in Tacoma. **Education and work experience**

Sandrine explained in this interview that her father “always pushed me to fight in order to live.” This mentality is evidenced in Sandrine’s gutsy move from her family at the age of 18. At this same age, she dropped out of school, due to “no follow-up and help at school.” In addition, Sandrine worked long hours in her home and did not have time to study. She also said that she dropped out of school because she was “on my own”, though a few moments later she said that she was still living at home at that time. This discrepancy leads me to believe that Sandrine was “on her own” in terms of educational support and caring for herself, rather than physically “on her own” as she was later.

When Sandrine was 24, she began studying to become a nurse at a private clinic. Sandrine was able to take nursing classes thanks to a friend who offered financial support. She took six years of nursing classes and interned at two different clinics. When she started working, Sandrine earned the equivalent of 110 dollars a month. She was still living alone at the time and apparently this was enough money to support herself. In 2006, Sandrine had to stop working because of a war in Abidjan. Sandrine does not go into the details of the war, which leads me to believe that though the war caused her to lose her job, it did not have a greater affect on her.

Sandrine had not had a job since 2006. She immediately became pregnant shortly after her marriage and has been a stay-at-home mother since then. Her husband, however, went to university. When I asked Sandrine about her husband’s job, she had to think for a moment. She finally said he worked as a counselor for people with mental issues in Tacoma. However, when I asked Sandrine whether her husband went to university in Ivory Coast or in the United States, she answered that

he finished four years of university in Ivory Coast. Four years in a university outside of the United States would not be enough education to work as a mental health counselor. Sandrine's initial hesitation at the question leads me to believe that she is not exactly certain about her husband's job or about his level of education. In any case, her husband's job may have been related to the mental health profession. His area of work is particularly striking given Sandrine's domestic violence situation. During the interview, Sandrine admitted that her husband "sometimes gets nervous and beats me." One would expect a mental health worker would have more regard for his wife's mental and physical health. This domestic violence situation will be described in more detail in this chapter.

Household Duties

When I asked Sandrine about her household duties in the Ivory Coast, her answer was quite short. She did her household chores in the morning and talked with friends in the afternoon and evening. She had to work at the clinic every other day from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night. Sandrine did not explain her household duties when she lived with her father and second stepmother. However, she said in the previous section that she had to drop out of school because she had too many chores. Caring for her 11 younger siblings was undoubtedly part of Sandrine's household duties.

In Tacoma, Sandrine said she "always has the same rhythm." She wakes at seven or eight o'clock and showers. Then, she prepares breakfast for her children and stepdaughter, and lets them watch television. While the children are watching television, she completes her household duties, which include washing the clothing

for all family members, putting their clothes away, and cleaning the house. She takes care of her children “as soon as my children are asking for my attention.” Her eight-year-old stepdaughter helps Sandrine by entertaining her smaller children while Sandrine does the housework.

She receives almost no help from her husband, though her husband does watch the children while Sandrine attends ESL class. Sandrine’s husband does do all the grocery shopping for the family. However, this arrangement was made in order to “avoid disagreements as far as [the] food [that] is needed.” This arrangement may also have been made because Sandrine’s husband is significantly better at English, since he had been in the United States for 15 years at the time of this interview and used English every day at work. In fact, Sandrine sometimes helped pay for groceries by cutting and braiding her neighbor’s hair, for which she earned 25 or 30 dollars. This arrangement is particularly interesting because grocery shopping is the one household duty which would require Sandrine to leave the home and interact in English with the community. As a result, Sandrine rarely left the house, except to go to ESL class. “I am always at home,” she said.

Data Analysis – Major Codes

Several major codes emerged in classroom observations, student artifacts, and interviews from both participants. Two codes included the presence of isolation, as well as few opportunities for participants to develop their English language proficiency. Other prominent codes included language as power and the lack of familial support regarding English language acquisition. In the following sections, I analyze each code as evidenced by the two participants, Rosa and Sandrine.

Isolation and few opportunities for English language acquisition

Isolation and few opportunities for English language acquisition were prominent themes for both Rosa and Sandrine. In Rosa's case, a house full of teenage and young adult daughters meant that there was always someone with better English capabilities to take on the role of family spokesperson. Rosa's daughter, Elisabel, said, "My sister works in the night, so she stays [at home] in the morning. And then my other sister goes to work and, you know, then my other sister comes from high school. So she's always with someone."

Lillia, the second oldest daughter, was assessed by Rosa and Elisabel as the most capable in English. This capability meant that Lillia always contacted and received messages from the youngest daughter's high school. Lillia, or sometimes Elisabel, would also handle business with the landlord. Elisabel said, "My mom does sometimes [communicate with landlord] when we're not in the house. She does when she has to...like when he [the landlord] goes to the house. But, um...just a little bit. And he's very patient, so, he's not...he knows, he understands." Despite an understanding landlord, Rosa would only communicate with him when her daughters were not in the house.

These findings contrast to those of Rockhill (1987) and Gordon (2004). As described in the first chapter of this action research project, Rockhill and Gordon found that most household literacy work was done by women. This literacy work included negotiating with landlords and dealing with the staff at children's schools.

Household literacy work was usually women's responsibility because often she was the only family member home during the day, when most of these transactions would take place. Rosa, however, had a house full of teenage and young adult daughters who were at home during various times of the day. Therefore, household literacy work fell on to the most capable family member available at the time.

For Rosa, grocery shopping was another household responsibility that was done communally. Rosa never went grocery shopping alone because, in her words, "I always have someone to go with." Rosa further explained that "I don't like being alone. I don't know why. I'm not accustomed to it." When necessary, however, Rosa was willing to shop for groceries alone. Sensing that English might be the real reason Rosa did not want to be alone, I asked if she was comfortable with English when she went grocery shopping. She responded, "I feel bad. I feel powerless that I don't know, that I don't understand."

These findings echo those of Rockhill (1987). In her study, Rockhill found that immigrant women rarely entered the public domain and when they did so, it was to complete a specific transaction that did not occur on a regularly basis. Therefore, women did not experience repeated contact in linguistically similar situations. Rockhill also found that whenever possible, women went with someone who could help them with English, just as Rosa described feeling uncomfortable going to the grocery store alone.

Rather than constantly feeling powerless when calling her daughter's high school, dealing with the landlord, and grocery shopping, Rosa retreated within herself and let family members do the speaking for her. This phenomenon was evidenced in

the interview I conducted with Rosa. Though Elisabeth helped translate questions and answers, allowing Rosa to communicate in her native language, Elisabeth did most of the talking for her mother.

I also noticed Rosa's silence during my classroom observations. For example, on October 17, 2011, I taught the Educational Interview class for one hour, during which I observed her. The lesson consisted of a story about an immigrant woman's goals and problems with her goals, entitled Hakim's Goals. All students worked with a partner on the story. The story was presented as an information gap, where one partner had half of the story and the other partner had the other half. Students had to read their half of the story aloud while their partner listened and wrote. Then, students changed roles. Students could ask clarification questions regarding repetition or spelling, which we went over at the beginning of the lesson. During my observation, I wrote in my fieldnotes, "Rosa had a very hard time in class today. Her partner helped her considerably. She copied his part of the story completely. She was very quiet." Rosa's struggle with this lesson is likely linked to the fact that this lesson relied heavily on speaking and listening skills, since partners had to read the story aloud.

Rosa's silence in English is evidence that she is in the preproduction stage of second language acquisition (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). However, during my interview with her, Rosa was also reluctant to speak even in her native language of Spanish. This silence leads me to believe that Rosa feels powerless not only in English, but also in Spanish. To Rosa, her "voice" in either language is unimportant, so she does not bother to speak at all. Her feelings of powerlessness are likely tied to

her documentation status, which at the time of this interview, was precarious. In fact, her documentation status prohibited her from securing a job, which would have allowed her “voice” to be heard. These findings are similar to those of Norton Pierce (1995), who found that relations of power positively or negatively affected interaction between language learners and target language speakers. One of Norton Pierce’s participants, Eva, finally developed the right to speak when she developed her identity in the United States.

Though Rosa was often surrounded by her more capable English-speaking daughters, Sandrine was sometimes the only adult at home during the day. Her husband’s work schedule was such that he worked all day several days a week but was also at home on other weekdays. Therefore, Sandrine sometimes undertook household literacy work such as calling and receiving messages from her stepdaughter’s school when her husband had to work. My findings for Sandrine closely emulated those of Rockhill (1987) and Gordon (2004), as described previously in this section, because Sandrine was at home during the day.

However, on his days off or whenever possible, Sandrine would defer to her husband to call the school. Household literacy work was also completed by Sandrine’s stepdaughter whenever possible. For example, during the fall 2011 quarter her stepdaughter called me to relay that Sandrine would be unable to register for class until the following week. These findings are similar to those of Rosa, and also correlate with those of Rockhill (1987), who found that immigrant women relied on someone who could help them with English whenever possible, rather than undertaking literacy work themselves.

Sandrine's husband also did most of the grocery shopping, as described previously in this section, which meant that Sandrine had even fewer opportunities to connect with the community and practice her English. Initially, Sandrine rationalized that this arrangement was made in order to "avoid disagreements," but another explanation was revealed in the second interview: Sandrine's household only had one car, which she did not have access to. Though she would have liked to obtain her driver's license, her husband "doesn't want me to get my freedom." When I asked Sandrine if she could take the bus, she said that the transportation system was too complicated, especially with two small children. Sandrine further explained that her husband believed that if she obtained her driver's license she will have the means to leave him permanently. This detail about the car sheds light on Sandrine's statement in the "Household Duties" section of this chapter that she is "always at home." Without means of transportation, Sandrine is confined to the domestic sphere and cannot connect with the English speaking community as she would have been able.

Sandrine's isolation and limited opportunities for English language acquisition were further revealed in the second interview I conducted with her. In this interview, Sandrine revealed that once she left her ESL classroom at Lakeview Community College, her opportunities for English language acquisition were severely limited. For example, Sandrine did not have access to the internet, which she admitted she would have liked to use to practice her English on one of the many websites that offer activities and practice for English language acquisition. Though there was a computer with internet in Sandrine's home, her husband would not let her use the computer even though, according to Sandrine, "he uses the keyboard all the time for

his work.” Sandrine recognized that internet access was a vital tool to further her English language acquisition. She said, “I recognize the lack of practicing English that I could have through the internet.” To compensate, Sandrine tried to improve her listening and comprehension skills by watching television in English.

Her husband’s isolation of Sandrine, in the form of prohibiting internet access and use of the car, is likely tied to the fact that socialization and a sense of community would facilitate Sandrine’s English language acquisition. As explained in chapter one of this research project, language learning is essentially social because language learners take part in social practices and social networks. Since language learners are social beings, their relationship with the social context where the language learning is occurring and the structuring of language learning opportunities greatly influences second language acquisition (Miles & Mitchell, 2004). By keeping his wife isolated, Sandrine’s husband is severely limiting her opportunities for authentic English language acquisition. Therefore, Sandrine cannot improve her English language capabilities, as a means out the powerless state in which her husband is happy to keep her.

Powerlessness and lack of familial support for English language acquisition

Rosa received little help from her family regarding her English language acquisition. When I asked Rosa during the interview how she practiced English outside of class, she replied that she practiced “repeat[ing] and put[ting] the letters” on a website with English practice questions. When I asked how often she practiced on the computer, she answered that “we just put it in. Last weekend I started.” Rosa’s daughters also recently started helping her with homework from her ESL class

as well. Elisabel said, “I just started helping her yesterday. She just told me about it [the interview].” Rosa said that Elisabel and her other daughters helped by “Explain[ing] to me. They ask me about the class and the notes I bring home.”

The recent installation of the computer and help from Rosa’s daughters appear connected to the arrival of the date of our interview. When I first approached Rosa about being a possible participant in this study, she was very reluctant to do so. For Rosa, the interview I conducted seemed more of a test of her English language progress for which she needed to study.

Usually Rosa’s family did not help with homework or further English practice. Rosa said that her youngest daughter, Laura, who was in high school at the time of this interview, “Knows the most but she has the least patience with me.” In addition, Rosa’s husband did not support her English language acquisition. When I asked Rosa if and how her husband supported her, she answered:

No, he works a lot. He comes back tired. He almost doesn’t have time, but he knows more. Much more. He can speak like in the third level I think, second...I don’t know. Because I explain something to him and he says, ‘I already know that’.

Rosa’s assessment of her husband’s English language skills as superior to hers coincides with Rockhill’s findings (1990). Rockhill found that, among her participants, both women and their husbands said that the husbands knew more English. Rockhill found that this superiority in English was tied to the fact that men had more of a public life and more opportunities to practice spoken English. In fact, men’s jobs often allowed them more contact with the English speaking public.

Rosa's husband's job as a construction worker allowed him to practice English with his English-speaking boss and other colleagues. Rosa, however, had fewer opportunities to practice English because she ventured into the public domain only when necessary: to attend ESL class, go to the grocery store, or participate in church services.

Sandrine also assessed her husband's English language level as superior to hers. Like Rosa, Sandrine's husband had "picked up" English at work. As a mental health worker, he had to deal with many English-speaking colleagues and patients on a daily basis. In addition, he was further in the public domain because he did all of the grocery shopping for the family. Sandrine, however, rarely left the house except to attend ESL class.

Sandrine's main support for learning English came from her eight-year-old stepdaughter (Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M., Todorova, I. (2008). Sandrine said, "At home, I can communicate with my step-daughter when I don't know a word in English. I can ask my step-daughter and she helps me." Sandrine's step-daughter also helped her with homework when necessary.

Sandrine received no support from her husband regarding her English language acquisition. In fact, Sandrine's husband used any means possible to discourage Sandrine from attending ESL class. When Sandrine first arrived in the United States and became pregnant, she immediately wanted to take an ESL class. However, as Sandrine explains, "My husband didn't think it was a good idea to follow classes in order to be careful with my pregnancy." Sandrine's uncle, who lives in New York, finally intervened and found Sandrine an ESL class at Lakeview

Community College. Sandrine began attending class in the fall of 2010, but stopped attending for several quarters in order to take care of her children. However, in fall of 2011, when these interviews were conducted, Sandrine was regularly attending ESL class at Lakeview Community College again.

Attending class was a daily struggle for Sandrine. She said, “Almost all the time, I get into fights with my husband. When I have to come to class, I know I have to be nice with my husband because he has the car.” Often these fights between Sandrine and her husband were physical, as previously described in this chapter. This abuse is likely another method, in addition to the prohibition of the car and internet, for Sandrine’s husband to keep her powerless. These findings correlate with Rockhill (1990), who found that domestic violence was connected to the pursuit of literacy among her participants. Rockhill also found that men felt threatened when their wives wanted to learn English, not just to acquire a few words, but for the purposes of upward mobility.

Participants Goals and Courses of Action for the Future

Rosa’s goals for the future included proficiency in English and securing a job. Rosa realized that her work options were limited by her documentation status, yet she wanted “something better.” Her dream would be to own her own grocery store, as she did in Mexico.

Sandrine’s goals also included proficiency in English and becoming a nurse in the United States, as she was in the Ivory Coast. However, she explained that “Every time I talk to my husband about my projects, he cuts me off by discouraging me.” Sandrine hypothesized that her husband did not want her to become a nurse because

then she would be financially independent. Despite her husband's discouragement, Sandrine remained determined. "I am not naïve and I know I am right about my projects. I want to be free," she said.

Both Rosa and Sandrine's goals were linked to English language acquisition, which was viewed as an important step towards "something better." However, each participant faced staggering obstacles such as isolation and few opportunities to acquire English, as well as a sense of powerlessness and lack of familial support. Without interventions to resolve these obstacles, Rosa and Sandrine's dreams will remain unrealized. Possible interventions will be discussed in the following chapter of this action research project.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Relationship Between the Literature, Research Question and Findings

Immigrant women are highly motivated to learn English to better their own lives (Lambert, 2008) and those of their children (Waterman, 2008). Despite this motivation, immigrant women's gender identities hinder their second language acquisition (Gordon, 2004; Norton Pierce, 1995; Rockhill, 1990; Tran and Nguyen, 1994).

For example, the majority of housework and caring of children falls on immigrant women, even if they work outside the home (Haddad and Lawrence, 1994). Women are able to attend ESL class only if they have first accomplished their household duties. However, in this action research project, I found that Rosa had significant help from her daughters regarding household chores. In contrast, Sandrine performed most of the household duties herself while her stepdaughter entertained her younger children. During the time when this action research project was conducted, these responsibilities did not seem to hinder Rosa and Sandrine's second language acquisition, though Sandrine had to stop attending ESL class in order to better care for her children in previous quarters.

In addition, immigrant females lead less of a public life than males with fewer opportunities for authentic English language acquisition (Rockhill, 1990; Tran and Nguyen, 1994). This phenomenon was seen in Rosa and Sandrine's confinement to the home: either by choice, in Rosa's case, or by force, as in Sandrine's. Even grocery shopping, which would have connected my participants with the English

speaking world, was almost always completed with one or more of Rosa's English proficient daughters who then undertook most of the English communication work as the more capable family member. For Sandrine, grocery shopping was completed by her controlling husband in order to avoid disagreements about food and as a means to keep Sandrine restricted from the outside world. According to the research reviewed in chapter one of this action research project, though immigrant women had less of a public life than men, household literacy work was mostly completed by women (Gordon, 2004; Norton Pierce, 1995; Rockhill, 1987). This tendency was not evidenced in my research findings. For Rosa, one of her English proficient daughters was usually home to perform such tasks as dealing with the English-speaking landlord and calling the youngest daughter's high school. Rosa only completed this household literacy work when she was alone in the house, which rarely occurred. For Sandrine, household duties involving literacy were completed either by her eight-year-old stepdaughter or by her husband on his days off. Like Rosa, Sandrine only relayed messages from her stepdaughter's school when she was the only family member available.

Many immigrant women also received opposition from home because of learning English. This opposition sometimes manifested itself in the form of physical violence (Rockhill, 1990), as evidenced by Sandrine in the previous chapter of this action research project. For example, Sandrine was obligated to "be nice" to her abusive husband on days she attended ESL class. Though Rosa's husband was not physically violent, his lack of support for Rosa's English language acquisition was evidenced in his claim "I already know that" when Rosa tried to talk to him about her

progress in ESL class. In addition, Rosa did not receive homework support from her husband nor her daughters, until just prior to the interviews I conducted.

The findings for my participants, Rosa and Sandrine, and those of other researchers described in this action research project are significant barriers to English language acquisition. In order to meet the unique needs of immigrant women, community colleges and community based organizations must reconfigure the services they offer these women.

Recommendations

Currently, most ESL programs at community college and community-based organizations support English language acquisition as best possible within the confines of the classroom. Once the student leaves the classroom, however, there is little support for opportunities for second language development and practice (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009; Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004). There is even less regard for female students gender-based circumstances that impede English language acquisition, as described in the previous section of this chapter.

These issues, which greatly hinder immigrant women's English language acquisition, are rarely addressed in the ESL classroom. Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004) call for ESL education that investigates contexts in and out of classrooms and considers student's lived experiences. They also suggest a critical and feminist pedagogical approach to teaching, where the lived experiences of both female and male students are central. Curriculum in all ESL classrooms must address power relations across societal contexts. In addition, teachers should be conscious of student's realities when preparing lessons and choosing textbooks for the classroom.

A classroom model such as that proposed by Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004), would better support English language acquisition for not only female students such as Rosa and Sandrine, but male students as well. In such a classroom setting, Rosa and Sandrine's lived experiences and needs, such as their sense of isolation and disconnection from the community at large, would be better addressed and met. Davis and Skilton-Sylvester's classroom model would better facilitate the social networks that Rosa and Sandrine so desire because these issues would be brought to the surface, rather than ignored as they are in current classroom models.

One example of a program model that serves immigrant women and addresses their many barriers to second language acquisition was described in Keffallinou's (2009) study. This program model consisted of a "stop-out" plan, or a plan for students who needed to leave class for a brief period of time, and was implemented within an adult education program at a community college in Massachusetts.

The "stop-out" plan consisted of conferences with the teacher and student after a student had two consecutive absences. In addition, the school counselor also regularly visited each class and individual students as needed. Visits and discussions focused on addressing barriers to learning and working with students to prevent them from "stopping out". If students had to "stop-out", counselors, along with teachers, helped to develop a home study plan with students and a plan for students to come back to the program. Study plans consisted of a series of assignments for students to do at home in order to keep up with the class, and a weekly check in with the teacher.

After implementing this plan, Keffallinou found that learning gains of GED students improved from 17% to 44%. The completion rate of GED students (defined

in the study as attending classes until the end of June and/or achieving a set goal, such as getting a job or getting a GED) rose from 46% to 65%. Teachers and staff at the community college where this study was implemented also noticed an improvement in student behaviors, attitudes, and relationships (Keffallinou, 2009).

This program model would have benefitted female immigrant students, like Sandrine, who had to leave class at Lakeview Community College during previous quarters to better care for her young children. Had a “stop-out” plan been implemented for Sandrine, she would have been able to mitigate her gender identity with her education.

In the classroom environments described by Keffallinou (2009) and Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004), instructors would also be better able to connect students to school and community resources because student’s lived experiences would be at the forefront of instruction. For example, when I learned of Sandrine’s domestic violence situation during the data collection portion of this action research project, I was able to connect her with a school counselor at Lakeview Community College. I did not merely give Sandrine the phone number for the counselor, as many teachers would. Instead, I took the extra step to really support Sandrine by setting up the appointment for her and attempting to locate a French interpreter. In addition, I met Sandrine in her classroom on the day of the appointment and walked to the counselor’s office with her, which was in an unfamiliar part of campus.

After Sandrine’s appointment with the counselor, she made the decision to stay at a friend’s house with her two small children. Though Sandrine eventually returned home, I called to follow up with her several weeks later. During this phone

conversation I was told by her husband that she was with her children in New York, visiting her uncle, who had helped her find the ESL class at Lakeview Community College. Sandrine's husband did not know when she would return. By connecting Sandrine with this school resource and consistently following up with her, she was able to leave her domestic violence situation, hopefully permanently.

Some community colleges and community based organizations support policies that make their services even more inaccessible to women. For example, Cuban and Stromquist (2009) found that many ESL classes that served immigrant women were held at night, when women often felt unsafe to travel to and from class and public transportation was scarce. Such classes were often focused on job skills, though many immigrant women are stay-at-home mothers and pursuing literacy for a variety of reasons apart from job skills, as evidenced by my findings of Rosa and Sandrine (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009).

When women are able to access these services, many organizations are not accustomed to dealing with immigrant women and their needs. For example, when I contacted the Lakeview Community College counselor to meet with Sandrine, she did not realize that because Sandrine had a low level of English proficiency, she would need an interpreter. After I scrambled to find a student who could interpret for Sandrine to no avail, the counselor finally contacted a French-speaking colleague. These findings were echoed by Novick, Runner, and Yoshihama (2009), who found that language barriers were often critical problems among organizations that currently serve the needs of immigrant women. In addition, mainstream service providers

needed to “overcome “cultural incompetence” toward—even discrimination against—immigrant and refugee groups” (p.5).

Even community colleges and community based organizations who are accustomed to working with immigrant populations often do not address women immigrant’s specific needs. For example, many immigrant women struggle to negotiate their English language acquisition with caring for their children (Cuban & Stromquist, 2009). Providing free or low cost childcare for ESL students helps mitigate this struggle for women. Though Lakeview Community College offers free childcare for ESL students at off campus sites, free or low cost childcare, especially during evening classes, is nonexistent on campus. Tellingly, enrollment in ESL classes at off site locations is consistently high while enrollment on campus is significantly lower. For women with younger children, like Sandrine, negotiating childcare so they can attend ESL class with unsupportive husbands is a further barrier to their English language acquisition.

Community colleges and community based organizations must also support immigrant women, like Sandrine, in domestic violence situations. Novick, Runner, and Yoshihama (2009) call for organizations to support these women by offering:

- Crisis-oriented, community-based, confidential counseling that includes immediate and ongoing safety planning;
- In some instances, temporary shelter for the victim and her children;
- Education about justice system options to help stop and prevent violence, the direct provision of legal services or the referral to available, accessible legal service providers;
- Supportive, ongoing advocacy to help victims build additional life skills and to negotiate systems that might help them enhance safety and obtain needed services; and

- Information about other services or assistance to meet victims' needs for housing, food, economic resources and mental health counseling generally offered to the population at large (subject to eligibility requirements) by mainstream providers (p. 5).

Though many domestic violence organizations offer quality services for women, many are unaccustomed to dealing with immigrant women, as demonstrated by the counselor at Lakeview Community College. In order to serve all women, these organizations must better communicate and share resources with those that serve immigrant women (Novick, et. al 2009).

Emergent Questions and Areas for Future Action Research

Though several researchers, whose findings are described in this action research project, are concerned with immigrant women's gender roles and English language acquisition, few have studied immigrant women with extremely low levels of English language proficiency. Rosa and Sandrine both attended level one ESL class at the time of this study and their low level of English proficiency likely contributed, in addition to gender roles, to their feelings of isolation and powerlessness. It would be interesting to follow Sandrine to New York, provided she stays there, and conduct further interviews with her after she has left her husband and has acquired more English. I suspect that her sense of isolation and powerlessness would have greatly diminished. More research, comparing a sense of empowerment among low level and high level English language proficiency immigrant women, needs to be conducted among the research community at large. This further research would help strengthen the claims of myself and those of other researchers described in this action research project about the relationship between gender roles and English language acquisition.

In addition, more research needs to be conducted among men. In nearly all the studies described in this action research project, husbands were rarely interviewed about their own viewpoints regarding their wives English language acquisition. This new research would strengthen the already existing research and open a new field by better exploring husband's expectations and worries about shifting gender roles in the United States for both immigrant women and men.

Furthermore, more research could also be conducted comparing participants from countries where gender roles are more fluid and women enjoy greater equality, such as Scandinavian countries, and countries where women are less equal, such as the United Arab Emirates. Such research could explore whether immigrant women from the former countries are able to acquire a second language with greater ease than immigrant women from the later countries. This new research would shed more light on the issue of gender roles and second language acquisition, strengthening the need to provide services, such as those described in the previous section of this chapter, to help women overcome barriers caused by gender roles.

Conclusion

In this action research project, I answered the question: In what ways does gender identity influence adult ESL student's educational persistence and English language acquisition? I answered this research question by collecting student artifacts, classroom observations, and interviews with my participants, Rosa and Sandrine. The data I collected was then coded and triangulated with the research. Common themes emerged across the data and research, including isolation and few opportunities for English language acquisition, as well as powerlessness and lack of

familial support for English language acquisition. These factors impede ESL class attendance and prohibit English language acquisition among immigrant women.

In order to support immigrant women and their second language acquisition, classroom models, such as those described previously in this chapter, must be adopted by community college and other community-based organizations. In addition, those organizations accustomed to dealing with immigrant women must better communicate and share resources with other service sectors that serve women, but are unaccustomed to dealing with immigrant women's specific needs, such as domestic violence shelters and counselors.

Improved communication across community colleges and community-based organizations, as well as the adoption of more student centered classroom models will better serve not only immigrant women, but all students. By unlocking those doorways which have been traditionally closed for female immigrants, educators, counselors, and administrators can ensure that all students can persist in their educational goals and dreams on their way to a better life.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your life in your country.
2. Tell me about a typical day for you when you were in Mexico or Ivory Coast.
3. Tell me about a typical day for you in Washington.
4. Why did you come to the U.S.? How?
5. Tell me more about your goals. Did your goals change? Why?
6. What are your difficulties learning English?
7. Do you have opportunities to learn English at home or at work?
8. Do you have problems coming to class? What are the problems?
9. Does your family support you learning English? How?

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

I, _____, hereby agree to serve as a subject in the research project title “In what ways does gender identity influence adult ESL student’s educational persistence and English language acquisition?” It has been explained to me that its purpose is to gather information about female English language learners and problems in classroom attendance.

I have been informed that all data collected through observations and interviews will only be used for an Action Research project by Kristen Blegen Bouyer for her Master’s in Education Program at The Evergreen State College. I also understand that any information that I provide will be kept confidential and that my identity will also be protected.

I understand that the risks to me will be minimal, if at all. I also understand that no compensation will be provided for my participation in this research. Kristen Blegen Bouyer has agreed to provide, at my request, a copy of interview transcripts.

I understand that if I have any questions about this project or my participation in it, I can call Kristen Blegen Bouyer at _____ or email her at _____. Likewise, the person to contact if I experience problems as a result of my participation in this project is John McLain, Academic Dean at The Evergreen State College, Library 2002, Olympia, WA 98505; Phone (360) 867.6972.

I understand that I will be interviewed and audio recorded, solely for the purposes of this action research project. I also understand that any recording taken will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary. I am free to withdraw my permission at any time before or during the project.

I have read and agree to the information on this paper.

Participant Name _____

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix C: Spanish Consent Form

Yo, _____, concuerdo en participar en el proyecto de Kristen Blegen Bouyer quien esta estudiando actividades para ayudar a mujeres aprender inglés.

Me han confirmado que la información colectada por Kristen Blegen Bouyer sólo será utilizada por su trabajo escrito. La identidad de los estudiantes será protegida y no será compartida con nadie. Comprendo que no hay riesgos a tomar parte en esta investigación. Se puede exigir una copia del trabajo escrito si quiero.

Las entrevistas y observaciones sólo serán utilizadas para reunir los datos, y serán destruidos después de que el trabajo escrito haya sido finalizado.

Comprendo que participar en este proyecto es voluntario.

Comprendo que si tengo cualquier pregunta acerca de este proyecto o mi participación en ello, yo puedo llamar a Kristen Blegen Bouyer en _____ o por correo electrónico en _____.

La persona para contactar si tengo problemas es John McLain, AcademicGrants Manager en The Evergreen State College, Library 2002, Olympia, WA 98505: numero (360) 867-6045.

Nombre de estudiante _____

Firma del o de la estudiante _____

Fecha _____