

“I Will Find My Way”:

A case study of multilingual students developing their aspirational identities

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Hannah Irene Soblo

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Abstract

This thesis reports the results of a qualitative case study of multilingual students at a large public university as they develop and enact their aspirational identities. The study seeks to understand the focal students' hopes for the future, called here *aspirational identities*, and how these impact their investment in university coursework. It also addresses how students develop their aspirational identities by exercising agency and what factors influence their perceptions of opportunities for agency. Data sources include a survey and two in-depth interviews. These data sources are analyzed together using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Drawing from the study participants' experiences during their first year at the university, suggestions are made for writing program administration (WPA), with a particular focus on WPA work with diverse and underrepresented student populations, as well as for research and teaching.

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1. Introduction

Research on identity and investment in second language (L2) writing has informed us about and allowed us to understand how social positionings and language learners' perceptions of these positionings impact their decisions to invest in writing and language education (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Harklau, 2000; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Ivanic, 1998; Kramsch, 1993; 2011; Matsuda, 2001; 2015; Norton, 2000; 2013). Much of this research acknowledges the impact of future identity goals on writing (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Harklau, 2000; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Roozen & Herrera, 2010; Schwartz, 2010; Shuck, 2010). In practice, however, the research methodologies used have privileged the communities that participants identify with either in current or past contexts. This contradiction is apparent in the common methods of study, such as textual analysis, text-based interviews, and observation and conversation analysis (Hyland, 2011; Ibrahim, 2011; Jule, 2004; Neumann & McDonough, 2015; Storch, 2013; Tardy & Matsuda, 2007). These methodologies have yielded valuable and complex understandings of identity by accounting for past experience and current contexts but have not empirically accounted for future-oriented conceptions of identity.

These limitations of research methodologies that emphasize past or current circumstances, rather than future considerations, have had ramifications for identity theory. Identity theories have generally focused on how language learners are influenced by social positionings, and how they reflexively or discursively construct identity in response to various communities and contexts. What is yet to be fully understood is how language learners negotiate these past experiences and present social positionings and exercise agency to develop and enact future identities. I term the interplay between these factors and their impact on an individual's hopes for the future *aspirational identities*. Empirically accounting for aspirational identities is important because the focal students of multiple studies have indicated that, in addition to past experiences and current contexts, they also take into account their future aspirations as they develop, negotiate, and enact identities (Cox, 2010; Darvin & Norton, 2014;

Norton, 2013; Roozen & Herrera, 2010; Schwartz, 2010). In this project, I seek to honor these considerations by listening to the focal students' experiences and perceptions of developing their aspirational identities within the context of a university writing program.

The primary goal of this project is to generate an understanding of how the confluence of past experiences, current contexts, and future aspirations contributes to identity development and/or transformation within the context of a university writing program. Within the writing program, a secondary goal is to examine the potential influence of aspirational identities on multilingual students' investment in first-year composition (FYC). In order to account for the complexity of identities in various contexts, I also explore what factors participants consider influential to their aspirations, and how their perceptions of these influential factors might affect their abilities to exercise agency while at the university. In accordance with these goals, I use identity as the primary theoretical lens to analyze the experiences of multilingual students enrolled in a FYC program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Their experiences are elucidated through a combination of survey data and a sequence of qualitative in-depth interviews. The first chapter provides an overview and definitions of the foundational concepts used in the study: aspirational identities, aspirational communities, investment, and agency. At the end of this chapter, I will provide an outline for the rest of the thesis.

1.1 Foundational Concepts

This research project aims to study aspirational identities and investment in the experiences of multilingual students enrolled in first-year composition courses. The study population includes both international (defined as individuals who hold a Visa) and resident students (defined as students who completed all or most of their primary school in the United States but whose primary home language is not English), as well as participants from both the multilingual and mainstream FYC course sequence. For the remainder of the study, I will refer to these two populations as international and resident multilinguals, respectively. I have chosen to focus on first-year students because research has indicated

that during key transitional phases—such as the transition from high school to university—aspirations for the future may be particularly significant in how individuals develop, transform, and enact particular identities (Leki, 2007; Schwartz, 2010).

Key transitional phases are identified as a critical moment for identity development by researchers taking a sociocultural perspective of language learning (Ivanic, 1998; Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Norton, 2000; 2013; Pavlenko, 2001). According to the sociocultural perspective, any act of writing is influenced by how an individual is positioned across multiple communities and contexts. These communities might be based in political affiliation, ethnic groups, cultural values, economic status, religion, family, and many others besides (Ibrahim, 2011; Kendrick & Hissani, 2007; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2006; Peckham, 2011; Lam, 2000). In responding to (or ignoring) how they are positioned by these communities, individuals develop and enact particular socially constructed identities. In this study, I account for how identities are developed in particular social contexts by exploring the concept of agency as it pertains to identities. The most influential definition for this study is Saenkhum's (2016) definition, which is, "the capacity to act or not to act contingent upon various conditions" (p. 109). I view this definition as in line with sociocultural perspectives of the multilingual condition because it recognizes the impact of particular community influences as some of the conditions that either provide or constrain opportunities for agency. The value of accounting for agency when researching aspirational identities will be delineated further in Chapter 2.

In addition to the impact of these social positionings on identities, some researchers have demonstrated the impact of sociocultural factors on how identities are discursively conceptualized through writing (Davila, 2012; Hirvela, 2005; Hyland, 2012; Jeffery, 2011; Lam, 2000; Matsuda, 2015). This increased focus on writing and its impact on identity development in sociocultural contexts has been informed by Norton's (1995; 2000) theory of *investment*. Although the theory of investment was initially developed in response to the global migrations and diversifying populations of English of the late

20th century, it has consistently furthered understandings of how identities are a product of both individuals and communities (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Kramsch, 2013; Norton, 2000; 2013; 2016; Norton-Pierce, 1995; Norton & McKinney, 2011). In this study, investment will be conceptualized along the lines of Darvin and Norton (2015), who propose that investment is located “at the intersection of identity, ideology, and capital” (p. 1). In broad terms, accounting for investment is important to the current study for two reasons. First, this is important to acknowledge the negotiation between individuals and communities during identity development, and second, for the recurring connection between writing and identity examined by researchers focused on investment. The theory of investment and its relationship to aspirational identities will be delineated further in Chapter 2.

The connection between identity and writing has a long history of examination across multiple fields of study, including L2 writing, composition, and sociolinguistics. Taking a sociocultural perspective can provide an explanation for this connection by elucidating how individuals often first encounter or interact with new communities through writing. Literate acts are therefore a primary means of identity development. Herrington and Curtis (2000), for instance, demonstrated over the course of nine years how individuals “develop[ed] new writing skills as they were recomposing themselves as human beings in response to other human beings” (p. 13). As many researchers examining writing and identity together have pointed out, writing is particularly important to identity development when it serves a community gatekeeping function, such as in standardized testing and university acceptance and placement (Harklau, 2000; Ivanic, 1998; Saenkhum, 2016). The ability to write “well” in edited academic English has also become linked to affirming or resisting socially constructed identities (Ibrahim, 2011; Peckham, 2010; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Smitherman, 1995; Vandrlick, 2010). These socially constructed identities may either help or hinder an individual’s ability to develop aspirational identities, as these identities are often contingent upon an individual’s entrance into particular communities. In this study, I will term the specific communities that writers seek to enter *aspirational communities*.

It is impossible to speak of aspirational identities without also acknowledging aspirational communities. Like other identity theorists, I view identities and communities as intertwined in ways that are complex, fluid, and multifaceted. The *aspirational* nature of these identities complicates matters because, being contingent upon future contexts and potentially ephemeral desires, these identities can be abandoned, replaced, transformed, or even achieved. Once an aspirational identity has been enacted, it is no longer aspirational, but rather, is *an* identity. The transformational potential of aspirational identities makes key transitional moments a particularly valuable time of study because these contexts imply that individuals may be embracing new aspirational identities even as former aspirations are achieved. Further complicating matters, it should also be acknowledged that different identities and communities are not always divided by clear boundaries. With this notion, the theory of aspirational identities expands research on multimembership (Wenger, 1998). This is particularly true since aspirational identities are informed and constrained not only by a single aspirational community, but rather by how individuals are positioned by multiple communities across various contexts.

When speaking of identities, I will use the verbs “developing” and “enacting” to differentiate between identities that individuals feel they must still actively work towards, and those that they feel comfortable or confident claiming as their own, respectively. For instance, aspirational identities can be described as *in development* when an individual is still in the process of imagining what their membership or role in a community might entail. Put simply, identities are multiple and changing, making any study of identity difficult at best. Particularly in the current project, I recognize that aspirational identities may be a fleeting concept, subject to multiple influential factors as individuals move between communities and contexts. To account for the ephemerality of aspirations, I have chosen to rely on self-reported responses through survey and interview data. While I recognize the challenges inherent in analyzing self-reported data, these data sources are appropriate because the goal of this study is to illuminate how an individual’s aspirations may develop, shift, and transform during their time

in a first-year writing program. For achieving these goals, I view the ambiguity of self-reported data as both a necessity and a benefit. This methodology also differs from previous research on identity that has sought to account for the role of aspirations in identity construction (Ivanic, 1998). While other researchers, such as Ringer (2016), have demonstrated that it is possible for aspirational identities to emerge from writing assignments, my research focuses on the development or enactment of aspirational identities—including through discursal practices such as writing, but also extending imagination without direct practice—without a specific focus on writing. Taken together, the current project and previous research can show the existence of aspirational identities in multiple forms and fashions, across times and contexts.

In this study, identities are conceptualized as both a function of and dependent on particular communities. For the remainder of this study, I will often use the terms “aspirations” or “aspirational identities” rather than “aspirational identities and communities” for the sake of brevity; however, when aspirational identities are mentioned, it can be assumed that this also connotes the aspirational communities to which these identities are linked.

1.2 Overview of Chapters

This chapter has defined the theory of aspirational identities, how this theory contributes to identity research, and the key concepts this theory is in conversation with. Specifically, the theories of agency and investment are both important considerations for researchers of aspirational identities. This chapter has also delineated the genesis of my research interests in how individuals’ identities are multiply situated across various communities and contexts. The chapters to follow will examine the history of identity across multiple fields, outline my research design for studying aspirational identities, report the results of a case study of multilingual students at the University of Tennessee, and finally draw implications for research and pedagogy.

In chapter two, I emphasize the importance of drawing from multiple fields and perspectives in

a study of identity. Given that the history of identity studies is based in multiple fields, I begin with an interdisciplinary review of how identities have been conceptualized by researchers through the concepts of voice, self, and imagination. In connection with the role of imagination for identity development, I will examine how investment has informed sociocultural theories of identity. Finally, I will explore the implications of recent theories of agency for identity studies, and conclude by delineating how these concepts—investment, identity, and agency—have informed my theory of aspirational identities.

Chapter three delineates my research design for examining the impact of aspirational identities on writing investment, including a detailed description of the research setting and participants, as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. This chapter also explains the value of using self-reported data and combining multiple data sources and methods of analysis in a study of aspirational identity.

Chapters four and five will report the results of this study by discussing the experiences of the study participants and drawing connections between their responses and those of other participants of other empirical research on identities. Chapter four focuses on findings on the relationship between aspirational identities and investment. These findings draw on both survey data from students enrolled in several different FYC courses as well as in-depth interviews with nine of the multilingual students that were enrolled in these courses. Chapter five will focus further on the experiences of the nine interview participants to delineate the multiple factors that influenced participants' identity construction, and how they perceived their own opportunities for agency in the midst of these influences.

Chapter 6 will draw from these results to discuss the implications of aspirational identities for writing programs and identity theory as a whole. The implications for writing programs will also be based on the experiences of survey respondents and interview participants in their FYC courses, the expectations they had for these programs, and their perspectives on learning to write at the university. These perspectives will contribute to curricular and programmatic suggestions for WPAs. In addition to

these programmatic implications, the implications of this project for researching and theorizing identity in multilingual contexts will be discussed. The final chapter will outline directions for future research.

2. An Interdisciplinary Review of Identity Research

Across multiple fields, identities are defined as discursively constructed (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2008; Pavlenko, 2001; Zhao & Llosa, 2008); as communally constructed (Cox, 2010; Norton, 2000; 2013; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Wortham, 2008); as contradictory and contingent (Harklau, 2000; Rhee, 2010); and as a constellation of factors (Kramersch, 1993; Powell et al., 2012; Shuck, 2010). These many disciplinary theories of identity are important to review together to garner a more holistic and complex understanding of the topic. A shared focus on the relationship between identity and writing in sociolinguistics, language acquisition, composition, and L2 writing has led this research to become a collaborative and interdisciplinary endeavor. My theory of aspirational identities carries on this tradition by applying the transdisciplinary lens of L2 writing (Belcher, 2013; Matsuda, 2013) to illuminate the interplay between the complex of influences from past experience, current contexts, and future aspirations.

The goal of this chapter is to establish the interdisciplinary groundwork for a theory of aspirational identities. My interest in aspirational identities arose out of a wish to empirically account for the importance of future contexts on writing investment among multilingual students in order to develop suggestions for research, pedagogy, and writing program administration. This chapter delineates a brief history of identity theories across multiple disciplines as these relate to the theory of aspirational identities. The chapter begins by reviewing the multiple terms associated with identity across various disciplines, and how these can be understood as facets of aspirational identities. These terms are *voice*, *self*, and *imagined identities*, respectively. I focus in particular on theories of discursive identity construction (Matsuda, 2001) and possibilities for selfhood (Ivanic, 1998), which, respectively, have been the most influential definitions of “voice” and “self” to the theory of aspirational identities. Additionally, I will detail why accounting for investment (Darvin & Norton, 2016) and agency (Saenkhum, 2016) is crucial to researching aspirational identities by reviewing relevant research on these two topics.

Finally, I will review how these theories have been synthesized in the constellation model of identity, and how the theory of aspirational identities adds to these conversations.

2.1 Defining Identity: Self, Voice, and Imagination

Particularly since the 1990s, many fields in the humanities, social sciences, education sciences, and other fields concerned with writing have developed disciplinary theories of identity. While these disciplines have developed distinct terminology, there are many commonalities to identity research. Three of the most commonly used terms in identity research are *voice*, *self*, and of course, *identity*. These terms have shifted meanings over time and across disciplines, and their meanings have occasionally overlapped with one another. Since voice, self, and identity are used in different ways across various fields, this section will define what disciplines have informed my understandings of these terms, and how they will be distinguished in this study.

2.1.1 Self

Discussions of identity in many of the social sciences, including SLA, often used the term “self” to describe how an individual identified in different social contexts (Ivanic, 1998). For instance, Ivanic (1998), drawing on Foucault’s (1988) work on “technologies of power” and “technologies of the self,” takes a critical view of how the self is socially constructed, proposing that the self is continually in flux (p. 13). The social constructionist view of the self recognizes that identities are constructed anew from moment to moment, meeting different contextual needs of the individual and community. For instance, Bruffee (1986) defines the social constructionist view as: “Social construction understands reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on as community generated and community maintained linguistic entities—or, more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define or “constitute” the communities that generate them” (p. 774). In this understanding of social constructionism, there are no identities or “selves” apart from those that arise from community interaction and ideology. This means that any “self” is multiple and contingent upon an individual’s interaction across multiple communities,

and furthermore, that there is no particular defining identity in the individualistic sense of the word. While undoubtedly valuable to understandings of identity, some researchers have pushed back on this notion for its limitations on individuals to agentively develop particular personal identities that contrast with social constructions or positionings. Ivanic (1998), for instance, added to the social constructionist perspective by accounting for the persistent role of what her research participants often called their “true” self as one of many socially and individually constructed *possibilities for selfhood*. This concept is the most influential idea of self to inform the theory of aspirational identities. Possibilities for selfhood draws on social constructionism in acknowledging the role of social positioning; however, this theory differs in that it takes into account the idea of a true self by acknowledging individual desires to create possibilities for particular representations of the self. In other words, how one is positioned by society—for instance as a man or woman, black or white, old or young—as well as how one positions oneself with regards to others form socially available possibilities for selfhood. These multiple selves, including an individual’s sense of their “true” self, are all aspects of an individual’s identity.

Differentiating between how individuals’ perceptions of their *true* and *performed* selves is valuable to the current study because often a “true” self connotes the self that an individual is aspiring to become. Researchers have noted the importance of a sense of true self to their case participants when these individuals have resisted social positionings they felt misrepresented their self (Roosen & Herrera, 2010; Wortham, 2008), as well as when they reported feeling a loss or removal of a sense of their true self through participation in particular communities (Shuck, 2010). Often, participants’ true self was reportedly at odds with their current actions, situations, or the self they had projected in a particular piece of writing. Ivanic differentiates between two versions of the self that are specifically future-oriented: the *aspiring* and *desired* self. From her research on adult learners returning to higher education, she defined the *aspiring self* as “the self one might become” (p. 224). Her participants were occasionally deceptive in their use of disciplinary terminology, attempting to project a version of the self

they aspired to even when they did not feel they had full control of the terms they used. The second category, a *desired self*, differs in that it connotes a self that a writer wants to project, but feels unable to, either because of inadequate resources or unfavorable social positionings. Ivanic differentiates these concepts in her study thus:

They [desired selves] differ from the projected, but somewhat fraudulent identities discussed in the previous section [on aspiring selves] in that there is no trace of them in the writers' essays: they can only be discovered in what the writers say they wished they had been able to project in the essays. (pp. 225-226)

These two versions of the self are highly relevant to the current study because both are specifically future-focused. As a contributing factor to identity, the *desired* aspect of the self for Ivanic was an identity desired but perceived as beyond an individual's reach. The perceived impossibility of obtaining the desired self leads to a *lack* of investment in that aspect of identity. My interest in aspirational identities is informed by Ivanic's desired and aspiring selves, but also examines the impact of multiple social contexts on identities—both the representation of identities in current communities, as well as the development of future identities.

The theory of a "true" self and the categories of *aspiring* and *desired* selves can provide a useful way of understanding discursive identity construction in social contexts and add to understandings of identity garnered through textual analysis. Written identities can never form a whole picture of an individual's identity, though written discursive acts are undoubtedly an important avenue of identity development. Textual analysis studies have illustrated that, though it may be conscious or unconscious in the mind of a reader, an idea of the writer's *self* is always projected through text, with ramifications for the reader's perceptions of the writer (Hyland, 2011; 2015; Matsuda & Tardy, 2008).

2.1.2 Voice

Discursive identity construction has most often been studied through the theory of “voice” in L2 writing. In both this and other fields, much of this research in the last decade has drawn from Matsuda’s (2001) definition of voice as: “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet ever-changing repertoires” (p. 40). Following this trend, my use of the term *voice* derives from Matsuda’s (2001) definition. This definition is useful for a study of diverse populations because it takes into account the use of rhetorical strategies by writers of all backgrounds in an attempt to move the fields of composition and L2 writing past earlier expressivist conceptions of voice, which had conceived of voice as a personal or individual choice in writing. I will review some of this research, and how it pertains to theories of identity, in the next few paragraphs.¹

Voice was seen as a personal feature of an individual’s writing by expressivist theorists in composition. Defined thus, voice could not be taught, but rather had to be discovered by individual writers, and this definition led to the use of personal writing and narrative in expressivist pedagogies. In a metadisciplinary history, Matsuda (2015) explores how subsequent movements in composition studies—structuralism and poststructuralism—led to new theories of voice, which “was favored by writing teachers who focused on genres that draw on personal knowledge” (p. 142). The use of this term has been critiqued for its reliance on western models of personal writing pedagogy. Specific critiques have questioned whether “voice” is possible to achieve when writing in a second language (Bean et al., 2003; Kaplan & Ramanathan, 1996), whether it can be exclusionary to linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic minority students (Peckham, 2010), and the fact that, by relying on a singular definition of an authentic self, it limits individuals possibilities for selfhood (Hyland, 2011; Ivanic & Camps, 2001;

¹ I recognize that this debate has a long history in composition and is too complex to be summarized in its entirety in a few paragraphs; interested readers should see Bartholomae’s (1995) and Elbow’s (1995) discussion of the topic, or else the corresponding section of Villanueva’s (1997) *Cross-talk in Composition Theory*.

Matsuda, 2002). Bean et al. (2003) note that the issue with relying on *voice* in pedagogy or research is that it relies on an overly narrow definition of identity, constrained by the text, with little regard for the many *contextual* factors of identity.

Despite these challenges, scholars at the turn of the 21st century sought to productively redefine the concept to be applied in classrooms (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Zhao & Llosa, 2007). Contrary to prior debates surrounding whether or not voice existed or should be taught, Matsuda (2001) found that voice was an unavoidable feature of writing even for a “collectivist” culture such as Japanese writing. He suggested that difficulty with voice pedagogy among L2 writers may arise not out of a collectivist, or sans-voice, culture. Instead, L2 writers might find expressing their intended voice difficult because their options for doing so are constrained by academic, linguistic, and social contexts, as these students are “deprived of familiar discursive options” (2001, p. 51). Similarly, Ivanic and Camps (2001) found that L2 writers struggled against unfavorable social positionings. However, as advanced writers, their participants were able to resist these positionings by “selecting and creatively recombining available resources” (p. 7). Like Matsuda, Ivanic and Camps propose an awareness-raising pedagogy with regards to voice. Other researchers later demonstrated the importance of voice in academic writing for advanced, as well as novice writers (Devila, 2013; Hyland, 2011; 2012; 2015; Jeffery, 2011; Tardy & Matsuda, 2007). Simply put, as the social implications of different syntactic, lexical, and grammatical features of writing change over time and across cultures, an awareness-raising pedagogy is important to help writers maintain control over their identities as represented in writing.

The debate surrounding voice has led to the conception of voice used in the present study as an unavoidable feature of writing, which is created either consciously or unconsciously by writers, and influences their possibilities for selfhood in social contexts. As Ivanic (1998) points out, writers may intentionally misrepresent what they feel is their true self in a piece of writing in order to enact a

desired self, and in so doing, purposefully deploying a particular *voice* that is a single, performed component of their identity. During data analysis, in chapters 4, 5, and 6, a distinction will be made between aspects of identity that I will refer to as *voice* and *self*. I will use *voice* to denote aspects of identity the participants refer to as connected to specific acts of writing. By default, I will therefore only be measuring the *intentional* use of voice; unintentional appearances of voice is another area of research beyond the scope of this study. By contrast, I will use the term *self* to refer to more abstract aspects of writing the participants refer to as intended to promote certain identities. The related concepts of *self* and *voice* are each defined as aspects of, though not constitutive of, identity.

2.1.3 Imagined Identities and Investment

Interest in the social construction of identities through discursive acts in composition and L2 writing coincided with and complemented interactionist theories of second language acquisition. Researchers working through the theory of interactionist SLA proposed that “social interaction was essential to acquiring the ability to use language” (Kramsch, 2013, p. 193). Particularly as societies became increasingly multilingual and multiethnic, researchers sought to account for the ways this increased diversity impacted identity and language learning. This research was also informed by Anderson’s (1983) “imagined communities,” which proposes that the importance of communities derived from individual’s *perceptions of* these communities, rather than the community itself. Investigating the role of social factors on identity construction represented a major shift in SLA, which had previously “view[ed] SLA as a predominantly mental and individual process” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 79). Arising from these traditions, Norton (2000) drew on the experiences of adult immigrant women in Canada to propose that language learners are strategic in their language education, choosing to invest in particular language codes based on the potential impact of these codes to their imagined identities. She defines imagined identities in terms of Anderson’s (1983) imagined communities:

Such communities include future relationships that exist only in the learner’s imagination as well

as affiliations—such as nationhood or even transnational communities—that extend beyond local sets of relationships (Warriner, 2007). These imagined communities are no less real than the ones in which learners have daily engagement and might even have a stronger impact on their current actions and investment. (Norton, 2013, p. 8)

An extension of Anderson's communities, imagined identities can be based in communities of the present, separated spatially, or those of the past or future. Communities, both physical and imagined, play an important role in aspirational identities, as it is through community engagement and interaction that individuals discover, choose, and enact particular identities. These multiple communities necessitate differing expressions of and strategies for developing identities, and the strategies individuals choose are based on future, aspirational communities and identities.

Anderson's theories were and continue to be influential to developing theories of identities as both socially constructed and constrained, as well as dependent on individual imagination and motivation (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Norton, 1998; 2000; 2013; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko, 2001). Both Ivanic's (1998) *possibilities for selfhood* and Anderson's (1983) *imagined communities* account for how imagination can be a more powerful shaping force on identities than current or contextual factors. This is particularly the case with regards to identity development through writing, such as that explored in research on voice; writers seeking to develop particular identities must imagine their current and future audiences and how these communities will react to their writing (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Tardy & Matsuda, 2008). Ivanic (1998), for instance, draws on imagined communities to propose that individual writers can come to embody "their assessment of their readers' expectations" (p. 225). The concept of imagination can be used to construct a temporally and spatially expanded notion of identities by including possibilities for imagined identities and communities ranging across national borders, as well as both forward and backward in time. My research accounts for imagination by focusing on participants' perspectives through in depth interviews as they traverse

between and imagine aspirational communities across linguistic and national boundaries.

Recently, the conversation surrounding imagined identities and investment has broadened in light of the impact of digital writing and the fluidity the global development of technology has afforded various individuals and communities in developing or transforming identities (Darvin & Norton, 2014; 2015; Hirvela, 2005; Lam, 2000; Matsuda, 2002; Norton & Early, 2011; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011; Tembe & Norton, 2008; Warschauer, 2000). Darvin and Norton's (2015) expanded conception of investment sought to "elucidate further that identity is a struggle of habitus and desire, of competing ideologies and imagined identities," and how the advent of the digital age has impacted social mobility. This expansion follows a trend in writing research in the last two decades to understand how identities are developed through writing and interacting in online spaces. Researchers have proposed that, when geographic boundaries no longer apply and cultural and economic differences are less apparent, individuals are able to enact imagined identities with far greater ease and swiftness than would be possible in physical contexts (Lam, 2000; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011; Palermi, 2013). The ramifications of increased means to develop new or desired identities in transcontinental spaces and communities has been examined not only in the context of identity and investment, but also for theories of agency. For instance, Darvin and Norton (2015) explain the relationships between agency and investment by delineating a theory of social ideologies that accounts for the complex ways that individuals and communities interact:

The recognition of ideology as a site of struggle, of competing dominant, residual, and marginal ideas, enables an understanding of identity that has a certain disposition to act and think a certain way, but also has the agency to restructure contexts. Agents act within a spectrum of consent and dissent, and what appears to be consent sometimes may be a matter of hegemonic practices. (p. 44)

Within the construct of a fluid and complex societal ideology, Darvin and Norton (2015) recognize four

key concepts of agency: first, agency as a matter of action *and/or* thought; second, agency as consent to social norms; third, agency as dissent to social norms; and finally, the potential for unquestioning consent to be misunderstood as an agentic act. Though Darvin and Norton (2015) do not spend time differentiating between the idea of consent to social ideologies as *an act of agency* and as *a surrender of agency*, this is a major point of distinction with ramifications for how individuals develop aspirational identities. It is important to understand this distinction because an aspirational identity is an individual's desired future, which they develop or enact agentially, rather than a passive acceptance of social ideologies that construct pre-established or acceptable future paths. This distinction can be better understood by examining recent conversations surrounding agency and identity.

2.2 Enacting Identities: Agency

Up till now, I have reviewed research on identity as it has been considered in research on *voice*, *self*, *imagination*, and *investment*, and how scholars have increasingly moved to acknowledge the situated, communally constructed nature of identities. This section reviews scholarship on agency in order to understand how aspirational identities, specifically, may be developed and enacted in concrete contexts. Scholarship on agency in recent years has developed similarly to identity research, with multiple scholars developing theories of agency as a located, community-based phenomenon (Darvin & Norton, 2014; 2015; Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016; Saenkhum, 2016; Sternberg, 2015). These researchers all propose that the ability to exercise agency is contingent not just upon individual motivation or action, but also on community interaction and ideological structures that can both constrain and create conditions for agency. Researchers have described the favorable alignment of these ideological, contextual, and individual factors as the *optimal conditions* for agency (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016, p. 53; Saenkhum, 2016, p. 109). This study accounts for these conditions by questioning the influences participants perceived as impacting their opportunities for developing aspirational identities and exercising agency. I will refer to these influences as ideological, contextual, and

aspirational. Ideological influences relates to Darvin and Norton's (2015) construct of *ideology*, and come from political, environmental, or social ideologies. Contextual refers to social or community influences, such as advice from family, friends, or advisors. Aspirational influences relate to Ivanic's concepts of *desired* and *aspiring* selves in that these influences derive from an individual's hopes for the future. These terms will be further delineated in chapter 3 when the coding categories are introduced.

This study departs from previous research on identity in that I specifically account for how opportunities for agency influence the development and enactment of aspirational identities. More often, researchers have studied identity through the lens of *resistance*, as either conscious heteronormative action or chosen non-participation. Resistance is one type of agency noted by Darvin and Norton (2015), through it is far from the only type. The idea of resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, emphasizes the role of community by defining agency in terms of actions taken *against* or *along with* a particular discourse or set of practices. For instance, Ivanic (1998) describes the experiences of non-traditional university students as they sought to tailor their writing to meet the expectations of academic audiences, an act of agency by consenting to and attempting to enact the writing style of a particular community. Other research on university students from multilingual (or multi-dialectic) backgrounds has found that language learners often resist contextual/ideological discursal structures when they feel these are untrue to their identities, including the identities they have developed based on past experiences, current contexts, or future aspirations. Identity theorists have illustrated how resistance occurs when individuals are positioned as *outsiders* by communities or ideologies, a positioning often based on gender (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004), race (Canagarajah, 2006; Hiroshimana, 2010; Ibrahim, 2010), economic status (Peckham, 2010; Vandrick, 2010; 2014), and culture or language backgrounds (Lam, 2000; Jule, 2004; Norton, 2000; 2013). Resistance has therefore been studied frequently among individuals as they transition to new or additional communities, such as those of workplace, national, or educational contexts. Due to my understanding of resistance as an important

aspect of agency, I will differentiate and describe further the active or passive means of resistance used by individuals through examining several case studies.

Passive resistance can be an obstacle in language learning contexts because nonparticipation can lead language learners' identities to be constructed by external agents. For instance, Julé (2004) and Norton (2000) both illustrate how, when language learners choose nonparticipation, their identities are constructed by contextual sources such as schoolboards, instructors, other students, or coworkers. Julé documents the experience of Amandeep, an elementary student who, by remaining silent, was constructed by her teacher as "the good kid" and given little extra assistance or attention. Similar conclusions are drawn in Norton's research on adult Canadian immigrants, when one participant, Eva, is mocked by coworkers and given the worst jobs in the restaurant where she works. In silence, she is construed as a "stupid person" who cannot participate in the community of either coworkers or restaurant patrons (p. 110). When she spoke out, however, she gained status in the community as a legitimate participant and was able to join in the interactions of her workplace and practice English (2013, pp. 98-110). Unlike Eva in the workplace, however, Amandeep was unable or unwilling to advocate for herself. Julé documents how the classroom practices of the teacher inadvertently led many of the female students to be less talkative, and therefore, "how gender may correspond to access to linguistic opportunities in a language classroom" (p. 77). Because participation in multiple new communities is an unavoidable aspect of university life, it is important that language learners maintain a sense of agency and their own ability to choose communities to (and not to) invest in.

In addition to resistance through silence, resistance can also occur when language learners refuse to be silenced. The use of language as a means of resistance has been documented among both native English-speaking and L2 students. Wortham (2008) illustrates how Tyisha, an African American high school student, continually resisted her instructor's and classmates' ethnicity- or gender-based constructions of her, first as a typical "promising girl," and later as a "disruptive outcast," (p. 212) by

continuing to answer questions in class even when others ignored her and using African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Other researchers have studied how resistance to being positioned as ethnic or racial minorities can become manifested in language use for international students. Ibrahim (2011), for instance, illustrates how African language learners in North American contexts may acquire AAVE because they are positioned as *ethnic* (rather than linguistic) minorities by white Anglophone communities. Ibrahim argues that his participants' choice to use AAVE constituted an act of agency in that it was "simultaneously an act of investment, an expression of desire, and a deliberate counterhegemonic undertaking" (p. 151). These findings supports Matsuda's (2002) assertion that multilingualism can be a type of agency, because multilingual individuals have greater linguistic repertoires from which to choose when interacting across diverse contexts.

In addition to immediate acts of agency through resistance, recent research on agency has encouraged scholars to examine the ways opportunities for *future or internal* agency might be encouraged by classroom or institutional practices (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016; Saenkhum, 2016). Agency in this understanding has been described as the ability to find meaning in various required tasks (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016) and the capacity to question and negotiate contexts in the present and plan for the future (Saenkhum, 2016). Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016) for instance, describe how some university seniors invested in writing instruction because the types of writing they learned might create future opportunities for agency within their careers. These opportunities for agency are less overt than outright dissent or consent, both of which require interaction with a contextual or ideological factor. The abilities to plan, negotiate, question, and find meaning are all impacted by these factors, but cannot be studied by means of observation or an analysis of the community or ideology surrounding an individual. Rather, they necessitate the use of self-reported data, since these acts of agency take place solely within an individual and are thus contingent upon individual perceptions. This research on agency as a mental or individual ability to choose, plan, negotiate, and find meaning is important to aspirational identities

because these identities are formed mainly through mental processes. In other words, aspirations must first be imagined by individuals, before they can be enacted. Being able to envision themselves in new contexts and communities and plan for the future are therefore critical to developing aspirational identities.

In this study, the concept of agency can be understood as how individuals interact with(in) communities to create favorable identities. These acts may include both active or passive means of resistance, as well as chosen conformity or assimilation. While language learners may choose non-participation in a community as a form of resistance, the experiences of these studies' participants illustrate that purposeful identity construction is crucial, particularly for language learners occupying minority positions. However, it is important to remember that identities are multiple, and that different identities may afford different opportunities for agency.

2.3 Understanding Identities

Identity research in the last decade has continued to acknowledge the important roles of voice, self, and imagination in identity construction, but also sought to understand how individuals maintain coherent identities as they move between multiple communities (Cox, 2010; Darvin & Norton, 2014; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; 2010; Roozen & Herrera, 2010; Schwartz, 2010; Shuck, 2010). Researchers have applied various metaphors, such as *constellations* (Kramsch, 1993) or *webs* (Cooper, 1995), to describe how different identities shift in and out of focus for a single individual as they move through various communities and contexts. I will use the constellation model to describe how participants in this study were multiply positioned and influenced by an array of contextual, ideological, and aspirational factors, and how these factors led them to represent themselves differently at the university and to develop various aspirational identities. The constellation metaphor is useful because it allows an understanding of the multiplicity of identity, in which individuals are continually developing and enacting an array of connected but diverse identities across different contexts. The theory of aspirational identities adds

complexity to this understanding by providing a heuristic to describe the reasons for and means behind these shifting identities. For a theory of aspirational identities, the means of transitioning between various identities can be understood as the *conditions for agency*, whereas an individual's reasons for embracing different identities in various contexts are described as *investment*.

The constellation model of identity can be used to conceptualize the multiple ways individuals are positioned in social contexts based on factors such as race, gender, culture, language, and social class. Shuck (2010), for instance, applies the constellation model of identity to a case study of four female Afghani students entering a United States university. Their first years in the university were characterized by choices of how and where to invest in identity, as well as how and where to resist identity constructions that would have been detrimental to their futures. The participants embraced an identity as multilingual when, as one participant put it, it was seen as “cool” among peers (p. 127). At the same time, however, these students actively resisted being positioned as ESL students by school administration. Their resistance occurred because the term clashed with both their aspirational and historical identities— first, by potentially constraining their class choices and holding back their graduation, and second, by misrepresenting their linguistic histories. They did not see themselves as “ESL” because they had been speaking English from a young age. Their historic as well as aspirational identities thus defined how they resisted current contextual positionings as “ESL” at the university. Similar clashes of identity and subsequent adaptation have been noted by Harklau (2000), Ortmeier-Hooper (2010), and Ibrahim (2010), all of whose participants were first-year university or high school seniors navigating the multiple social positionings of friend groups, institutional programs, and familial backgrounds as they transitioned to a university context. For Ibrahim's (2010) African participants, for instance, adopting AAVE (African American Vernacular English) became an important way of being accepted into a Black Canadian friend group, whereas learning edited academic English was important to succeeding in coursework. Similarly, Harklau's (2000) participants agentively resisted being positioned

as immigrants when it might hurt their academic prospects, but took advantage of this same positioning when it helped them gain assistance or sympathy from teachers. The experiences of these students can illustrate the importance of viewing identity as a constellation. As individuals move between communities and contexts, they present different identities and encounter different contestations of their identities. The theory of aspirational identities seeks to add an additional possibility to the constellation model by looking to how individuals develop future-oriented identities.

While the above researchers generally relied on observation data and spoken discursive acts, adjustments in identity based on contextual or ideological positionings may also be manifested in writing. For instance, Roozen and Herrera (2010) conducted a five-year case study of one writer as she developed her identity as a multilingual writer and professional. Angelica Herrera, a bilingual Spanish and English speaker and Roozen's co-author, saw writing as a primary aspect of her identity and aspired to use both Spanish and English writing styles in her first-year writing course. She encountered contextual challenges to this identity because her attempts to integrate Spanish-style storytelling were seen as inappropriate for the types of writing done in her English courses. In response, she exercised agency by speaking with her instructor about alternative writing styles for her final project. Her investment in her aspirational identity as someone who "write[s] deliciously and with emotion" overcame her contextual positioning as a student (p. 145). After the course, Angelica switched her major from English to journalism, where she felt able to pursue the kind of writing that matched her aspirational identity. In doing so, Angelica sought to maintain coherence across her multiple identities as a Hispanic woman, as a writer, and as a successful student—all part of her constellation of identities—by embracing a new aspirational identity as a journalist.

2.4 A Theory of Aspirational Identities

In proposing a theory of aspirational identities, I take the position that future, imagined communities have an equal or greater impact in how individuals invest in and exercise agency to develop identities in the present. Based on research from language acquisition, linguistics, composition, and L2 writing, it can be understood that aspirations are especially impactful during transitional contexts, such as the transition between different educational, professional, or social environments. Particularly influential to this study have been social constructionist theories, which emphasize how identities are co-constructed and developed by both individuals and communities. Norton's theory of investment (1995; 2000; 2013; 2016), Matsuda's (2001) definition of voice, Ivanic's (1998) possibilities for selfhood, and the constellation model of identity (Kramsch, 1993) can all be understood as following this tradition, because they seek to account for how identities are created through interaction and the social availability of opportunities for agency. As Matsuda (2015) points out, "identity is part of the interpersonal meaning that is negotiated through the interaction among the writer and the reader mediated by the text" (p. 145). By drawing on these theories, I have sought to extend conversations on identity by developing a theory of aspirational identities. This theory of aspirational identities accounts for the multiplicity of identity, how these identities are formed from multiple aspirational, contextual, and ideological factors, and above all, how and why individuals develop new identities in response to their aspirations for the future. To do so, I draw on survey and interview responses from multilingual writers in the context of a first-year composition program at a large, United States university.

3. Methods

The research design of this study is intended to elucidate how multilingual students negotiate ideological, contextual, and perceived future influences as they develop their aspirational identities while at the university. An additional goal is to develop suggestions and implications for research, as well as for both multilingual and mainstream writing programs. To do so, data collection was broken into two components: a survey distributed early in the Fall 2017 semester, and a sequence of two in-depth interviews conducted at the beginning and end of the same semester, respectively. Survey responses and interview transcripts were triangulated to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspirational identities are multilingual students in FYC invested in?
2. How do students perceive opportunities for agency to develop aspirational identities while at the university?
 - a. What factors of influence do students perceive that impact their aspirational identities and opportunities for agency?
3. What role might first-year composition courses play in creating opportunities for aspirational identity development?

In this study, I define aspirational identities as the influence of an individual's hopes for the future on their actions in current contexts. Action in this definition refers to agency, for which I will use a definition that accounts for individual choices both to engage with, or not to engage with, particular communities and contexts. This definition of agency is drawn from Saenkhum (2016), who defines agency as, "the capacity to act or not to act contingent upon various conditions" (p. 109). It is also important to note that agency, like aspirational identities, is impacted by social and contextual constraints, both perceived (by the individual) and actualized (by official policy). This means that the ability to exercise agency to enact aspirational identities is not merely a matter of individual choice. The

interrelations of aspirational identities and students' opportunities for agency will be described in greater detail in Chapter 5.

3.1 Research Setting and Context

This research was conducted at a large, public, 4-year institution in the southeastern United States. The participants were multilingual students taking coursework in the first-year composition (FYC) sequence. This sequence is broken into two tracks: the first, English 101 and 102, the mainstream track, and the second, English 131 and 132, for multilingual students. The mainstream and multilingual courses are equivalent, for-credit courses, which all students are required to take. Multilingual students may also be required to take English 121, a for-credit precursor to English 131 and 132, as well as ELI 110, a language class run by the English Language Institute at this university. Since ELI 110 is not directed by the English department, this class was not included in the survey distribution. The university places students based on standardized test scores (TOEFL, IELTS, ACT, SAT), but students have the option to challenge their placement by taking an in-house writing placement exam.

I chose to consider students in required FYC courses at a large United States university so that implications drawn from this research might be relevant to the many similar institutional contexts and writing programs across the US. The required nature of the FYC sequence at this institution positions these courses at gatekeepers to the professional and disciplinary communities many immigrant and resident multilingual writers aspire to join, making the potential role of FYC a valuable focus for a study of identity.

3.2 Research Population & Participant Selection

Student participants were recruited for the study initially through an email. In accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted instructors and requested that they forward the email to their students. The email they sent to their classes included my description of multilingual. This definition was, "if you grew up using languages other than English; primarily speak a

language other than English at home or with friends; are acquiring English as an additional language; or you are an international student with a visa.” The email invited students to complete a survey about their experiences writing, both in FYC and in other settings, and their goals for the future.

Demographic and basic information was collected from the survey, at the end of which students were asked to volunteer to participate in follow-up interviews. The total number of survey respondents was 34; six of these were removed from data analysis because they either left the vast majority of questions blank or, based on the demographic information they filled out, did not meet the criteria for participating in the study. Initially, sixteen students volunteered to take part in the interview, but only nine agreed to take part in the two follow-up interviews after I contacted them.

3.2.1 Survey Respondents

The survey was distributed in Fall, 2017, to a total of six FYC classes, which were taught by five different instructors. These classes included two sections of English 131, one section of 121, one section of 132, and two sections of 101. The total number of students enrolled in these sections was 104, including forty-six in English 101, eleven in English 121, thirty-four in English 131, and thirteen in English 132. Initially, four sections of English 101 were randomly selected using a random number generator. However, this strategy yielded no participants from English 101, perhaps because of the low percentage of multilingual students in the mainstream track. In order to include participants from English 101, I spoke with English 101 instructors individually to ask if they had students they either suspected or knew were multilingual in their classes. From these, two sections were selected. Though this population represented the largest proportion of students who saw the survey, at 46, many of them did not qualify to participate. The sections of English 121 and 131 were all of the sections offered that semester, while the two 101 sections were only two of over one hundred. Although there were two sections of English 132 offered that semester, the second section was not included in the research because I was unable to

visit it to introduce the project to students. The total number of respondents to the survey by section were: eight from English 101; three from English 121; fourteen from English 131; three from English 132.

Based on demographic information, these 28 respondents represented a diverse group and an accurate representation of the larger student population at this university. They ranged in age from 17 to 26, represented eight countries, spoke fourteen different languages, and had spent anywhere from their whole lives to less than one month in the United States. The majority of students (11) identified their home country as China, followed by the United States (5) and Saudi Arabia (4). Countries with one or two participants included Myanmar, India, Greece, Egypt, and Hong Kong. Many of the students identified multiple home languages, with the majority speaking Chinese (12), English (6), and Arabic (5) as their home language. Other home languages included Burmese, Cantonese, Korean, German, Vietnamese, Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, and Greek. There was a sharp distinction between the number of home languages and those the participants said they had spoken in K-12, however, with the total number of languages represented falling from fourteen to seven. At the university level, numbers fell again, from seven to just four: Chinese, English, Arabic, and Italian. However, these results may have been skewed by respondents not counting foreign language classes; three of the interview participants, for instance, reported taking Japanese classes at the university level, but none had reported Japanese as a language they used at the university.

3.2.2 Interview Participants

A total of nine students took part in the two follow-up interviews. The interview participants were from three different English classes—101, 131, and 132—and represented five home countries. Though none of the students were taking English 121 at the time of the study, three had taken it in the previous semester and so were still able to offer their perspectives on the course. Two were first generation residents, three were late arriving residents, and four were international students with VISAs. All four of the VISA students, as well as one late arriving resident, were from China, with the other

four students identifying Egypt, India, Hong Kong, and the United States as their home countries. Though Chinese was clearly the majority nationality of these participants, this population accurately reflects the multilingual population at this university, which enrolls over 80% of its international population from Asia (OIRA, 2017-2018). I will provide details for the nine interview participants below, including pseudonyms, majors, ages, and time of study in the United States. All time-sensitive data is reported based on the time of the first interview, except where otherwise specified. Some of the students chose their pseudonyms, while those who declined to do so were assigned pseudonyms:

- Allie was an 18-year-old freshman computer science major. She was a first-generation resident of the United States, and identified Hong Kong as her home. She reported speaking only Cantonese at home and spending most summers in Hong Kong. She was enrolled in English 101.
- Asim was a 26-year-old senior industrial engineering major from Egypt, whose first language was Arabic. He had spent four years in the United States, but had originally moved to the United States to work with a friend's business. He enrolled in the university after the business failed. He was taking English 131, and had previously completed English 121.
- Biyu was a 19-year-old freshman from China, majoring in business analytics. She was enrolled in English 131, but had previously completed English 121 and ELI 110. She had been in the United States for just over one year.
- Hai was a 20-year-old sophomore from China. He had yet to declare a major, though he was on the pre-med track. He had spent two years in the United States and had previously completed English 121 and ELI 110; he was enrolled in English 131.
- Holly was a 20-year-old junior, double majoring in journalism and business. She was enrolled in English 132, and had previously taken English 131. She was from China and had initially been enrolled in a Chinese university, before transferring to the US university after completing a semester as an exchange student in the previous year.

- Ilan was a 19-year-old freshman biological sciences major. He was a US resident, and had moved with his parents from India four years prior to the beginning of the study. He had graduated from a United States high school and was enrolled in English 101, but reported speaking only Hindi and Punjabi at home.
- Jun was an 18-year-old psychology major from China, who had been in the United States for just under one month. She was enrolled in English 131, having placed out of the other classes based on her test scores.
- Lian was an 18-year-old freshman computer engineering major. He was taking English 101 when we first met, but reported struggling with the level of English expected at the university. He had immigrated to the US with his parents five years ago and reported speaking only Chinese at home.
- Max was an 18-year-old freshman philosophy major, who was also on the pre-med track. He was a first-generation US resident, having been born to Vietnamese immigrants, and reported growing up speaking both English and Vietnamese at home. He was enrolled in English 101.

3.3 Data Collection

Data for this project derived from two sources: a survey and two interviews with each participant. The survey was distributed to students in beginning of September, in the Fall, 2017 semester, and closed to respondents on September 15th (see Appendix A). The goal of the survey was to ascertain basic demographic information about the incoming multilingual student population, what types of writing they were familiar with and hoped to learn more about, and what their aspirations were beyond their undergraduate years. To address these goals, the survey included questions about demographic information, as well as their goals for their English class and beyond, and the types of writing they were familiar with and felt would be important in the future. Short answer opportunities were included with many of the questions, encouraging participants to elaborate on both their past

experiences and future aspirations. Respondents were able to skip any question they did not want to answer. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to provide their name and email address if they wished to be included in the two follow-up interviews.

Two interviews with each participant were conducted at the beginning and end of the Fall, 2017 semester, respectively (see Appendix B). The first round took place between September 6th and 19th. The second round of interviews was split by winter break, and so took place between either December 12-14 or January 9-16. Each interview was conducted by myself in English and lasted 30-60 minutes. The goal of the first interview was to understand in greater detail the aspirations of the participants, particularly those they had indicated in the short answer questions of the survey, as well as what they anticipated learning in their FYC course. These questions led to discussions of their perceptions of their own agency and influential factors on their aspirations. In addition, four of the participants had been enrolled in English 121 or 131 previously, and questions for these participants were added that focused on their perception of these previous courses. In the second interview, questions focused on their experiences in their FYC course and the semester as a whole, and whether their aspirations had changed or developed in any way. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher in order to be analyzed in detail.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis began after the survey was closed to respondents in September, 2017, and followed a process of recursive analysis until the final write-up (Polio & Friedman, 2017). Survey data was used to provide answers pertaining to the first and third research questions: what aspirational identities students had, and what role they anticipated for FYC in helping them obtain these aspirations. Interview data was added to further understand why they focused on the writing types that they did, what influenced their aspirations, or how they perceived or created opportunities for agency to develop these aspirations. For the interview participants, data from both the survey and interview was

triangulated in order to provide an in-depth description of how the nine interview participants experienced opportunities for agency, influential factors, and developed their aspirational identities while at the university.

Survey data was coded in two ways: multiple choice and Likert scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while short answer questions were analyzed thematically. From the survey data, an initial qualitative coding scheme for identifying types of aspirational identities was developed, which was also applied to early coding of the interview transcripts. This coding scheme correlated with research questions one and three, and is shown in Table 1, below.

After the survey analysis, interview data was analyzed thematically. This led to both revisions and additions to the above coding scheme. The interview coding scheme is based on all four major research questions, but with a particular focus on question two, since the matters of agency and influential factors were not addressed by the survey. The coding categories were developed using an inductive, constant comparative method of analysis (Polio & Friedman, 2017). In addition to the categories listed above, two new categories were added to address research question two, and a code for “personal aspirations” (described below) was added to the first category. The resultant coding categories are shown in Table 2. Following the first round of interviews, all transcripts were first read and analyzed by myself to identify major themes across participants that were relevant to the research questions and develop a preliminary interview coding scheme. The code was then refined at a case analysis meeting (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with my researcher adviser, a practiced researcher in L2 writing and agency. Finally, an interrater reliability test was conducted with two PhD students who had experience in L2 writing and conducting empirical case studies.

Table 1: Survey Coding Categories for Aspirational Identities

Categories	Coding
1. What aspirational identities are multilingual students invested in while at the university?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional: a hope for an identity contingent upon a future career ● Academic: a hope for identity contingent upon gaining knowledge, including but not limited to further study in academia ● Social: a hope to enter a particular aspirational community <i>outside of work or educational settings</i>, such as heritage communities
2. What role might FYC play in helping students access their aspirational identities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addressing general concerns: “improvement” of writing skills, without reference to specifics ● Addressing mechanical concerns: including grammar, syntax, vocabulary, or citations ● Addressing communicative concerns: improving speed, style, or clarity (not limited to writing) ● Addressing internal concerns: improving confidence or “native” quality of writing

Table 2: Coding Categories for a Researching Aspirational Identities.

Categories	Coding
<p>1. What aspirational identities are multilingual students invested in while at the university?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional: a hope for an identity contingent upon a future career ● Academic: a hope for identity contingent upon gaining knowledge, including but not limited to further study in academia ● Social: a hope to enter a particular aspirational community outside of work or educational settings, such as heritage communities ● Personal: a hope to encounter or develop previously unknown options for identity, not tied to any external community
<p>2. How do students use agency to enact aspirational identities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Positive (+): choosing to consider, act on, or not act on current contexts ● Negative (-): feeling unable to choose/a lack of options
<p>3. What types of influences to students perceive impacting their agency and aspirational identities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ideological: environmental influences from culture, politics, or social norms, either of current or past contexts ● Contextual: influences from current contexts such as peer or teacher advice, coursework, and placement ● Aspirational: influences of internal motivation, such as self-perception of perceptions of personal success

Since I used an inductive code, my goal was not to report a percentage of interrater agreement, but rather to establish and refine a more reliable coding scheme by discussing coded interviews with other researchers. For the interrater reliability meeting, I randomly selected four of my full sample of nine interview transcripts that we each coded independently, and then discussed. Our discussion affirmed the three overarching types of aspirational identities: professional, academic, and social (Table 1). We coded professional identities when participants explained their aspirations for the future by referencing particular careers they wanted to hold or workplace environments they wanted to enter. In contrast, academic aspirations were coded when participants referred to their aspirations of being seen as knowledgeable, continuing education, or otherwise continuing to learn. Finally, social identities were coded when participants referenced particular communities they hoped to enter and people they wanted to interact with—for instance, a community of Chinese speakers or of English speakers. It is important to note, however, that as a group we were unsatisfied with the category of “academic” aspirations. While this category was suitable for the survey data, it did not sufficiently capture the variety and detail of aspirations discussed by the interview participants. In order to address this concern, in January, 2018, after conducting the second round of interviews, a new code was developed to address this concern. Following a discussion with my research adviser, this code was titled “personal,” and included the participants’ aspirations to continue exploring new options or opportunities for identity development for entirely intrinsic reasons. These included aspirations to explore new or unfamiliar aspirational identities, as well as internal aspirations to fulfill a self-described notion of success.

In addition to adding a category of aspirational identity, the interview data was used to develop coding categories for perceptions of agency and influential factors. These two codes were refined during the interrater reliability meeting. When coding for agency, we coded any time students reported considering their options for the future, including choosing to take action or not to take action (Table 2).

This follows Saenkhum's (2016) recommendations. Negative (-) agency was coded when students felt frustrated by a perceived lack of control over the future. In many of the instances coded for agency, the students also referred to influential factors. When the influence was from a source in the individual's immediate contextual surroundings—such as advice from teachers, parents, or peers, or course requirements at the university—we coded this as a contextual factor. When the participant perceived an influence was from a disembodied political, social, or cultural entity, it was coded as an ideological factor. Finally, when participants referred to the influence of an internalized or personal goal for the future, it was coded as an aspirational factor.

In order to address the fourth research question, students' responses from both survey and interviews were combined to draw both practical and theoretical implications for FYC and writing programs more generally. The experiences they reported that were used to answer this question included their perceptions of their FYC courses, their perceptions of writing and its importance for their aspirations, and the types of communication they saw as most valuable to obtaining their aspirations.

In developing and applying the coding categories reported in Table 2, I recognize that categories of identity and influence often overlap with each other. Much of the interview data were representative of multiple codes or categories. As noted by other identity researchers, particular categories of identity cannot be isolated from each other in day-to-day life (Ivanic, 1998; Leki, 2007; Norton, 2013). This means that it is unproductive to isolate particular facets of identity development for research and analysis. When presenting the results, I will divide the results by the research categories as far as possible, but will provide explanation where the participants' responses overlapped across categories.

4. Aspirations and Investment

The goals of this project are twofold: first, to add to existing models of identity by drawing on the experiences of multilingual students at a university writing program to develop a theory of aspirational identities; second, to suggest implications for research, pedagogy, and writing program administration. Chapter 4 will focus on the first goal by combining the data of the survey and two interviews to delineate types of aspirational identities, and how these identities impacted the investment of the student participants at the university. Taken together, the results of the survey and two interviews provide a detailed narrative of how multilingual students navigate their aspirations within this university. These results are important not only for this program, but also for L2 writing scholars and other researchers and teachers with an interest in identity, because they add to existing understandings of identities as complex, flexible, and influenced by multiple shifting factors and contexts.

Chapter 4 will foreground the stories of the nine interview participants, together with the larger set of survey participants, in order to ascertain what aspirational identities these students have as they enter FYC classrooms, and how these might impact their investment in the university context. I will begin by drawing on both survey and interview data to answer the first research question: what aspirational identities do students enter first-year composition with? The answer to this question will be divided into four categories of aspirational identity, which were described in Table 2. I have ordered these sections so as to create a coherent narrative of how the research population, and most particularly the nine interview participants, maintained coherence between their past experiences, current contexts, and future aspirations as they developed their identities. While personal aspirations were often the most important for this coherence, I have chosen to describe these last because it is important to understand each participants' overall aspirations within the context of various social,

academic, and professional communities in order to delineate how personal goals for identity brought their aspirations together.

The survey results will be used to provide demographic information as well as an overview of the aspirations of a portion of the student population at this university. The interviews will be used to provide a richer, more detailed understanding of the aspirations of a few students. Excerpts from the interviews and short answer questions from the survey are reported in their original, un-edited forms, in order to let the participants speak with their own voices (Leki, 2007; Saenkhum, 2016). Though every effort will be made to represent each participant as completely as possible, the results reported here do not claim to be comprehensive; either of the full amount of data collected or of the participants' identities. The sequence of interviews resulted in over two hundred pages of coded transcripts; particular stories and experiences from each participant have therefore been selected for this thesis, necessarily at the expense of others.

4.1 Aspirational Identities in the Survey

A total of 34 students responded to the survey, but as explained in Chapter 3, only 28 were included in data analysis. Determining what aspirational identities students had as they entered FYC was in many ways the most difficult aspect of this study. As noted in Chapter 3, the respondents came from diverse backgrounds, and their current circumstances were equally diverse: they represented eighteen different academic majors. The most represented major was Engineering, with four students; also of note were Psychology and Biological Sciences, each with three. The rest of the disciplines represented had only one or two participants each. Particularly as many of the respondents had spent less than one year at the university, it was not assumed that their academic major reflected their aspirations for the future. Though concrete aspirational identities were not apparent in the survey, the results of a series of 5-point Likert scale questions yielded some general aspects of aspirational identities (see Appendix A). Many of the participants also indicated that English writing would be "valuable" for their future, and

most of these elaborated on why they felt this way in a follow-up short answer question. These components of the survey will be reported in this section.

Of the twenty-eight survey respondents, twenty-three filled out the Likert scale questions. From their responses it was revealed that, at least for these students, the majority of them felt fairly confident in both knowing what they planned to do after graduation and their ability to find work with a college degree in their field. To these two questions, only one student in each marked below “Neither agree nor disagree,” with the majority answering “Somewhat agree.” From this future career, they generally desired stability and a large salary. These responses were coded as aspects of professional aspirations; however, without further explanation or details, it was impossible to determine to what extent factors such as income or stability influenced the respondents’ aspirations.

An additional insight from the survey data came from a thematic analysis of the short answer questions. These questions prompted students to explain why they had chosen particular options in the multiple choice sections, and were used to provide an indication of what types of writing students were invested in, what they expected from their FYC courses, and whether the content of FYC might promote investment in writing education. The most important survey question for this purpose was Q16, asked students to provide more detail to the question, “English writing will be (valuable / not valuable / not sure) for my future” (Q15). Of the twenty-four who responded to Q15, twenty-two said that it would be valuable. Twenty-three students elaborated on why they thought it would be so in Q16. Combined, these responses provided two insights: first, a clear majority of students were invested in English writing; second, the types of writing they were invested in depended on *particular types of aspirational identities*. These three types of aspirational identities—professional, academic, and social—were all apparent in relatively equal numbers in the responses to this question, and revealed that the survey respondents associated particular writing types with particular aspirational identities. The responses to

this question are divided by the types of aspiration and appear in the tables at the beginning of each corresponding section of the chapter, sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, respectively.

For the rest of this chapter, the three types of aspirations noted in the survey will be described in greater detail by combining the survey and interview data. At the beginning of sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4, a table with responses to Q16 will report all of the responses that were coded for the corresponding type of aspirational identity: social, professional, or academic, respectively. In each table, bolded text indicates what I coded as the focal type of aspiration for the section. When one of the respondents to the survey also participated in the interview, this will be noted with the student's pseudonym; survey respondents who did not participate in the interviews are represented by numbers. Differentiating between these types is valuable not only for researchers of identity, but also for multilingual writing programs, as it provides an indication of what type or aspect of writing the students were most invested in.

4.2 Social Aspirations

Social aspirations tended to correspond to students being invested in English writing due to the increased mobility and understanding it offered. These aspirations, as recorded in Table 3, were indicated in the survey when respondents said that writing would help them to be better understood, communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, or travel between language communities.

Eight of the respondents emphasized the importance of writing for communication, with five of these focusing on the value of English as a universal language. Respondents 1, 4, 6, and 7, for instance, all explained that English was valuable for communicating with people from different places and backgrounds. Though respondents 1, 4, and 7 all mentioned particular communities related to work or education, they still indicated in their responses that being able to write well in English was valuable to them not only for its use in these communities, but also because of its "universal" nature.

Table 3: Social Aspirations in Q16

Respondent	Coded response to Q16
1. (Allie)	I want to start working at a company here in the U.S. and be able to communicate with other people and make a network . English would be easier for communication, because it is becoming a universal language .
2. (Max)	My plan for my future is that I become a surgeon. After I graduate, I will definitely need to be able to utilize my writing to propel myself forward into medical school and after. During my career, I am sure I will have to be writing, whether it be to my fellow doctors or to the general public .
3.	Those who can write well are better understood when someone is reading their writing.
4.	Valuable in preceding a higher level of education. In addition to English being a second language in most countries, it will helpful for communication with other people from different places . Among other things.
5.	Valuable as it will help me express my findings, thoughts, and interests to the world in a better way.
6.	It is how the majority of the world communicates.

Table 3 continued

Respondent	Coded response to Q16
7.	<p>It is the most common language that is spoken nowadays around all over the world.</p> <p>For instance, in my home country, a person can get more chances to get a job if he/she has a high level of education and has enough number of certificates, also, almost all people need to have high scores in English skills; especially when it becomes the common language which is taught in universities.</p>
8. Lian	<p>because in Engineering much know to professionally communicate through writing.</p>

For these students, part of their investment in English writing was due to the social aspiration of mobility, being able to move, work, and interact with people “all over the world,” as Respondent 7 put it. The importance of social aspirations was further emphasized in the interviews. Allie, for instance, when asked about her response to Q16, explained that being multilingual would help her to learn more about computer science from different perspectives:

Not only Hong Kong, but I think I would really like to go to Japan because they’re so technologically advanced, it would be an awesome experience...and just being able to embrace their culture, too, I think would be an awesome experience, too.

Though she had been born and attended school in the United States, Allie had returned to Hong Kong most summers with her parents and considered it her home. Her international upbringing was reflected in her aspirations: she hoped to work across multiple research communities in the United States, Hong Kong, and Japan. Many of the students, including long-term residents like Allie as well as late-arriving residents and immigrant students, had internationally focused social aspirations. Holly, for instance, responded to why she had chosen to study journalism in this way: “I like listening to people’s stories.

Like if I work in a media environment, no matter in China or anywhere else, I can meet people from different backgrounds.” Like Allie, Holly hoped to travel in her future work, and both of them emphasized the importance of being able to interact with multiple communities across different languages. Drawing from the survey results can add to the value of this finding by indicating that their experiences are not simply anomalies, but rather a relatively common aspiration for international and multilingual students at the university. Other research has indicated the importance of intercultural communication skills for both L1 and L2 students (Goodwin, 1988; Kramsch, 2011; Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Reichelt, 2003; Walker, 2010). Goodwin (1988), for instance, drew on the perspectives of L1 English students to propose the importance of teaching intercultural communication in FYC courses. These students viewed such skills as valuable because they believed they would be working in multinational, multilingual professional spaces post-graduation. Holly’s and Allie’s experiences indicate the continuing importance of providing students opportunities to explore languages other than English in FYC, and suggest these opportunities could help foster increased investment in writing education.

In addition to entering new or unfamiliar communities, another aspect of social aspirations became apparent in the second interview with Allie. In addition to communicating with new communities in different countries, Allie also aspired to become a part of a heritage community by enrolling in a Mandarin Chinese class. Although this was not a required class for her, she explained that it was important to her to learn more Chinese, and particularly character writing, in order to feel more connected to the country she identified as her home:

Taking it [Chinese] now really helps and I get to learn more about my culture and being able to read and write, I get to learn something about it....Being able to read certain phrases and being able to text my mom in Chinese, that’s really cool. It’s the little things that motivate me to take that class.

Allie's aspirations to learn Chinese can be further understood in the context of heritage language and identity research (Doerr & Lee, 2013; Leeman, Rabin & Roman-Mendoza, 2011). Leeman, Rabin, and Roman-Mendoza (2011), for instance, note that "one key challenge of language learning is for learners to retain their sense of self while also appropriating new discourses and subjectivities" (p. 481). While a full and detailed discussion of heritage language (HL) scholarship is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting here due to the emphasis in HL on breaking down linguistic or cultural hierarchies that promote particular discourses at the expense of others. My results join the growing body of work not only in HL, but also in L2 writing and SLA, arguing for increased sensitivity to non-English languages and non-standard discourses in the writing classroom.

4.3 Professional Aspirations

Ten of the respondents to Q16 explained the value of English in terms of their future careers, the largest category of aspirations. For four of the respondents, professional aspirations were related to their social aspirations. These students, whose responses are reported in both Table 3 and Table 4, explained that writing was valuable both for communication in general and for specific professional reasons. Two of them, Allie and Respondent 7, linked their professional success to the ability to communicate with people all over the world. Other respondents (Table 4) mentioned specific careers or aspects of a career—such as document translation (Respondent 15) or writing research articles (Respondent 13)—while others wrote about English as a general requirement of their future career. Similar to the finding that social aspirations were often transnational in nature, several respondents mentioned that the value of English derived mainly from its use as a universal language. Respondent 15, for instance, explained that they would be translating documents, and Respondent 11 planned to work in an international company. Other participants indicated that English would be generally useful for their careers, without providing details. The lack of detail provided may have been due to many factors, including simply a lack of motivation to write more in the survey.

Table 4: Professional Aspirations in Q16

Respondent	Coded response to Q16
1. (Allie)	<p>I want to start working at a company here in the U.S. and be able to communicate with other people and make a network. English would be easier for communication, because it is becoming a universal language.</p>
2. (Max)	<p>My plan for my future is that I become a surgeon. After I graduate, I will definitely need to be able to utilize my writing to propel myself forward into medical school and after. During my career, I am sure I will have to be writing, whether it be to my fellow doctors or to the general public.</p>
7.	<p>It is the most common language that is spoken nowadays around all over the world. For instance, in my home country, a person can get more chances to get a job if he/she has a high level of education and has enough number of certificates, also, almost all people need to have high scores in English skills; especially when it becomes the common language which is taught in universities.</p>
8. Lian	<p>because in Engineering much know to professionally communicate through writing.</p>
10. Asim	<p>Valuable because I will be looking for jobs with my degree inside the United States which will require a good English language.</p>
11.	<p>I would like to work in an international company.</p>
12.	<p>It used a lot, at least as I think, in my future career.</p>
13.	<p>I'll be writing a lot of research articles, reports, and papers.</p>

Table 4 continued

Respondent	Coded response to Q16
14.	If I want to work in US , I have to enhance my writing in English.
15.	I will be translating documents from foreign languages into English (and vice versa)

The difference between these two types of professional aspirations were further illustrated by Allie and Holly. Perhaps because they were closer to graduating than most of the interview participants, Asim and Holly provided much more detailed descriptions of their professional aspirations and of the value of writing in various languages, including English, to obtaining these aspirations. Four of the survey respondents had experienced some university education in a home country other than the United States and could be classified as experienced writers. Experienced writers are typically defined in research as having had some education in their first language and writing in graduate, professional, or upper-level undergraduate writing contexts (Ivanic, 1998; Norton, 2000). By contrast, novice writers tend to be defined as students enrolled in FYC sequences without prior university education, or in K-12. When researchers have focused on younger participants, their identities are typically more flexible or multiple (Shuck, 2010), whereas experienced writers have often formed identities connected to particular professions (Cox, 2010; Norton, 2013). Out of the four experienced writers who responded to the survey, Holly was the youngest and Asim was the oldest.

Asim's experience was unique among the the interview participants. He was a senior engineering major, twenty-six years old, and was also a father. He had spent some time working in the United States with a friend's company, and had not originally intended to enroll in a university when he first emigrated. As might be expected, his professional aspirations were far more specific than those of the other participants. When asked about his goals for the future, he said:

It would be working much more with business industries, stuff like operation management and production planning...What I'm kind of now in is more about designs and design factors...but I kind of more like business. So I might go into engineering management after I'm done with my degree, to go more into the business field.

Within his specific goals, Asim seemed most concerned about gaining work experience directly related to his future career and obtaining the necessary qualifications. As he put it, "I just want to go in with some experience, I don't want to go in blank." Similar to the participants in Norton's (2000) study, who had also come to language learning classes from professional backgrounds (rather than from high school, as do so many FYC students), Asim aspired to be a competent, successful professional, and he wanted to be seen by others in this way, as well.

Similar to Asim, Holly had definite goals for her career post-graduation and had taken practical measures to ensure that she could find work that would allow her to be independent. This included adding a business minor to her journalism degree, as well as enrolling in at least 18 hours each semester to ensure that she would graduate on time. She planned to be an international correspondent, using both English and Chinese to work across borders. She said that her business degree ensured her a job with a livable income after graduation, and that this was a major reason why she had chosen it; the importance of economic factors for participants will be explored further in Chapter 5. In addition to working in the United States, she also hoped to work in the United Kingdom, after spending a semester abroad there. The experiences of Holly and Asim resonates with other identity case studies focusing on identities among experienced writers and nontraditional students (Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Kramsch, 2011; Norton, 2013). Norton's (2000; 2013) research in particular suggests the multiple potential outcomes of having specific professional identities for adult language learners. Coming from highly successful careers, several of her participants felt frustrated in Canada with how they were positioned by their new community. Their experiences, as well as those of Holly and Asim, illustrate how

L2 writers with pre-established professional identities can at once contribute to a more stable sense of self in spite of setbacks, as well as frustration with and a lack of investment in new contexts where their professional capabilities are not recognized. Asim's anxiety over entering a new profession "blank," in connection with Norton's (2000; 2013) research, indicates the importance of acknowledging students' previous experiences and the resources they bring to the classroom in addition to the new contexts they hope to enter.

Having specific professional aspirations is not unique to experienced writers (Shuck, 2010; Schwartz, 2010). While the majority of my participants would be classed as "novice" writers, in that they were generally 18-20 years of age and often had moved away from their parents' homes only within the last year or even month, several of them had clear and specific professional aspirations. Jun, for instance, was only 18 years old and had spent less than a month at the university at the time of the first interview, but was already focused on a particular profession. Jun hoped to become a clinical psychologist, something that was for her a very practical aspiration. She mentioned the importance of having definite job opportunities after graduation and of graduating on time, so as not to put a strain on her parents' finances. In this way, Jun was quite similar to Holly and Asim: all three of them explained their professional aspirations in terms of the likelihood of obtaining a stable job with a livable income, and they all adjusted their hopes for the future to meet these aspirations. For Asim, this meant taking more business classes to be qualified in engineering management, whereas for Jun this meant giving up a childhood dream of being a detective. She explained that she felt this career path was unsuitable for women: "Since I was a child I wanted to become a detective, [but] later I think maybe it is a little impossible for females. Like, you need to have a very stress[ful] life and you can fight with bad people." Instead, she had chosen psychology, something that she felt provided a more stable and obtainable career for a woman and that would still allow her to work with people.

Several of the other freshman interview participants—Ilan, Max, and Hai—had specific professional aspirations to enter the medical field. All three of them intended to enter the medical field in their self-identified home countries, which for Ilan and Max meant the United States, whereas for Hai this meant China. They all traced this aspiration to a childhood hope or experience that had led to a desire to help others; these experiences will be detailed in section 4.5 on personal aspirations. Ilan and Max, in particular, seemed to derive a strong sense of stability from their professional aspirations that allowed them to overcome or ignore setbacks such as grades or standardized testing. All three of them, for instance, expressed some level of trepidation about the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) and obtaining the required grades in their pre-med courses to enter medical school, but they pursued their aspirations in spite of these challenges.

A final aspect of professional aspirations that was important to many of the participants, which contrasted with the specific aspirations of Holly, Asim, and Jun, was the aspiration to remain open to different career paths and opportunities. This was true of Hai and Max, despite their goals to enter the medical field, and was also important to Allie, Biyu, and Lian. Though Hai occasionally seemed assured of his aspirations to enter medical school, he also emphasized the importance of maintaining an ability to “find my own way,” that is, a way other than the one his parents’ wanted for him. As one of the seven survey respondents who mentioned only general English skills as valuable for his future, Lian’s experience is particularly interesting to note here. Lian was very uncertain of his specific goals for the future, something he explained in the interview when I asked him to clarify what he meant in his response to Q16:

Lian: I haven’t found my goal yet. I definitely want to be better in English and, I don’t really know, I don’t understand much right now. I’m pretty confused; I’m sorry.

Researcher²: If you don't know what your goals for the future are, how do you prioritize your work and what you focus on right now?

Lian: I try to focus on studying, studying everything I have, and I will try to get involved with other people, [but] second, third, I'm not so sure about that yet.

Rather than having a specific path, Lian felt that the university was a time to explore different options for the future. For him, this lack of a specific plan appeared to cause a certain amount of anxiety, and also led him to be unsure of what areas to focus on during his undergraduate years. Lian's experience can add to Shuck's (2010) findings that flexible, undefined identities for young writers can at times be both an asset, as well as a source of distress or uncertainty over their future. For Lian, although his uncertainty undoubtedly caused him anxiety at times, it also led him to explore different paths to find what he felt he would enjoy. During his first year at the university, he changed majors, from computer science to computer engineering, and seemed much happier with his major in the second interview. His ability to remain flexible in his aspirations and the choices he made as a result of this flexibility can also add to conversations on the importance of opportunities for agency, particularly for young university students, as they develop their aspirational identities (Saenkhum, 2016). The connection between agency and aspirations will be discussed more in Chapter 5.

Two more students with uncertain professional aspirations were Biyu and Allie. Both of them were far more invested in English writing for its value in cross-cultural communication than for obtaining any specific professional aspiration. For Biyu, in particular, aspirations were decidedly *not* professional. When asked what she planned to do after graduating, she said:

I don't have to think about too much about career development or a good company or position,
I mean...people pursue these things, yes. But I don't have to reach this level...If I can do all the

² I have chosen to include both my questions and the participants responses in some instances when doing so is necessary to 1) accurately and truthfully report the interview data, and 2) maintain transparency about the extent to which the interview questions may have influenced the experiences participants shared. For qualitative interview studies, the researcher's focus and priorities affect the types of data collected and reported.

things that I wanted to do...hard things or crazy things like this, you can do that at this age.

That's what I want, to do what i want to do. I mean, I know, to be more realistic: find job, find internships that helps your career...But...for now, my purpose is to do the things I want.

Biyu clarified in this and several other instances that her aspirations were specifically *not* professional, something that is important to note. Although many university programs emphasize specific types of writing for specific disciplines or professions, for some students, the importance of writing and of a university education is in the ability it allows them to explore unfamiliar options for the future. For these students, a less structured approach to writing might be more important, and lead to more investment, than a curriculum geared towards a particular discipline.

4.4 Academic Aspirations

Different aspects of academic aspirations often related to the different types of professional aspirations noted in section 4.3. For students who had specific career goals, such as Asim or the three pre-med students, a focus on achieving high grades and finishing the requirements to enter particular professions or graduate programs was a key aspiration. However, for those students who had less specific goals, academic aspirations were more flexible. For students like Biyu, Allie, and Lian, for instance, continually learning as a way to explore different aspirational identities was more important than achieving high grades. For this second type of academic aspiration, Q16 appeared limiting, as none of the students explained the value of English writing as a way to learn outside of their coursework or academic programs. All seven of the respondents to Q16 who mentioned academic aspirations said that writing was valuable for entering higher education or achieving desirable certificates, test scores, or other qualifications (see Table 5). These included both their goals for their undergraduate major and for attending graduate school. The differences in experiences between students whose primary academic aspiration centered on grades, as opposed to those who focused on more abstract concepts of learning, became particularly apparent during interviews with the three pre-med students.

Table 5: Academic Aspirations in Q16

Respondent	Coded response to Q16
2. Max	My plan for my future is that I become a surgeon. After I graduate, I will definitely need to be able to utilize my writing to propel myself forward into medical school and after. During my career, I am sure I will have to be writing, whether it be to my fellow doctors or to the general public.
4.	Valuable in preceding a higher level of education . In addition to English being a second language in most countries, it will helpful for communication with other people from different places. Among other things.
7.	It is the most common language that is spoken nowadays around all over the world. For instance, in my home country, a person can get more chances to get a job if he/she has a high level of education and has enough number of certificates , also, almost all people need to have high scores in English skills ; especially when it becomes the common language which is taught in universities .
16. Ilan	Valuable because it is the only better way to interact with your professors and help them for solving the intricate problems of that certain field .
17.	Valuable, because may I will attend the grad school in US, so I have to read, write, and speak in English .
18.	I will attend graduate school .
19. Holly	My major is journalism and of course I have to write in English.

Despite their similar professional aspirations, Ilan, Max, and Hai exhibited very different approaches to their education. Max, for instance, was less concerned with standard measures of success in academia—such as grades or standardized tests—than he was with overall knowledge. He explained this when asked what he hoped to take away from his undergraduate education:

I guess what I really want to take away is just the experience and the knowledge that I gained from learning about these different things and being able to tie that to the real world. I think knowledge is the best thing that we have...If, putting aside the MCAT and putting aside all the premed stuff, if the more I learn the better I am at navigating the world and navigating life. So that's what I want.

Max's academic aspirations were not tied to a particular system of education, which allowed him to make choices of what knowledge to pursue based on his interests rather than on traditional pathways to success. For this reason, he had chosen to major in philosophy, while also remaining on the premed track. This was similar to another participant, Biyu, who acknowledged the importance of grades while also explaining that these were not her main focus in education:

Now, my purpose is to do the things I want... if I can do that then an A is coming soon. So I don't calculate the grades...to see what I [have to] get to get an A...or go to class or not go to class...My goal is to do every single thing, go to every single class, and that's what I want.

More than any of the other participants, Biyu emphasized the importance of experience, and in particular of taking every opportunity she could to have new or different experiences. Since Max's and Biyu's aspirations were not tied to a particular academic or professional system, they seemed better able to navigate the challenges of developing their own identities within the constraints of obtaining a university degree, and were unconcerned by setbacks such as low grades or difficult assignments. In contrast, other students focused on academic aspirations that were tied to numerical success in grades or on standardized testing.

In the survey, five of the seven students who displayed academic aspirations specifically mentioned graduate school. This distribution was more pronounced among the interview participants, six of whom were certain they would go directly to graduate school. Aspirations to enter graduate school straight out of undergraduate were often, though not always, accompanied by a focus on grades. For Ilan, for instance, the aspiration to become a medical student was accompanied by the serious challenge of the MCAT and fulfilling the requirements of the premed track. He explained his goals in the first interview:

I eventually have to apply to medical school, because I want to become a cardiologist in the future. And I'm really passionate about finding new research, I'm really passionate about that aspect.

At first, Ilan stated that he *had* to apply to medical school, bringing to light an important distinction in what was and was not coded as an aspirational identity. When students described points in their future that they felt required or forced to accomplish, this was not an aspirational identity; aspirational identities of any type were only indicated when participants referred to a desire that they themselves had chosen to pursue. However, in this instance Ilan also stated that he wanted to become a cardiologist, and elaborated that he was passionate about learning new things through research. This indicated both a professional and academic aspiration, but more importantly, illustrated the conflicts that might arise for students whose aspirations were tied to a particular professional or academic track. Since Ilan felt that his aspirations for the future were contingent upon his ability to pass the MCAT and enter medical school, he struggled with feeling uncertain of his identity.

4.5 Personal Aspirations

In addition to their professional, social, and academic aspirations, personal aspirations were also important for many of the participants. Personal aspirations were those that participants felt were contingent only upon their own desires, including having the freedom to make individual choices about

where they lived, or what they studied, or feeling a sense of personal accomplishment. These aspirations often helped the interview participants maintain coherence in their past experiences, current contexts, and future aspirations. Having clearly defined personal aspirations also helped many of the participants negotiate between multiple, contradictory, and fluctuating professional, social, and academic aspirations. For instance, for students who had chosen their major, profession, or the location of their study based on personal aspirations, momentary setbacks such as grades, difficult courses, or other contextual and ideological influences were easier to overcome. These influences will be detailed more in Chapter 5. For now, this section demonstrates how personal aspirations impacted participants' aspirations in other areas.

Personal aspirations defined both those identities and communities participants *did* and *did not* want to develop. As noted in section 4.3, Biyu often referred to aspirations that she did not have rather than any that she did, such as her professional and academic aspirations. This lack of clear aspirations was also true of her survey responses; in Q16, for instance, she had responded that she felt writing was valuable because “writing is everywhere.” This response was left un-coded, because it was unclear what she meant. Over the course of the two interviews, however, Biyu demonstrated that she was highly invested in English writing, but not for the same reasons as many of the other participants. Instead, she continually emphasized the importance of exploring new options for identity in new or changing contexts. In our second interview, she elaborated on the importance of this when she rephrased a question I had asked about why she had chosen her academic major:

Maybe this question means, why you go to study in America? What's the difference if you study in China or America? I mean you study, you learn, knowledge, it's probably the same. But what you can learn is cultural, and there's other experiences...so I mean, that's what I think is freedom, because you can fully do what you want to do here, even, you can do everything you

want... That's why I choose to study here, because I'm still searching and finding what I'm going to do. Not just a job.

Biyu's experience of what she called freedom was important to her not only as a personal aspiration, but also as a way of approaching her current education and coursework. She saw herself as a hardworking student, attending all of her classes and doing all of her assignments thoroughly, but became extremely frustrated when she felt like her courses were repetitive. This was the case with ELI 110 and English 121, which she felt were wasting her time because they did not create opportunities for new experiences and, furthermore, she felt she had been forced to take them. While for many participants, achieving high grades and success as a student was an (academic) aspirational identity in and of itself, Biyu's investment in coursework was tied to her personal aspirations of continually exploring, learning, and experiencing new things. As she put it most succinctly, she had chosen to enter undergraduate study and to come to the United States because, "I just wanted to know what you have."

Other participants expressed their investment in their university work in terms of accomplishing personal aspirations such as experiencing new things, gaining more freedom, or feeling a sense of personal accomplishment. Two of these students were Allie and Holly, both of whom said that they felt heavy pressure from their families to perform well academically and obtain a secure profession. Though they were two academic years apart, their experiences and aspirations were strikingly similar. For instance, Allie explained why she felt more invested in her extracurricular activities than in her university work:

For myself, I just want to gain experience through research or internships. I feel like the more I focus on what I want...the more I'm in my own mentality. I still have those expectations and stuff, but it's not my real concern if I am able to be a part of those opportunities. And I feel like being able to do those things, it's more worthy. It's more; I find it more meaningful.

Similarly, Holly found more meaning in accomplishments that she felt were not required by any outside pressure, but rather were purely for herself and her own personal aspirations. As Holly was slightly further along in her studies than Allie or Biyu, her experiences are interesting to note because she was able to articulate more than the other two how her aspirations had changed. For instance, she explained how her aspirations had transformed from primarily academic and professional to personal during her year as a transfer student:

Before I transferred to UT, I think I want to graduate on time because I want to do graduate study, so that the work later can go on...But after I came here I felt that, I don't really need to push myself so hard. I can give myself a gap year to really think about what I've learned in universities and what I want to do...Like, I can go to graduate school if I want to study after long work if I don't like the work. I feel like, that's okay, that's acceptable, it's not like I have to follow the normal schedule. So I think that's good.

For Holly, entering new communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) resulted in a new aspirational identity. For her, this new identity was highly personal; though she did not feel she had relaxed about her coursework as much as her American peers yet, she hoped to in the future. Her positive experience of this transitioning identity can add to understandings of flexible and specific identities, noted in section 4.2. While having a more flexible identity or undergoing a transition in identity can lead to uncertainty and difficulties for some writers, Holly's experience supports findings that encountering a new or additional option for identity can also be liberating. These types of experiences have often been noted by researchers of multilingual students writing in digital spaces (Darvin & Norton, 2014; Lam, 2000; Warschauer, 2000), who have found that entering new and unfamiliar communities enabled participants to envision previously unimagined futures and develop new identities. The theory of aspirational identities can provide a heuristic to understand how future-oriented identities are both situated in

communities, yet are able to move fluidly between communities as individuals discover new possibilities for selfhood in new contexts.

For these three young women, experiencing independence and having the ability to choose for themselves what they felt would be a meaningful and worthwhile path undergirded the decisions they made about what communities, coursework, and other opportunities to invest in during their time at the university. These findings support research emphasizing the importance of acknowledging students lives outside the classroom in order to make their time in writing classes in particular more valuable and productive. Ivanic (1998), for instance, uses several longitudinal case studies to document how factors such as socioeconomic, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds impacted how student writers interacted with the university. To honor these experiences and the importance of her participants' complex lives and sense of self, she chose to use the term *true self* to refer to what they spoke of as the core of their selfhood, their real identity apart from shifting factors such as professional positions or academic qualifications. For my research, personal aspirations serve a similar purpose: accounting for these represents my part in an ongoing effort to represent participants in identity research as fully and honestly as possible to their own perceptions of themselves and lived experiences. Personal aspirations, for the participants in this study, can be understood as the main source they drew on to maintain coherence in their identities as they entered new and unfamiliar contexts and social positionings.

4.6 Implications for Theory and Practice

This chapter answers the first research question by investigating what aspirational identities multilingual students invested in while in their FYC courses. It also provides the foundation for a theory of aspirational identities by delineating four related components of this concept: professional, academic, social, and personal aspirations. This theory will be further explored in chapters 5 and 6, which will focus on how students exercised agency to develop these identities (chapter 5) and what role they perceived for writing as they developed their identities (chapter 6).

Through the survey data, the first three categories of aspirations were shown by respondents who wrote that their goals for the university were to use writing to access particular professional or academic identities, or else to travel and develop new social identities. These categories of aspirations were complicated by the interviews, as many of the interview participants explained how their different aspirations led them to invest in different contexts or communities. Holly, for instance, aspired to be a journalist, but because she was also invested in becoming independent from her parents as quickly as possible, added a business minor; this made it difficult for her to fulfill all the course requirements she needed to graduate on time. Professional and academic aspirations could both be divided into broad categories of *specific* and *flexible* aspirations. Generally, students whose professional aspirations were specific—that is, contingent upon entering a particular profession—also has specific academic aspirations that they felt would help them achieve their professional aspirations. Asim and Holly were the most clear on their professional and academic aspirations. However, many of the undergraduate participants also had specific aspirations, including Jun, Hai, Ilan, and Max. For other participants, however, academic and professional aspirations were flexible. These participants were Biyu, Allie, and Lian. The distinction between specific and flexible aspirational identities is an important foundation for a discussion of how the interview participants developed their aspirational identities by using agency, and what factors they perceived as influencing their agency and aspirations (chapter 5). The final category of aspirational identity was personal aspirations. These aspirations were especially significant for Biyu, Allie, and Holly, all of whom were able to find coherence in their identities through personal aspirations in a way that they could not through professional or academic aspirations. Their experiences indicate the importance of using self-reported data in a study of aspirational identities. Hearing their stories in the interviews, through their own voices and perceptions, illustrated the complexity of identities—and particularly aspirational identities—in a key transitional moment. As these young women transitioned to a new university and/or national context, personal aspirations were particularly significant to them as

they chose new ways of being and interacting in their current contexts and invested in new or unfamiliar aspirational identities and communities. For them, personal aspirations represented an individual and free choice of what they could be(come), which they had not experienced when considering their professional or academic aspirations. These findings lend support to research in composition, L2 writing, and linguistics that assert the importance of validating students' self-perceptions and individual investments in the writing classroom in order to help them learn what is valuable to achieving their aspirations (Ivanic, 1998; Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Norton, 2010; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011).

Another key finding from this chapter is that many of the participants associated particular types of writing with particular aspirational identities, and these writing types were not limited to writing in English. Many of the survey respondents and interview participants had social aspirations to be able to work and communicate in transnational societies. Their perceptions of the importance of linguistic and communicative multi-competence mirror the assertions of research on transnationalism and global communities in linguistics (Duff, 2015; DeFina & Perrino, 2013). Though the increased global connectivity afforded by Web 2.0 technology was not a focus of my research, many participants referenced the importance of social media, email, and other web-writing activities in maintaining and/or building connections with transnational communities. Their social aspirations to enter transnational and multilingual communities in the future were often integral to their professional, personal, or academic aspirations, as well, because the communities they sought to enter were often related to particular professions, educational settings, or, in the case of Allie, a heritage community in Hong Kong. In order to achieve their social aspirations, which were connected to different professions, universities, and communities, many of the participants also referenced the importance of learning languages other than English or what they identified as their native language. The importance of multilingualism and writing for accessing aspirational identities and communities will be discussed in more detail in chapters 5 and 6.

The findings of this chapter illustrate the complex and connected nature of the categories of aspirational identities and also, hopefully, will allow educators to understand their students better. Listening to the interview participants in this research can broaden our understandings of the constellation model of identity by adding a further layer of complexity to research that has shown the importance of historic or current contextual identities and social positionings. Since individuals must negotiate not only their past experiences or current contexts, but also their hopes for the future, it is important that identity research account for the multiple, fluid, and ephemeral nature of aspirations to create a more holistic and realistic theory of identity.

5. Developing Identities through Agency

Chapter 5 focuses on the relation between the participants' perceptions of their opportunities for agency and the influential factors they took into account while developing their aspirational identities. In the previous chapter, I have presented the experiences of the survey respondents and interview participants in order to delineate a theory of aspirational identities, which for this population can be understood in terms of four related types of identity: personal, academic, social, and professional. I have attempted to show the importance of researching future aspirations *alongside* participants' past experiences or current circumstances in order to conceptualize a holistic theory of identity. In this chapter, I will draw from the experiences of the nine interview participants to describe the choices individuals make about agency and investment based on the combined influences of their past experiences, the constraints of their current circumstances, and their hopes for the future.

The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of the definition of agency used in this study, before describing the interview participants' perspectives on their opportunities for agency within the university. Their experiences revealed four current contextual opportunities for agency that relate to other research on agency: being multilingual, gathering information, finding meaning, and planning for the future. An additional finding of this study is that they also invested in particular contexts based on their perceptions of future opportunities for agency. After the discussion of agency, the chapter describes the participants' perceptions of the three categories of influential factors—ideological, contextual, and aspirational—which are delineated in the coding categories in Chapter 3. Understanding their perceptions of opportunities for agency and influential factors is a critical component of the theory of aspirational identities that can be used to describe how these identities are developed, transformed, and enacted across different contexts and communities.

5.1 Agency

For all of the nine interview participants, perceiving an opportunity for agency, either in their current contexts or in the future, was necessary to developing aspirational identities. I use the phrase *opportunity for agency* because this term is more inclusive to an understanding of future-oriented identities; while the participants were not always able to exercise agency in their current contexts, recognizing an *opportunity* to do so in the future still often contributed to their sense of control over and coherence in their aspirational identities. In addition, the participants often encountered more opportunities for agency than they were able to act on. This required them to continually assess various aspirations and choose where and how to invest and exercise agency in developing future identities. The various opportunities for agency they perceived and how they reacted to them will be discussed in this section. First, however, I will reiterate the foundations of the definition of agency used in this study.

The primary definition of agency I draw from in this study is, “the capacity to act or not to act contingent upon various conditions” (Saenkhum, 2016, p. 109). The various conditions reported in this study are *influential factors* (see section 5.2); as noted above, participants had to make choices about whether or not to act within a particular context . In order to make a choice, however, individuals must have “sufficient...information from different sources” (Saenkhum, 2016, p. 109). These are referred to as the conditions for agency. Another condition for agency was revealed by Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016), who revealed that choice plays a role in students writers’ ability to find meaning in writing projects. They define this ability to find meaning as agency, and I concur; for the participants in this study, engaging in coursework or writing that they found meaningful was a necessary condition for agency. When the focal students in this study believed they were able to make an informed, meaningful choice for how best to develop their aspirational identities, they perceived more opportunities for agency that led to an increased ability to choose particular identities that they found favorable.

The opportunities for agency participants in this study perceived included being able to use multiple languages, learn things that they felt were meaningful, gather information from multiple sources, and plan for the future. These opportunities all, in some way or another, led to another opportunity for agency which was for students to imagine realistic and attainable pathways to their aspirational identities. In other words, the students all perceived their current contexts as not only influencing their *current* opportunities for agency, but also what opportunities for agency they would have *in the future*. The importance of current contexts to creating future agency has been explored by Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016), who found that one reason students found their writing projects meaningful was because these projects would assist them in both obtaining and rising higher in desired professions in the future. For the theory of aspirational identities, it is not only current conditions for agency, but also the future potential for agency that needs to be taken into consideration. In this section, I describe the four current contextual opportunities for agency (multilingualism, meaningful learning, information, and planning) and how these impacted future potential for agency (imagining pathways). These categories of agency were not coded for, but were emergent trends of the interview data. I have chosen to include them here to provide a more complete and nuanced understanding of how various opportunities for agency can help students develop their aspirational identities within the context of a FYC program.

5.1.1 Multilingualism as an Opportunity for Agency

For all of the interview participants, the ability to communicate with multiple populations across linguistic and cultural barriers was an opportunity for agency and method for developing their aspirational identities. The finding that being multilingual was an opportunity for agency, in that it provided access particular professions or communities, resonates with other theories of multilingualism as a resource for agentive language use (Matsuda, 2002; DePalma & Ringer, 2011; 2014). Jun, Hai, and Max all said that being multilingual would be of benefit in their future careers because they would be

able to communicate with a wider range of patients and clients. Jun said that being multilingual would also increase her mobility in her profession, because by speaking multiple languages, she said, “Once you are knowledgeable, you can work anywhere. Even if in one country there is not enough jobs for you, you can go to another.” For Holly, Biyu, and Allie, meanwhile, being multilingual was essential to developing their aspirational identities because all three hoped to work, study, and even live as international citizens. Holly, for instance, believed that being multilingual would benefit her not only directly, through linguistic communication skills, but also by giving her a unique perspective on global issues. Referring to her role as an international journalist, she said,

I think if I speak English I can talk to people by myself in which way I can learn more real situations in the United States. Then I can cover that to Chinese people. To let them know what the real United States is; what [it] is good at and is lacking. And for people in the United States I can show them what real China is; it’s not poor anymore.

For Holly, being multilingual was not only an opportunity for agency in her current context, but also in the future. While being multilingual was not something she explicitly stated was beneficial to her in the context of the US university, she said that her abilities to speak multiple languages had helped her to obtain internships with journalists in China. This experience, as well as the ability to communicate across cultures, were opportunities for agency both for the present and the future.

5.1.2 Meaningful Learning as an Opportunity for Agency

Engaging in work or learning that they found meaningful was an important opportunity for agency as students imagined their aspirational identities. As noted in Chapter 4, particular types of writing and working were, for many participants, associated with particular aspirational identities. These included professional, academic, social, and personal aspirations. Holly, for instance, explained that learning and practicing skills that were relevant to her professional aspirations in photojournalism was a primary motivation for her in transferring to a US university. She said that in the US, “You can just prove

you really know this...from practice. If you don't shoot by yourself, you can't say that [you are] good at using a camera." Holly's work in her journalism and photography courses were both an opportunity for agency in developing skills in the present, but also represented a potential source of agency in the future by allowing her to "prove" that she could do relevant tasks to future employers.

The participants also engaged in meaningful learning outside of classroom contexts, and these were also opportunities for agency. For Allie, for instance, entering programs like the Engineering Ambassadors program—an outreach organization that introduced high school students, particularly young women, to the engineering major—was an opportunity for agency that helped her develop her personal aspirations. She said that, "doing those opportunities really makes me satisfied and...I feel like having that improves my self-worth." As noted in Chapter 4, Allie's personal aspirations were to become less stressed by her own and her parents' high expectations. Completing meaningful work that was not academic or connected with grades helped her in enacting this aspiration by giving her a sense of personal self-worth and accomplishment. Her experience and similar experiences of other participants will be described more in section 5.4 on aspirational influences.

5.1.3 Information Gathering as an Opportunity for Agency

Another source of agency was information, which the interview participants gathered from various sources. Some of the information gathering strategies participants used to develop their aspirational identities included researching potential academic majors and professions, requesting peer advice about their choice of universities and academic majors, and assessing the importance of advice from academic advisers, teachers, and family members. The importance of information to agency has been assessed in multiple studies of student placement (Crusan, 2006; Saenkhum, 2016), but has been less studied in the context of identity. In this study, the ability to gather adequate and accurate information and assess the validity or relevancy of that information was crucial to allowing participants to imagine what options they had for aspirational identities. Lian was one of the participants who

synthesized many sources of information in order to choose an aspirational identity and a path to attain this aspiration. He said, at various times, that he considered advice from his parents when deciding whether or not to enter a US university, his own research on the future job market for different academic disciplines, his friends' advice and interests, and his advisor's recommendations for course selection. These various sources of information will be detailed further in section 5.2, which focuses on contextual influences.

5.1.4 Planning as an Opportunity for Agency

The ability to plan for the future was based on participants' assessments of their own skillsets (such as being multilingual) and affinities, as well as their consideration of information they gathered from different sources. These assessments of affinities were related to aspirational influences, as they determined what they enjoyed or felt they were good at, while considering information was related to contextual influences. Planning for the future was also influenced by ideological factors, as participants took into consideration the potential constraints on their futures in different cultures based on their gender, race, or religious affiliation. Jun, for instance, said that she felt it was crucial for her to complete a PhD degree in psychology quickly, because as she put it: "For women those years are quite important...in some certain years, the society will discriminate, like on appearance discriminate, [and] will hire women who didn't get married or didn't get pregnant." For her, social ideologies based on gender were a constraining influence that she felt it was important to consider alongside other contextual or aspirational influences as she planned her future. These influences impacted her opportunities for agency in the present, but also her potential opportunities for agency in the future. Students' perceptions of what factors influenced their opportunities to plan for the future and develop aspirational identities will be described for the remainder of the chapter.

5.2 Influential Factors

Influential factors came from past experiences, such as the accepted practices of birth cultures or families (ideological); current circumstances such as the university, economic means, or advice from particular groups of people (contextual); as well as an individual's internal desires for the future and self-perception (aspirational). Depending on how the participants perceived them—as disembodied and unchanging, or as benevolent and negotiable, for instance—these factors both created and constrained opportunities for agency as they developed their aspirational identities. Section 5.2 draws from the voices of the interview participants to describe how ideological, contextual, and aspirational factors influenced their perceptions of opportunities for agency and aspirational identities.

Contextual and ideological factors of influence have been noted by other identity researchers, and my research builds on this conversation. I define contextual factors similar to many researchers of both identity and agency as the influence of advice from various sources, institutional requirements, and coursework (Harklau, 2000; Ivanic, 1998; Saenkhum, 2016). When defining ideological factors, this study is informed by Darvin and Norton's (2015) theory of ideology as the combined influence of social positionings and systemic patterns of control. The third category, aspirational influences, was developed based on emergent trends in the interview data. These influences derive from internal goals or ideas of success, as well as self-perception. For the nine focal students in this study, at least, aspirational factors were closely associated with personal aspirations and the overall coherence of individual identities.

5.2.1 Contextual influences

I have chosen to begin by discussing contextual influences because these were the influences that were apparent in the participants' daily lives and that they spoke of most often in the interviews. These influences included university coursework and requirements, as well as advice from peers, professors, families, and advisers. Their perceptions of these factors varied widely. For instance, some viewed the university as a benevolent, positive force creating opportunities for agency, while others saw

course requirements as a constraining influence. Likewise, for some, parental or peer expectations were a source of anxiety, while for others these expectations led them to exercise agency and develop particular aspirational identities.

The most polarizing contextual influences for the nine participants were university course requirements. Their perceptions of their coursework as either a helpful or constraining influence on their aspirational identity development determined whether or not they perceived the information and learning in the courses as an opportunity for agency. For some, course requirements led to a lack of agency as they felt unable to pursue their aspirational identities. Two of the three students who had enrolled in English 121, for instance—Hai and Biyu—were frustrated by what they felt was an unnecessary or repetitive course requirement. Hai explained that the class environment, coursework, and his classmates all created an environment that was disengaging and prevented him from learning what he wanted:

Hai: My classmates, sometimes they just stay in class—including me—we just sit there...and we don't think anything.

Researcher: So you don't speak?

Hai: Not only speaking, like, thinking! Sometimes we only sit there and after that—Like, the most important thing is that I need to learn how to write APA format, but I know [in] 131 and 121 they learn MLA, so, it's kind of...like, I cannot get what I want.

By not speaking or thinking, Hai demonstrated a lack of agency in his FYC courses, and explained that this lack of agency was because he could not “get what I want.” In other words, he viewed his aspirations as separate from, and unacknowledged by, the FYC courses, and so disengaged from the context. Similarly, Biyu felt that the amount of English courses she was required to take prevented her from taking other courses that would be more useful to her. Speaking of ELI 110 and English 121, she said, “You already know, you study again; it's pretty boring. So you just stay in the class and kill time.”

The experiences of Biyu and Hai demonstrate the need for appropriately paced sections of multilingual writing, where separate sections do exist. As many researchers have noted, it is easy for these course offerings to become perceived as non-academic by students when sections for multilingual students are divided from mainstream composition (Harklau, 2000; Saenkhum, 2016; Schwartz, 2010). Schwartz (2010) and Harklau (2000), for instance, both noted that first-year students in their studies rejected the “ESL” positioning when it had to do with course placement, even if they sometimes used that identity to gain extra help or leniency from teachers. My findings can add to this research by elucidating that placement that conflicts with students’ self-perceptions can also lead them to disengage because they feel that the coursework is irrelevant to their aspirations for the future. Biyu’s and Hai’s frustration was tied to professional and academic aspirations, because they felt they were prevented from learning disciplinary skills by their placement in several multilingual sections of FYC.

The institutional requirements of the US were not always a negative force. For some students, contextual influences from the university system gave them more opportunities for agency to explore new options for the future or develop aspirations they had previously considered beyond their reach. Holly, for instance, said that she had chosen to study in the US in part because she said there was “more freedom than China.” In addition to the increased freedom for professional journalists, she also felt there were more resources—particularly technology—in the United States (see section 5.1.2). Her experience was similar to Ilan and Asim, who also perceived the education system in the United States as a contextual influence that created opportunities for agency to develop particular professional or academic aspirations. Similar to Holly, Ilan said it was due to the increased freedom and resources of the U.S. that created new opportunities for agency and allowed him more options for aspirational identities.

While perceptions of newly entered contexts as beyond their control led students to feel a lack of agency (as was the case with Biyu and Hai), entering new contexts could also lead to increased opportunities for agency. Asim focused on professional aspirations, and said of his engineering degree,

“It will put me in a higher position back in the Middle East; if you come from a degree in Europe or America, it’s a big deal.” These students’ perceptions of education as an opportunity for agency shaped how attainable they felt their professional aspirations were, and helped them to imagine how these opportunities would help them in enacting their aspirations. This was true not only for the university, as Asim and Ilan explained, but also for the professional environment and resources in the US more generally, as Holly noted.

Another important contextual influence was advice students received from different individuals, including peers, teachers, parents, and advisors. Generally, they exercised agency by considering advice from multiple sources and using this advice to plan for the future, based on what they felt was best for developing their aspirational identities. This ability to make informed decisions, based on multiple sources of information, has been noted as a condition for agency by other researchers as well (Saenkhum, 2016). The source of influence the participants spoke of most was advice from their academic advisors or professors. Some of the students, including Lian and Jun, considered the advice of their academic advisers as overriding their own interests. Jun explained that her high school advisor, “told me what I’m good at,” and that she subsequently chose to enroll in psychology. Similarly, Lian took his advisor’s advice rather than pursuing his own interests: “I was interested in doing some other classes, in trying to do chemistry, but my advisor said it’s going to be too much...so I just stayed in my required courses.” For Jun and Lian, their advisor’s recommendations were the defining influence on how they chose and developed their academic aspirations, causing Jun to choose psychology and Lian to take only required courses, rather than those that interested him.

For other students, their advisor was a helpful influence in planning for the future by outlining what they needed to accomplish to achieve their professional or academic aspirations. Max, for instance, said,

My advisor's super helpful. She basically looks at all the requirements for philosophy, the major philosophy, and all the requirements for pre-med, and she sets out a path for me to take all the classes and graduate on time.

Due to the influence of his advisor, Max was not concerned about his abilities to graduate on time, something that was a major concern for several students, including Holly. This was because he exercised agency by planning his future based on his advisor's recommendations, whereas other students felt they had to plan their futures alone. An advisor's or professor's advice served similar functions for Asim and Biyu; Asim, like Max, took this advice as a way to determine what the most direct path would be to achieving his aspirations. Asim was driven primarily by professional aspirations in how he approached the university, and said of his future plans:

If you want to move up higher in your career, it might be good to go back to grad school. I wanted to focus more on engineering management, so I asked my advisor about this; he said, when you finish school you have to go back to master in engineering. So I might do this later after I work.

Though Asim still decided that he would rather work immediately after leaving the university, he considered his advisor's advice as something to help him plan a future in engineering management. The importance of advising for these students lends support to Saenkhum's (2016) study of student placement and agency. These results indicate the need for writing programs and universities generally to critically consider the role and training of advisors, particularly for first-year and multilingual students.

In addition to her advisor at the US university, Biyu sought the advice of a professor in her discipline at a Chinese university to develop her aspirations as a multinational businesswoman. It was based on the advice Biyu received from the professor that she decided not to focus on a particular professional track in the United States, but rather to focus on new experiences and challenges before returning to China. The importance of advisors for these students is clear: the advice they received

helped them to gather information to plan for the future and choose particular paths to develop their aspirational identities. Based on this information, they prioritized their actions in both current and future contexts.

Another important source of information for these students was the advice of friends. The influence of peer advice was similar to the advisor's, in that it was one of several sources the participants took into account while deciding how best to achieve their aspirations. The importance of peer advice had been noted by other researchers, including Saenkhum (2016), who explored how students made decisions about placement in FYC. She found that a major influence was the advice they received from peers. My research supports this conclusion. For instance, Lian said that he had chosen his major based almost entirely on what his friends were doing, and several more of the participants had chosen individual courses because their friends were enrolled in them. Interestingly, however, peer advice could also play a negative role, influencing participants' decisions *not* to do certain things. Hai and Jun, for instance, had both formed negative perceptions of Chinese universities based on their friends' advice. These perceptions were their motivation for pursuing an education in the United States, where they felt the education system was easier and the job market more open for recent graduates. Both admitted that they were unsure whether this advice was true, but they had acted on it anyway. The advice of friends and advisors was a source of agency for these students, helping them gather enough information to make a choice about what particular paths or opportunities to pursue in order to develop their aspirational identities.

5.2.2 Ideological Influences

Blurring the line between contextual and ideological influences were parental expectations and family histories. While parental expectations was considered alongside other sources of information by some students, for others, familial environments represented a connection to their cultural heritage; when this was so, these environments represented the ideologies of what they identified as their home

cultures (Norton, 2013; Roozen & Herrera, 2010; Shuck, 2010). For Holly, for instance, her parents' expectations constituted an ideological influence because their expectations were connected to her beliefs about how she was perceived by friends and other family and community members. Ideology was more important to her than contextual factors, because her beliefs (based on her parents' expectations) caused her to go against the recommendations of her academic advisor and professors. Explaining why she had enrolled in 19 credit hours for the second semester in a row, she said,

I feel like I'm more sensitive to what other people think of me because when I transferred from university in China to Tennessee, I was like, I'm going to do better than you guys because I have better opportunities...but if I graduate later, I think they may think about me like, why are you graduating later? Are you, did [you] not do well on your homework or academic courses? That kind of question.... I think it's because the cultural environment in China, it is super competitive.

In this excerpt, Holly reveals that she developed her academic aspirations based on ideological influences she perceived from the cultural environment where she was raised. Cultural factors were a profound influence in shaping both what aspirations she had, as well as how she used agency while at the university to enact these aspirations. She specified that most of the pressure she felt came from the peers she had left behind in Chinese universities, particularly friends who her parents knew and compared her to.

In addition to parental expectations, familial influences were also based on particular traditions. For instance, Hai said he had formed his professional aspiration to enter medical school based on the influence of an early childhood experience that he had been told repeatedly by his family members:

There are interesting things in my childhood, let me tell you. We have a big desk and there are many things on it, and we put a child on it and let him or her choose one of the things he will do in the future. Newspapers, and medicines, and some games, footballs, some things like this, and

my father put me on it and I catch the medicines. So, actually...I know what I will do in the future. For what major I should choose...I don't know. But for the long-term things, I know.

Hai planned his future aspirations based on the influence of family traditions. While his experience of tradition differs from Holly's experience of expectations, there were some similarities between their responses to these familial influences. Both conceptualized their families as an authoritative, ideological influence, which represented what they were *supposed* to or even *had* to do in order to be successful. While these influences were not helpful for them in gathering information, they did exercise agency based on these influences by planning for the future (Holly) and finding meaningful work (Hai).

These results can add to identity research that has focused on the influence of participants' familial backgrounds on how they experience the academic environment and develop particular identities (Norton, 2013; Roozen & Herrera, 2010; Shuck, 2010). The experiences of these students resonates with Shuck's (2010) research on four Afghan-American women as they transitioned to a university. Two of these students were profoundly impacted by their family histories to invest in their educational environment. One student in particular explained that her father had been unable to enter medical school due to ethnic discrimination, and that she had chosen to go into the pre-med track because of this. In my own research, Ilan's aspirations to enter medical school had developed from a similar influence. He said that his parents had chosen to emigrate from India in part due to the ethnic discrimination faced by his father in his profession and in the education system; Ilan chose to enter the pre-med track because he saw a United States university as an opportunity for agency that his parents had not had.

In addition to influences from their home cultures or families, some participants noted the cultural environment of their new country (for these students, the United States) as an ideological influence on their opportunities for agency. Like other influences, the cultural environment of the United States was viewed by different participants in different ways. Their perceptions of cultural

factors as either benevolent or constraining shaped how they responded to these influences, and what aspirational identities they felt were obtainable within the cultural context. The participant in this study who most felt the negative influence of the United States was Biyu. She pointed out several influences that limited her opportunities for agency: “In America you need to think about many things: race and your major, your university, your relationships with the people around you.” Based on ideological influences such as racism in the US, Biyu felt that her future was highly uncertain and out of her control, a perception which made it difficult for her to see opportunities for agency. Due to this, she disengaged from the US context, choosing instead to wait to enact her professional aspirations until she returned to China.

However, cultural ideologies were not always constraining. For some participants, a new cultural context, such as a move to the United States, was liberating. In contrast to Biyu’s experience, Ilan explained his positive view of the US education system in terms of religion: “They don’t discriminate on whether you’re Hindu, Sikh, or Christian, they just take care of every individual student.” While Biyu and Ilan were similar in feeling the pressure of ideological influences on their aspirations, they differed in how they perceived and responded to these influences. Their contrasting experiences illustrate the importance of perception on individuals abilities to imagine aspirational identities and routes to enacting these identities. A perception of ideological influences as a positive force often increased their opportunities for agency, whereas a negative perception left them frustrated by what they felt was a lack of agency. Ultimately, the true nature of these influences—whether or not individuals actually had any power to shape them—was less important than how each individual perceived them.

5.2.3 Aspirational Influences

For all of the interview participants, an additional influence on their aspirations came from their perceptions of success, their skills and competencies, and their individual affinities for particular identities and communities. Aspirational factors were intrinsic influences that were not related to

sources outside the participants themselves, and thus these influences were typically most significant for participants when they considered how to develop their personal aspirations. Despite the fact that these influences were intrinsic, however, the participants' perceptions of them were still complex and led to both positive and negative experiences. Allie, for instance, explained the heavy pressure she felt in developing her aspirational identity to obtain her personal goals:

One thing I'm trying to avoid by setting expectations for myself is failure, so I try to set high expectations for myself so I don't fail. ...If I don't meet my expectations, I feel like...I would be lost, because I would be questioning if it really is for me, like if I should change majors or if I should dive into something else because I'm not doing well, well then, is it really my strength, then? Can I really do it?

For Allie, aspirational influences were especially important as she negotiated a new context and sought new aspirations for the future. If she failed to meet the expectations she set for herself, her academic and professional aspirational identities identity would no longer be certain, or "lost," as she put it. Her own expectations for herself led her to exercise agency by imagining achievable aspirational identities and planning realistic means to attaining these identities. However, her agency in imagining these future identities was contingent upon her abilities to succeed in her current contexts. She explained that her expectations also led her to exercise agency through investing in education:

That really motivated me to study because I don't really want to go through the anxiety of not knowing what to do, like when you have a blank space...when you don't know what to do, it makes me really uncomfortable.

For Allie, her imagined future identity was contingent upon her abilities to meet her own definition of success. These findings can add to research that has proposed the importance of imagination is a type of agency (Duff, 2015; Kendrick & Hissani, 2007). While these researchers have demonstrated the importance of individual's abilities to access resources that allow them to imagine previously unknown

or unfamiliar communities or options for identity, Allie's ability to imagine possibilities for the future was contingent not on resources, but on self-expectations. For her to develop her academic and professional aspirations, she felt that a high academic performance was important, and a low grade or difficult course represented a threat to these imagined identities.

In addition to influences of expectations or success, other participants said that they considered what their personal aptitude or affinity was for certain careers or paths of study. The influence of self-perception on identities has been noted by other identity researchers, particularly Ivanic (1998), who noted the importance for her participants in maintaining what they said was their "true" self when writing in academia. Roozen and Herrera (2010), similarly, explored the decisions made by one writer as she transitioned from an English major to a journalism major in order to maintain her personal writing style, which she connected to her Hispanic identity as a storyteller. For all of these participants, the way they wrote was tied to the individuality of their identities. Changing the way they wrote to match academic standard English therefore represented a threat not just to their way of writing, but to their identities and their self-perception. In addition to writing styles, my participants also noted the disciplines they had chosen to study or professions they chose to enter as an integral part of their self-perception. Max, for instance, explained why he had chosen philosophy:

Max: It was just a spur of the moment kind of thing...I just feel like I'm well in line with that major, because of who I am.

Researcher: What do you mean, "because of who you are?"

Max: For me, I feel like I'm a deep thinker. I tend to keep thoughts to myself more than project them, and so that way just let my thoughts marinate. I just think a lot about people and everybody's life stories and I feel like all of that falls in line with the major philosophy.

Philosophy, for Max, was a way to maintain or develop particular aspects of himself. The aspirational influence of staying true to his perception of himself as a "deep thinker" and philosopher was a powerful

factor in his decision making, and led him to go against other influences. He said that his parents, for instance, were not happy with his decision of majors, and he also noted that balancing the course requirements for both philosophy and the pre-med track was difficult. The aspirational influence of self-perception represented a stronger influence than contextual factors, such as advice from his parents or the course requirements of the university. In choosing the major philosophy despite these contextual influences, and in alignment with his self-perception, Max exercised agency by choosing a path of study that he found meaningful. This result can begin to answer Eodice, Lerner, and Geller's (2016) call for future researchers to take into account how multilingual students, in particular, found meaning in their current or future work and writing. For these students, self-perceptions related to their own aptitude or alignment with particular majors and professions often influenced what they felt would be meaningful work in their current and future contexts.

Other students exercised agency by finding meaningful work based on their enjoyment of particular activities or based on how they hoped to define themselves in relation to particular communities. Lian, for instance, said that he had chosen computer science because, "That's my, that's the thing I like to do, making stuff to communicate." Similarly, Holly had chosen her major of journalism both because she saw it as a meaningful way to be heard by others and because she found personal enjoyment from it. For Ilan, however, meaningful work could be found not only based on his individual aptitude for scientific study, but was also defined in terms of community engagement and his ability to help others. He explained that his aspirations to become a doctor were connected to a specific childhood experience, which he related in the second interview:

When I was in India there was a guy who was laying on the road and somebody hit that guy on the road and nobody cared, like in India, nobody cared about that guy at that time. And I was feeling really low, like why, if I were a doctor, I could take that guy to the hospital or I can diagnose that guy right there. And it was, I was—it was very awful for me....So at that point I was

thinking, like, I started thinking: well, you should help, you're really good at science, why not use that to get more...If you love science, why don't you just implement what you learned and just help other people?

Ilan's experience in India influenced not only his professional aspirations, but also his personal aspirations of being a person who helped others. This, in turn, drove his academic aspirations of entering medical school. He found meaning in work not only because he, like Holly and Lian, felt he would enjoy it, but also because he saw a need for a person who helped others in a community and hoped to fill that need.

For these participants, finding meaning in current contexts was linked to how their work in these contexts would help them achieve future aspirations. This finding resonates with Eodice, Lerner, and Geller's (2016) research, who found that meaningful writing projects for their participants were connected both to agency in current contexts and in the future. By using the theory of identity, the results of the current study can add to their findings by elucidating how finding meaning as an act of agency assisted students in developing and enacting particular identities. These participants saw meaningful work as an opportunity for agency not only in their current contexts, but also in their aspirational communities of the future.

5.3 Implications for Research and Practice

This chapter has addressed the second research question by explaining how students in this context exercised agency to develop their aspirational identities, and what factors they perceived that influenced their opportunities for agency. For all of the students interviewed in this project, developing their aspirational identities required them to consider multiple, sometimes conflicting, influential factors. These influences could lead to new aspirational identities, particularly since many of these students were undertaking a key transitional moment as they had just entered a new university or nation in the last year. These findings join the ongoing conversation in identity research of the key

influences of family histories, cultural background, and personal experience to identity construction, but also move the conversation forward by specifically accounting for the role of agency, as well as the influences of individual aspirations or future communities, in identity development.

The interview participants of this study recognized four major opportunities for agency within the context of the university writing program: having and being able to use multilingual skills, engaging in meaningful learning, gathering adequate information, and planning for the future. These four opportunities for agency all contributed to a fifth opportunity, which was the ability to imagine realistic and attainable pathways to enter and excel in aspirational communities. The importance of agency for these students is valuable for future research on identity because it suggests that theories of agency—particularly Saenkhum’s (2016) and Eodice, Lerner, and Geller’s (2016) theories—can be productively examined in new research contexts. Although my research focus differs from either of these two studies, their definitions of agency have contributed greatly to generating an understanding of how the focal participants developed and enacted their aspirational identities. Accounting for agency is a necessary component of a theory of aspirational identities, because it is only by encountering and engaging in different opportunities for agency that aspirational identities can be developed, transformed, and hopefully, enacted.

These findings also have implications for writing program administration. The experiences of the focal participants indicates the value of providing students with adequate information and resources for gathering information and planning for the future. Acquiring and assessing information and using this to plan for the future helped participants such as Biyu become aware of, and feel able to overcome, ideological and contextual power structures that she felt negatively influenced her current social positionings and aspirations for the future. Making these power structures apparent is valuable because knowledge and understanding are themselves opportunities for agency which enabled the focal students to imagine realistic pathways to and make decisions regarding their aspirational identities.

Developing their aspirational identities within the constraints of these ideological factors was a challenge for students that led them, at times, to abandon or alter certain aspirations. With this finding, the theory of aspirational identities can be put into conversation with critical pedagogies, which have asserted the importance of making students aware of their own and others' social capital, and how they can transform their prescribed role in a community through action.

Also of importance to both L2 and L1 writing programs is the importance of acknowledging students' multilingual competencies as a key aspect not only of experiential or historic identities, but also of aspirational identities. Mainstream writing programs can (and often already do) help multilingual students see opportunities for agency. Many of the participants—including Lian, Max, Allie, and Ilan—were enrolled in the mainstream sections of composition courses and worked with instructors primarily trained in L1 composition pedagogy. Indeed, as “generation 1.5” students (Harklau, 2000) who had spent all or the vast majority of their lives in the United States, Allie and Max would likely not have been identified by their instructor as multilingual. Both of them expressed the concern in the first interview that they were not the correct population for the study, because they were not confident of their skills in their parents' languages. Both, however, professed a desire to increase their multilingual competency out of a desire not only to reconnect with heritage communities, but also because they felt multilingualism was important to be able to work and communicate with diverse communities.

The experiences of Max and Allie in particular, but more broadly of all the interview participants, lend support to arguments since the late 20th century that university students in the United States are in critical need of cross-cultural communication skills in order to succeed in the rapidly globalizing professional and educational environments they will enter post-graduation (Goodwin, 1988; Kramsch, 1993; Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Reichelt, 2003; Reichelt & Silva, 1995). Goodwin (1988) based his proposal for multicultural pedagogies on the motivations of American students as they sought to join “the richness of the intellectual life of a majority of humankind,” and his findings are just as relevant today—

if not more so (p. 78). Researchers of multilingual populations have increasingly noted the fallacy of dividing cultures and people groups by geographic or linguistic boundaries—in research, teaching, or, indeed, thought—as global migrations and technological developments spur the creation of transnational communities and modern areas of “super-diversity” (DeFina & Perrino, 2013; Duff, 2015; Ortega, 2009). For Holly or Allie, for instance, both of whom hoped to live and/or work in super-diverse city centers such as Hong Kong or Beijing, multilingual competency was an essential step towards achieving their future aspirations. In addition to resisting the ease of dividing global populations based on geographic or linguistic boundaries, I would further urge both researchers and teachers not to make assumptions about the student populations they encounter based on course placement. In this study, I have taken it as an ethical obligation to consider the multilingual competencies of students from diverse courses and backgrounds, not limiting the study population either by country of origin or by course placement. I have chosen to use the term “multilingual” rather than “L2 writer” to demonstrate that considerations of multilingual writers need not be limited to the field of L2 writing³. By doing so, I hope my research can add to conversations surrounding multilingualism, writing pedagogies, and the diverse resources students bring to our writing classrooms across multiple fields.

The experiences of the focal participants with regards to their multilingualism and their perception of its impact on their aspirations suggest that it is critical for not only L2 writing specialists, but for all composition instructors and writing programs to carefully consider how they position multilingual students, both intentionally and unintentionally. Being multilingual was a valuable opportunity for agency as they imagined and developed their aspirational identities across national and linguistic borders. What we can learn from these students can help us not only to have a more complex

³ I also, however, do not associate my research with translanguaging writing, but rather rely on the foundational work of scholars from sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, L2 writing, and language acquisition. For a more detailed explanation of this research and its distinction from the far more recent discipline of translanguaging writing, see Matsuda (2014).

understanding of our students' identities in the classroom, but also to acknowledge the importance of expanding our research scopes beyond traditional disciplinary, geographic, or linguistic divisions.

6. The Roles of Writing and English

This chapter draws from the survey data to understand students' perceptions of writing in English, their perceptions of FYC, and their beliefs about the role of writing in their futures. Investigating the role of writing in connection with aspirational identities is valuable for two reasons: first, because university students in a North American context often encounter a number of gatekeeping functions of writing, both in the form of standardized testing and in required courses such as FYC. These gatekeeping roles make writing a necessary component of accessing various aspirational identities. Furthermore, writing played an important role for most of the participants in how they imagined their futures. Particular writing types were associated, for them, with particular identities and communities, and mastering these types of writing was often a powerful motivating force for how students invested and exercised agency in their university coursework.

The results reported in this chapter are drawn from responses to Q8, Q9, Q10, and Q11 (see Appendix A). These questions focused on students' perceptions of their own writing abilities (Q8 and Q9), their concerns about writing at the university (Q10), and their hopes for their FYC courses (Q11). Throughout the discussion of the survey responses, I will also draw on the perspectives of the interview participants to add greater depth and detail to the analysis. The first section of the chapter focuses on participants' perspectives of the writing they did while at the university, both in FYC and in other courses. The second section of the chapter extends the discussion of multilingualism as an opportunity for agency, which was begun in Chapter 5, by examining the reasons behind students' views of multilingualism as an opportunity for agency (or as a hindrance to agency) in both the survey and interview data. These two sections are intended to extend the implications of this research project to add to current pedagogical and theoretical discussions in both composition and L2 writing. While other theories would undoubtedly be relevant, I have chosen to explain the pertinence of these findings in connection with theories of *transfer* and of *academic biliteracy*, for two reasons: first, because when

examined from a multilingual writing perspective, transfer and academic biliteracy each promote the other; second, because these theories have contributed greatly to writing curriculums across the United States, including the focal institution.

6.1 Writing in FYC and across disciplines

For all of the students in this study, including the survey respondents and interview participants, particular writing types were important for accessing aspirational communities and enacting particular identities within those communities. These included specific professional and academic aspirations they felt used certain writing types, but also included aspirations of personal growth or social mobility. Over the course of the two interviews, the nine focal participants were able to explain both the connections between writing types and communities, as well as how they prioritized their writing education in their current contexts based on their aspirational communities. For them, the writing they felt would be important in their aspirational communities was also, generally, the writing they hoped to do in their current contexts. This section will focus on their perceptions of and goals for the writing they did in the FYC sequence, as well as how these writing types connected to writing they did in other disciplines or imagined doing in the future. Listening to student perspectives of writing in this context is important because these experiences are shared by the vast majority of university students across the United States. Research has demonstrated that, when students feel their needs and aspirations are being honored in the classroom, they invest more in their coursework (Kendrick & Hissani, 2007; Norton, 2013) and are motivated to transfer their learning to other contexts (James, 2012).

The survey responses to Q11 revealed several patterns in the goals the multilingual students at this university had for their FYC courses. Their goals could be broadly divided into two categories: specific and non-specific writing improvement. These are the first two categories in Table 6, below, and were the most common response. Nine of the respondents referenced non-specific goals such as to

Table 6: Student goals in Q11

Category	Number of respondents	Response to, "What I hope to gain from my current English course is..."
1. Improving specific writing skills or features	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More local vocabulary usage ● Improvement in my sentence structure and tone ● To learn more about modern English and to write better essay.
2. Non-specific writing improvement	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Become a better writer ● To be able to read, speak and write better. ● To improve my writing skills.
3. Confidence or self-improvement	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confidence in my writing ● I will write just as good as the native students ● To get better knowledge about writing methods and skills; on other word, get the chance to improve myself more.
4. Professional or disciplinary knowledge	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To make me exceed at writing papers as I continue in college and in my professional career as well. ● To gain more understanding about the types of writing that are required at the university.

"Become a better writer" or "Improve my writing skill." Ten respondents noted specific goals, including vocabulary or grammar improvement, but also particular writing types or skills, such as "the MLA research paper" or to "carry my thoughts in an effective and concise manner." Although an examination of the impact of specific and non-specific goals on investment or performance in FYC is beyond the scope of this research project, the implications of these results can be understood in the context of educational research on the importance of long-term, specific goal setting on student performance and engagement in classrooms (Antonio & Tuffley, 2015; Locke & Latham 1990; Oyserman 2008; Perry, Liu, & Pabian 2010)⁴. The respondents' goals for FYC were related to more than just writing, however. Several students had goals to learn about particular professional or academic writing types (Category 4

⁴ Having goals is not the same as an aspirational identity. In this study, I understand the relation of goal-setting, as it is described in education research, to aspirational identities as a way of describing the imagined means to enacting an aspirational identity. In other words, discrete goals represent steps towards an aspiration.

in Table 6), and six of the respondents mentioned improving their confidence or achieving native-like proficiency as a primary goal (Category 3 in Table 6). Excerpts from responses to Q11, along with the number of participants who referenced each of these categories, are included in Table 6 to provide examples of the different types of goals identified in the survey.

The interview participants' explanations of their experiences in the FYC sequence can add to the results of the survey by providing perspectives on whether or not their goals were accomplished, as well as what new or additional goals arose as they completed their required courses. In the second interview, I asked them to reflect back on their experiences in FYC and to tell me whether they felt they had gained any important skills, resources, or knowledge from FYC and whether or not what they had learned in these courses had been helpful to them outside the classroom. They were able to describe their perspectives on FYC in more detail in the second interview because by that time all of them had completed at least one, if not two, courses in the sequence.

Like the survey respondents, many of the interview participants had goals related to specific aspects of writing such as grammar, organization, or particular genres. Hai, for instance, had been frustrated in English 121 because he had been unable to learn or use APA style citations, since the course had focused on MLA. He was frustrated by this because he felt that the curriculum prevented him from learning the types of writing that were most relevant to his aspirations of entering medical school. In the second interview, he said he felt this way about the writing he had done in English 131 as well. He explained that writing in English classes was completely different, in his view, from writing in other courses: "For other courses, like the lab reports, we only need to use some basic sentences. So actually, just for writing in English it helped, but for others it didn't work." Hai's view on the mutual exclusivity of writing in FYC, as opposed to writing in other disciplines or professional environments, was shared by a number of the participants. Lian, Biyu, and Ilan all felt that the type of writing they did in FYC was not applicable to other contexts. Ilan, for instance, said that "for the most part, [English 101] helped

me in English.” These students’ perceptions of FYC were similar to those reported by James (2012) in his research on motivation to transfer. For first-year multilingual students enrolled in various general education courses, he found that they often did not see the applicability of writing in FYC to other courses because they either did not do any writing in other courses, or the writing that they did was highly formulaic in nature. For James’ (2012) participants, as well as the students in this study, their perceptions of the boundaries between writing in FYC and in other courses limited their engagement in the courses, because they did not feel that writing in FYC was important or applicable to other contexts. Research on transfer in composition studies has found similar results⁵. In particular, the experiences of Hai, Lian, Ilan, and Biyu relate to what Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) call “boundary guarding” in writing transfer. Since these four students perceived clear and unalterable boundaries between the types of writing in FYC, and the types of writing in their major disciplines, they felt that the writing they did in one context had no pertinence on writing they did in others. Based on their self-reports, their transfer of writing skills, strategies, or resources was therefore limited; without having specifically examined their writing, however, I do not assume that transfer was entirely absent.

Other students felt that writing in FYC had given them valuable tools and resources for writing that were applicable to other contexts. Similar to Reiff and Bawarshi’s (2011) results, the students who felt that writing would be useful often spoke of the value of non-specific writing skills that were relevant to multiple writing situations. Their experiences indicate that current conversations in composition on transfer can be equally relevant to multilingual students. Asim, for instance, said that he had found his time in FYC valuable because it gave him an “overview” of writing knowledge that he would be able to build upon in different contexts. Speaking of how he expected to write in the future, he said,

⁵ While a complete review of transfer research is beyond the scope of this study, I define transfer as a dynamic process of transformation of writing skills, strategies, and resources across contexts, and for diverse writing tasks and audiences (see Soblo & Wilson, 2018, in press). Interested readers should also see: Baird & Dilger, 2017; DePalma & Ringer, 2011; 2014; James, 2012; Wardle, 2007; Yancey et al. 2014

I'm sure it's going to end up—on the job—how they want it to be. Like, after I write it I'm sure I'm going to go back to them and ask, is this how you want to do it or is there other ways you want to do it. But I think English [classes] here is like, maybe put me the first steps for how to do it this way.

Although Asim believed that writing in his profession would be different from the way he was expected to write in the university, he still saw the FYC sequence as valuable in providing a basic understanding of writing in English. Asim's approach to FYC and to English writing in general was different from that of Hai or the other students mentioned so far, because he felt that the writing he did in FYC would be useful to him in the future. This increased his motivation to transfer and, as James (2012) has indicated, most likely increased the knowledge and skills he gained from the courses.

Another participant who felt positively about the FYC sequence was Jun. Jun emphasized in both interviews the important role writing played for developing multiple aspirations. For her, writing was not only a way of enacting particular academic and professional aspirations, but also as a way of maintaining social and professional mobility. She felt that the writing she did in FYC had helped her in her writing in her major coursework in psychology by increasing her confidence in the structure and organization of English-language arguments. Jun was one of the few participants who said she had written several essays in courses outside of FYC, and this may have positively influenced her perception of the value of writing and the application of writing skills across contexts (James, 2012). However, she was also highly invested in improving her academic literacy not only in English, but also in her first language, Chinese, because she hoped to conduct cross-cultural research. This was a professional aspiration she felt that her psychology courses were not helpful for. Speaking of the research reports she was expected to write, she said that,

I found that what we learn in psychology and most of the results, like the research or experiment results, they are for middle-aged Americans. The limit is not suitable for other cultures. So it's kind of disappointing....I probably will learn Chinese psychology by myself.

For Jun, social mobility through multiple literacies was important because it ensured her greater job security and opportunities in the future. While she felt that the English writing she had done at the university was useful in some respects, writing in the manner of a professional psychologist in Chinese was also important to her. The goal of achieving academic biliteracy will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, because this was a goal for writing that was important to most of the interview participants and effected how they invested in their coursework.

In addition to the role of writing for enacting specific academic or disciplinary aspirations, many students associated writing at the university with particular personal goals. One of these students was Max. Like Asim and Jun, Max felt that the writing he did in FYC would help him to enact specific professional and academic aspirations, which in his case meant entering medical school and becoming a surgeon. In addition to this, however, Max also said that writing for him was a way to continually learn and grow for personal reasons. Explaining the role of writing in his future, he said,

For personal reasons, I feel like writing will help me, like writing out my notes and writing out things I learn, it will definitely help me to retain that. And in terms of my career, I think writing research papers and writing to peers is very important and this is how things get developed in society...just the communication that's constant between individuals.

Max was particularly invested in continuing to grow and learn as a personal aspiration. He had chosen to major in philosophy for this reason, and he explained that he enjoyed writing for much the same reason that he felt he was a "fit" with philosophy. For Max, writing even outside of class was a way to continue learning and to retain knowledge. Another participant who reported engaging in extensive writing outside of class was Allie, and she did so for similar reasons. She said that she kept many journals for

different subjects and wrote down new concepts she had learned, something that helped her academically and that she anticipated continuing to do in the future:

Usually when I learn a new concept or I'm in a class that's a higher level than a class I've taken before, I like to go back and read what I wrote and see how I did my work. So it can help me with an upcoming lab report or writing assignments. I still do that today with my English work...So I feel like documenting is very important to helping me at UTK and also if, like when I do get to the higher researching studies and internships.

Writing played an important role as a method of continual learning and personal development for several of the participants, and these same students often reported the most positive experiences in FYC. For Allie and Max, writing was a way to learn not only to accomplish their coursework, but to continue to develop and document their progress. Their perceptions of writing can add to the voices of students in other case studies that have found that, while writing for a course or profession are undoubtedly important, personal uses for writing are often the uses that most spur students to invest in classroom contexts (Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Ivanic, 1998; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011). As Herrington and Curtis (2000) assert, "writing [is] not a purely academic matter" (p. 13). Based on the experiences of Max and Allie, I propose that acknowledging the importance of writing for personal reasons can add relevancy to FYC curriculums and promote student engagement.

6.2 Writing across languages

English stood out among the many languages the focal students in this study wrote, spoke, and studied both because of the opportunities for agency and for developing new aspirational identities it afforded and because of its potential to impede agency and curtail aspirations. Although these two perceptions of the role of English for aspirational identity development might seem to be mutually exclusive, many of the interview participants held both views of the language at once. Their dramatically different interpretations of the role of English depended on the context. For many, the role of English as

a written language was one of exclusion, particularly as it was connected to university requirements such as the FYC sequence. In this current context, it impeded their agency and hence their identity development. For future opportunities for agency in their aspirational professions, social roles, or educational contexts, however, writing in English was a crucial and valuable means of networking, access to research and learning materials, and professional mobility.

In addition to the importance of writing in English, for many of the focal participants of this study, writing in other languages was important to developing academic, professional, social, and personal aspirations. These languages included home or heritage languages, as was the case for Allie as she learned Mandarin Chinese to connect with her parents (see Chapter 4), as well as additional languages that the participants felt would help them access new or cutting-edge research in their chosen fields. For these students, being literate in multiple languages increased opportunities for agency and identity development because it allowed them to access a greater variety of research and learning materials, increased their abilities to create professional networks, and enabled them to pursue transnational professions. The experiences of these students add to research in L2 writing and TESOL on the importance of academic biliteracy (Cho, 2010; Gentil, 2005), which has examined the value of multiple literacies for professional writers in academia as well as how these writers negotiate between languages. The current study extends this conversation to include the voices of novice writers as they imagine future communities and invest in current contexts in order to develop literacy in multiple languages.

The goal of academic biliteracy was shared by all the participants, though only some felt able to develop their identities as biliterate or multiliterate writers and researchers while in the context of an Anglophone university. Allie, for instance, hoped to engage in transnational research and was concerned about learning the vocabulary of her discipline—computer science—in both English and Japanese.

I feel like being multilingual will really help me make connections internationally, with different countries, and hopefully I can build a network with that for my field and maybe be able to participate in different countries and what they're looking at researching....I really want to experience how different countries approach certain problems and how they find their solutions.

To accomplish her professional aspirations, Allie needed to have a grasp of computer science vocabulary in multiple languages. For Allie, different languages were connected to different aspirational identities. English and Japanese were important for professional, academic, and social aspirations, whereas writing in Chinese was important for personal or social aspirations. In recognizing and distinguishing between the purposes for different languages as they were situated in particular contexts, Allie engaged in a sophisticated practice of code-switching (Kachru, 1990) and also indicated the importance of future academic biliteracy (Cho, 2010; Gentil, 2005; Walt & Dornbrack, 2011). She recognized that, in order to enact her aspirations in a transnational world, multiple linguistic resources would create greater opportunities for agency than would relying on a single language. Similar to Allie, Holly and Biyu both hoped to travel and work transnationally in the future. Being multilingual not only generally, but also in the terminology and vocabulary of their specific fields or professions, was an essential skill for their futures.

Even students who planned to work within a single country noted the importance of being or becoming multilingual in their fields. Hai, for instance, noted that Japanese would be important in his future because he would be able to access more medical research. Speaking of a university he had visited in China, he said, "many folders are just stored in the library and separated into many languages. If I learn three languages [English, Japanese, and Mandarin Chinese] I can read more folders." Hai, like Allie, felt that being not only literate but *academically* literate in multiple languages was important for his future. Similarly, Ilan felt that being multilingual would give him an advantage over other applicants

to medical school and would also help him interact with diverse patients in the future. The goal of assisting diverse patients was one shared by all three of the pre-med students—Hai, Ilan, and Max—and one that required them to become academically biliterate in their fields.

For the participants in this study, learning and maintaining literacy in multiple languages was a way to increase both their social capital and opportunities for the future. This was true regardless of what country they hoped to work in, or whether they hoped to work transnationally. In contrast to the goals described in the previous two paragraphs, for instance, Jun was unsure of whether she wanted to work in China or in the United States. She saw being bilingual as important to creating different options for her future professional identity, and so cultivated her understanding of Chinese psychology concepts and vocabulary outside of her usual coursework. This finding mirrors research on investment, which has consistently shown the specific social and cultural roles of language use, and how language learners choose what discourses to invest in based on the opportunities these languages afford in their imagined communities (Carrington, 2003; Norton, 2013; Norton, Jones, & Ahimbisibwe, 2011). Carrington (2003), for instance, proposes that “literacy is about who you are allowed to become in a given society” (p. 96). Academic literacy in multiple languages allowed the students in this study to consider new or desired roles not only in their current communities, but also for future, imagined societies.

The experiences of these students as they imagined the role of multiple languages in their futures can add to research on academic biliteracy, which has often focused on professional or advanced writers, but less often given consideration to novice writers (Cho, 2010; Gentil, 2005). None of the students in this study had yet entered the professional, academic, or social communities they spoke of when explaining the importance of academic biliteracy—although Allie, of course, had been able to develop her personal aspirations by using Mandarin Chinese to have a closer relationship with her mother (see Chapter 4). Academic biliteracy for these students, then, must be understood in terms of what recent scholars have termed *imagined transnationalism* (Duff, 2015). Duff proposes that the future

of linguistics research should recognize the global state of hyper-diversity when researching individuals even in apparently monolingual contexts, such as an Anglophone university. With the increased opportunities for interaction across national borders afforded by technology (both transportation and digital technology), even when individuals are not physically engaged in transnational communities, “people ‘move’ or ‘travel’—through their imagination, if not physically—using instructional materials and other media” related to language and culture (Duff, 2015, p. 75). While these students had not yet engaged in true academic biliteracy, they continued to exercise agency through imagining their futures as academically biliterate individuals and by choosing particular paths—such as continuing to read Chinese research articles while at their US university or taking Japanese language classes—in order to enact these aspirational identities.

However, being multilingual could also be perceived as an impediment to enacting aspirational identities, particularly when students felt positioned as outsiders by the US university on the basis of their “non-nativeness.” These experiences were shared by the interview participants and survey respondents, and often led to a heightened sense of anxiety over the judgment of their American peers or instructors. Three of the survey respondents who rated their English skills a 4, “need work” (Q8), explained in the follow-up question (Q9) that they felt this way because they were not native speakers of English. These three students not only traced their difficulties with English to their non-native background, but also identified their primary goals for FYC (Q11) as to make their writing more like “native” or “local” writers. These views on the importance of standardized or local English writing were shared by the interview participants. Max, for instance, said in the interviews that when he was writing, Vietnamese was “a distraction...Because sometimes maybe I’ll think in that language and then have to go over to English. But most of the time it doesn’t *get in the way*” (emphasis added). His view on his other language, Vietnamese, as a hindrance to his English writing abilities has been a documented perspective of teachers and students operating under the *deficit-model* of L2 writing instruction

(Harklau, 2000; Matsuda, 2011; Silva, 1997; Valdes, 1992). This model has been problematized by L2 writing researchers both for its ethical implications (Silva, 1997), as well as for the loss of knowledge, learning potential, and abilities to transfer that this model invites into the writing classroom (Chiang & Schmida, 1999; DePalma & Ringer, 2011; 2014; James, 2012). A view of non-English languages as mere distractions or hindrances prevents students from using the totality of their linguistic resources and fails to respect the knowledge they already possess, and also, more problematically, limits the knowledge they could gain in the future from achieving academic biliteracy.

One of the students who appeared most affected by a deficit mentality of language learning was Holly. In the survey, Holly had rated her English skills an “okay,” the middle ranking on a five-point scale, and elaborated that she felt this way because “English is not my mother language.” She also noted that she hoped to gain from FYC “more local vocabulary usage.” In the interviews, Holly further explained her perception of the importance of understanding local vocabulary in terms of her professional aspirations. Local terminology, idioms, and the requirements of AP (Associated Press) style writing had all been serious challenges for her in the journalism major. With aspirations that hinged on writing and communication skills, Holly felt heavy pressure to write and speak like a native, or else to make adjustments to her career if she could not. When asked what she planned to do after graduating, she said:

In the US maybe I can only do some basic stuff, not focusing more on writing; maybe focusing more on, I don't know, mabe making video...Because I don't think I can do better than native speakers with journalism major.

Holly's view of both the necessity and impossibility of obtaining “native” usage led her to find alternate aspirations, including video production and photojournalism. She had also said that she felt that the English language was “always a barrier” in the United States; while it was necessary for achieving her

professional aspirations, she felt that her status as a non-native speaker would always shadow her career, preventing her from being competitive with native English speakers.

Even as her abilities in English were viewed as an impediment in some respects, Holly also saw her multilingualism as an opportunity for agency in developing other aspirational identities. Other students also noted that being multilingual was, in and of itself, an asset that allowed them greater future mobility and options for identity, even though their status as “ESL” impeded their opportunities for agency within the US university. Hai and Biyu were the most vocal in this respect; they both saw little benefit from the FYC sequence, particularly English 121 and ELI 110, but felt that communicative and literate abilities in English and other languages was essential for their future. Holly, while feeling that English on its own was a barrier to her aspirations, explained that being multilingual would help her to become an international journalist, which fit her self-perception as someone who traveled. As she put it, “I’m not a person who’s willing to stay in one place all the time.” Biyu, Hai, and Holly viewed being multilingual as a challenge to overcome only when perceived narrowly within the context of the United States. When these students imagined a transnational future, achieving “native-like” language use was less important than being able to interact and communicate with diverse and multilingual communities.

6.3 Implications for Research and Practice

This chapter has examined the role of writing within the theory of aspirational identities. For the participants in this study, different writing types were seen as related to different aspirational communities and identities. Successfully writing in styles or genres associated with aspirational communities was therefore a means to developing their aspirational identities. These results have implications for teaching practices, particularly in a US context, because, by privileging particular styles, genres, and aspects of writing in the classroom, we are also necessarily privileging certain aspirations over others. Throughout this chapter, I have sought to put these results in conversation with current theories of transfer and academic biliteracy because these two pedagogical theories are related models

for establishing a curriculum that allows students the greatest opportunities for agency as they seek to develop diverse aspirational identities through writing while at the university.

The experiences of these students indicated that students' goals for writing while at the university extended beyond their specific academic or professional goals to encompass personal aspirations for personal growth and development, as well as aspirations to become members of multilingual, transnational communities. Being able to draw on their multilingual repertoire while at the university increased students' sense of their own agency, their investment in writing, and their engagement in coursework. Students who recognized an opportunity to transfer learning from the FYC context to writing they did in other courses, or imagined they would do in the future, also increased their engagement in FYC. The students who were the most engaged in writing that they did in FYC, such as Allie, generally recognized the writing skills, strategies, and resources that they were learning not only as pertinent across traditional disciplinary boundaries, but also across linguistic ones. This indicates that providing space for students to recognize their multilingual backgrounds as a resource and promoting opportunities for academic biliteracy could positively influence students' motivation to transfer learning (James, 2012).

While the unique experiences of multilingual students have not been often addressed in transfer research (with the exception of DePalma & Ringer, 2011; 2014 and James, 2012), perceptions of the transferability of writing skills, strategies, and resources across linguistic contexts and codes were highly relevant to the participants of the current study. Although transfer was not an explicit focus of this project, the results reported in Chapter 6 can be used as a jumping off point for future research on transfer in multilingual contexts, as well as research on the relation between transfer, investment, and identity. For these students, writing styles that they felt were important to developing their aspirational identities often inspired greater investment in and motivation to transfer learning across contexts. This included transfer across current contexts, as well as to imagined contexts of the future. For future

contexts, achieving academic biliteracy was seen as an essential skill for enacting their aspirational identities by many of the students, and as an opportunity for agency by all of them. This indicates that creating opportunities for students to explore languages other than English—including home languages and new languages that they are learning—in the writing classroom may be one crucial way not only to honor students' aspirational identities, but also to increase their investment in coursework and motivation to transfer learning.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I investigated how the aspirational identities of multilingual students in the first-year composition program at a large public university impacted their investment in their courses, writing, and the university context. Aspirational identities are defined as an individual's hopes for the future, and can be understood as one component of a constellation of identities including past experiential and current contextual identities. The goals of this project are to contribute to a more complex model for identities in research, to propose how aspirational identities might affect students' perceptions of the writing program and investment in coursework, and finally, to provide suggestions for writing programs and researchers about the efficacy and necessity of accounting for student aspirations when designing studies, curriculums, and programs.

Though this research was conducted at a single institution, and is thus limited to multilingual writers operating in a North American higher education context, the findings reported here can be used as a jumping off point for future research on identities across institutional and geographic contexts. Major findings show that aspirational identities are a complex, fluid, and continually changing concept, and that different aspirational identities can lead the same individual to invest in different current contexts and social positionings across various communities. The types of aspirational identities that were important to the students in this study were professional, academic, social, and personal. These four categories were related in complex ways. For instance, achieving particular academic aspirations was often a necessary step towards developing particular professional aspirations. These particular professional or academic aspirations were often connected to entering new or unfamiliar communities, a social aspiration. Finally, personal aspirations were often a driving force in how these students found coherence in their aspirational identities as they underwent a major transitional phase, such as entering a new university, national, or linguistic context. Based on these aspirational identities, and the steps

they believed were necessary to enact them, the participants invested in certain aspects of their current context at the university and in the writing program.

A second major finding of this study is that, when developing aspirational identities, individuals sought not only opportunities for agency in their current contexts, but also imagined potential agency in the future. A significant source of agency for the focal students in this study was being able to draw on and develop their multilingual repertoires; being and becoming multilingual was an opportunity for agency that many felt was necessary to enacting their future aspirations. In addition to this, having access to adequate information about the various choices they had, and feeling able to engage in work or learning that they found meaningful were two more opportunities for agency that were significant to developing aspirational identities. If they could exercise agency in these two categories, they also were able to create plans for how to enact their aspirational identities. Planning was the fourth category of agency in current contexts. When at least three of these opportunities for agency were available, the focal students could imagine realistic and attainable pathways towards enacting their aspirational identities, as well as anticipate increased opportunities for agency in these future roles. As the students described their perceptions of opportunities for agency, it was also apparent that there were a number of factors that influenced whether or not they felt able to exercise agency and develop their aspirational identities. These included ideological, contextual, and aspirational factors. These factors were always related, but were often contradictory, and different participants set different amounts of importance by these various influences. While Lian, for instance, based many of his decisions on current contextual influences by synthesizing multiple sources of information, Holly actually ignored the recommendations of her advisor and professors because of the influence of her cultural background. The differences between how the focal students perceived opportunities for agency, influential factors, and how they responded to these, indicates that aspirational identities are highly idiosyncratic in nature.

A final key finding from this study is that individuals associate particular aspirational identities with particular types of writing, and that these associations promote greater investment in those types of writing. This finding is particularly significant when understood within the context of first-year writing program. Participants' perceptions of the writing types that were meaningful for accessing future communities and identities often related to their perceptions of FYC. While in some cases the writing that they did in FYC led them to feel more in control of their futures and with greater opportunities for agency, for others, the repetition of multiple English courses led them to feel a lack of agency. For these former students, their perceptions led them to disengage from the FYC context. Particularly important for these students was feeling able to not only access particular disciplinary or professional ways of writing, but also to learn to write and communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers.

By delineating a theory of aspirational identities, this study can add to the body of research on identity in L2 writing, composition, linguistics, and related fields by generating a more complex understanding of identity and identity research. Although I am not proposing that all identity research must explicitly focus on aspirational identities, I do believe that it is necessary for researchers to be explicit in defining what identities are being left out by their methodology. The methodology used for this study, which relies on self-reported data from participants and focuses on the impact of future goals on current actions, focuses explicitly on aspirational identities, but also accounts for historically or contextually based identities as these influenced the participants' aspirations. Using self-reported data to study aspirations is important because these identities, being contingent upon multiple future contexts and challenges (both anticipated and not), are more subject to transformation even than other identities. As was the case for some of the participants in this study, aspirational identities are distinct from other contextually- or historically-based identities in that they can end: either through achieving an aspiration, or else by a dramatic transformation in aspirations. The transformational and idiosyncratic

nature of aspirational identities made apparent in this study indicates the need for more research, particularly longitudinal studies in different contexts.

7.1 Future Research

One purpose of this study is to contribute to current transdisciplinary identity research by providing a jumping off point for future research. As noted at the beginning of this section, the results of this study have been limited to multilingual students within a first-year composition program in a North American university. The impact of aspirational identities on investment, and how individuals exercise agency to develop these identities, might also be productively researched among other populations. For instance, researchers might consider aspirational identities in the context of graduate programs or adult education, and in non-English linguistic contexts. Particularly in the modern era of transnationalism and global migrations, aspirational identities may also be a significant area of research among individuals in sites of “super-diversity,” including cities such as New York, Hong Kong, or London (Duff, 2015). Researching the relationships between discourse and aspirational identities in these contexts is an area of particular interest since, as indicated by the participants of this study, different languages and discursal practices are associated with different identities. Researchers in a global context might focus on how individuals develop competency in multiple languages in order to enact aspirational identities, and how these individuals maintain coherent identities as they move between diverse linguistic communities.

The results of this study also indicate that aspirational identities would be best understood if researched longitudinally, ideally for two years or more. An original goal of this study was to ascertain how aspirational identities might change over time, and how these changes might lead participants to invest differently in current contexts. However, I determined that a single semester may be too short a time to truly document or understand changes to identity. While aspirational identities may be a fleeting concept when compared to historically- or contextually-based identities, they were still slow to change

for these participants. Particularly for teachers and program administrators, if aspirational identities are to be taken into account when designing writing curriculum, more longitudinal data is needed. This type of research could provide insights on the long-term effects of exposure to different writing types and composition pedagogies, a potentially important data source since aspirational identities were often associated with particular writing types. The association between writing and aspirational identities in this study indicates that, through learning new forms or styles of writing, individuals might begin to imagine or develop new aspirations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey

The following survey is part of an ongoing research project, which considers how useful UTK's first-year composition program is for multilingual students as they consider their options for professional work, further education, and many other life choices post-graduation. Please answer honestly and to the best of your abilities; there are no right or wrong answers. All survey responses will be kept anonymous, and will not affect your standing at the university in any way. Thank you for participating in the survey!

Q1) Please fill in the following information. Feel free to fill in multiple answers in each blank.

1. Home country/countries: _____
2. Language(s) used at home: _____
3. Language(s) used in school (not including university): _____
4. Language(s) used in university: _____
5. Language(s) used at work (leave blank if you have never worked): _____

Q2) Please fill in the following information:

1. Gender _____
2. Age _____
3. Birth country _____
4. Major _____
5. Time spent in United States (Months, Years) _____
6. Preferred Language(s) _____

Q3) The writing course I am currently enrolled in is (check all that apply):

- English 101
- English 121
- English 131
- ELI 110
- Other _____

Q4) The writing courses I have been enrolled in at UTK in the past are (check all that apply):

- English 101
- English 121
- English 131
- ELI 110
- Other _____

For the following questions, please check all answers that apply. If you check "Other," please list the type of writing you did.

Q5) I have used the following types of writing in an educational setting:

- Research Essay

- Personal Essay
- Book Report
- Fiction or Poetry
- Email
- Journal entries
- Resume
- Letters
- Other _____

Q6) I have used the following types of writing for personal enjoyment:

- Fiction
- Poetry
- Email
- Letters
- Social Media
- Blog posts
- Journals
- Other _____

Q7) I have used the following types of writing in a workplace setting:

- Email
- Resume
- Cover Letter
- Articles (journalistic)
- Other _____
- I have never worked

Q8) If I had to rate my English writing skills, I would give them a...

- Very good
- Somewhat good
- Okay
- Needs work
- Poor

The following questions will provide an understanding of how UTK's introductory English courses might best serve our students. Please answer them as thoroughly and honestly as possible.

Q9) I would rate my English writing skills a [Selected choice from Q8] because...

Having a large salary in the future is important to me.

I am confident that I will be able to find work with my degree.

Having a stable career in the future is important to me.

I will need to write in English in my future career.

Q14) When I graduate from university, I plan to...

- Work professionally
- Attend graduate school
- Travel recreationally
- Other (please specify) _____

Q15) When I graduate from university, writing in English will be...

- Valuable
- Not valuable
- Unsure

Q16) When I graduate from university, writing in English will be [Selected choice from Q14] because...

Thank you for completing the survey! If you would be willing to participate in two brief interviews in the Fall 2017 semester of around 30 minutes each, please provide your contact information below:

Click to write the question text

Email address _____

Preferred name _____

For participating in the interviews, you will receive a \$20 Amazon gift card. Your participation in the interviews will be kept anonymous, and will not affect your standing at the university in any way. If interested, you may request a summary of the project findings, which will be available in the summer of 2018. If you have any questions regarding the survey or research project, please contact Hannah Soblo at hsoblo@vols.utk.edu, and I will do my best to answer!

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Fall, 2017 Interview

- 1) Current writing course:
 - a) Tell me about your current writing course; how is it going so far?
 - i) How does it compare to past writing you have done, in any language?
 - ii) How does it compare to past writing you have done, in English?
 - b) What kinds of writing, if any, have you done so far in this course?
 - i) How does this type of writing compare to writing you've done in the past?
 - (1) More/less enjoyable? Useful? Challenging? → Why?
 - c) You indicated on survey question 9 that you hoped to gain ___ from your current English course. Can you elaborate on that?
 - i) Why is this goal important to you?
 - ii) How will your current English course help you with this goal?
 - d) Have you done any writing in other courses?
 - i) What kinds of writing have you done?
 - ii) What do you think of the writing you have done in these courses? How does it compare to the writing you have done in English 121/131?

- 2) Different writing types:
 - a) When did you first start having to write in English?
 - i) Was it your choice, or was it required?
 - ii) Why/ Are you glad you took it?
 - b) How did this English writing compare to writing you had done in other languages, if any?
 - c) You indicated that you had experience writing [genre reported in survey] in academic / professional contexts; can you elaborate on that?
 - d) Did you receive significant help with writing from your teachers in the past?
 - i) How did your teacher(s) help? With what kinds of writing / how often?
 - e) Did you receive significant help with writing from anyone other than teachers?
 - i) How did this/these individual(s) help? With what kinds of writing / how often?
 - f) You indicated that you wrote [genre reported in survey] for personal enjoyment; can you elaborate on that?
 - i) When did you start writing (this type of writing)?
 - ii) Why did you start writing (this type of writing)?
 - iii) Do you know anyone else who writes (this type of writing)?
 - g) Do you ever share your writing with other people?

- 3) Goal types
 - a) On the survey, you said your major was [major reported in survey]. Why did you choose this major?
 - i) Did anyone influence your decision? Who?
 - b) At this point, do you have an idea of what you want to do in the future?
 - c) Do you think that writing, in any language, will help you achieve that goal / be important to that future?
 - i) Why or why not?

- d) Do you think that the writing you will do in your current English course will help you achieve that goal / be important to that future?
 - i) Why or why not?

4) Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

Spring, 2018 Interview

1. Writing course:
 - a. Tell me about your first writing class. Overall, how did it go?
 - i. Are you satisfied with the results of the course?
 - b. Did the course meet your expectations stated in the first interview? How so?
 - c. Did the course fail to meet your expectations in any way? How so?
 - d. Is there anything that you wish you could have learned in your writing course, that wasn't covered?
 - i. How would this have been useful to you in the future?
2. Writing types:
 - a. What kinds of writing in the course did you struggle with, if any?
 - i. What specifically made this kind of writing difficult?
 - ii. Did you receive any help from your teacher or peers?
 - iii. What kind of help did you receive?
 - b. Did you ever attend a peer workshop?
 - i. Did you receive helpful feedback from your peers?
 - ii. Do you think you gave helpful feedback to your peers?
 - c. What kinds of writing in the course did you feel confident about, if any?
 - i. What makes you confident about this type of writing?
 - ii. Did you ever give / receive help on this type of writing?
3. Application of writing to goals:
 - a. Have your goals for the future, stated in the first interview, changed at all since we last spoke?
 - i. Did any coursework at UT influence you to change your goals?
 - b. Did you learn any writing skills, strategies, or types in your writing course that will be useful for your (stated goal)?
 - i. Why will/will not this (writing skill/strategy/type) be useful to you in the future?
 - c. Have you been able to use any writing skills, strategies, or types you learned in the writing course in your other courses? Outside of school?
 - d. Were you surprised by any of the information covered in the writing course?
 - i. In what way was it surprising?
 - e. If you could start your first semester at UT again, would you choose to do anything differently? Why or why not?

4. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

Vita

Hannah Soblo earned her Master's of Arts in the Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics program at the University of Tennessee, where she specialized in second language writing, identity, and writing program administration.