

FINDING THEIR PLACE IN PICTURES: REFLECTING ON IMAGES OF
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S LIVES IN STATE COLLEGE, PA

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LESLEY-ANNE M. FLAHERTY

Dr. Soren C. Larsen, Thesis Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S LIVES IN STATE COLLEGE, PA

Presented by Lesley-Anne M. Flaherty,

A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Soren Larsen

Professor Matthew Foulkes

Professor Mary-Jo Neitz

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Chapter One

Introduction

Immigrant and international women experience a number of challenges as they move to an unfamiliar community within a new country in search of opportunities or improved living conditions. They face many new obstacles on a daily basis, including: learning a new language, navigating the labor market, being viewed and treated as an outsider, and maintaining family life while navigating new cultural traditions. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on immigrant women's perceptions of and experiences within their communities as well as heighten awareness of the immigrant experience among community members through research on international women's experiences in State College, Pennsylvania.

State College is a university town with a population of over 84,000 people. The town is surrounded by rural farmland and wooded areas, and it is located over 150 miles from larger metropolitan areas such as Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Originally a sparsely populated agricultural community, State College expanded both in size and population as a result of the growth of Pennsylvania State University. State College attracts international students as well as immigrants and refugees searching for a more permanent home.

Studying the everyday lives of international women provides insight into how women adapt to their new homes and establish a sense of belonging there. Everyone is subject to the expectations and the power relations within the place they reside, however, the process is more evident for migrants who negotiate belonging in multiple places, their new as well as native homes (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Understanding the lived realities

of immigrants and the challenges they face is key for communities to meet the needs of all those living within its borders. The decision to focus on international women was inspired by discussions between myself and a non-profit organization that serves international students and migrants in State College, as women often face distinct challenges as they adapt to life in State College. Many women accompany their spouses attending Penn State and due to their visa status, cannot work or attend school. The three primary goals of this project are 1) to learn about immigrant women's "lived realities" in State College and how identity as a migrant affects their daily lives, 2) to provide opportunities for women to critique their community through interviews and reflection on photographs taken of their everyday lives in State College, and 3) to share pictures collaborative work with the wider community with a photo exhibition to help heighten awareness of the uniqueness of the immigrant experience.

To address these goals, I employed multiple qualitative methods, including self-directed photography, interviews, and focus groups to understand the immigrant women's experience in the community of State College. Photovoice can be an empowering experience by providing an opportunity for participants to voice what is meaningful to them, and to document and validate their experiences and stories. Through interviewing and focus groups, the project provided an opportunity for participants to view and reflect on their photographs, and to assess their needs as individuals and as a collective. To accomplish the third goal of the study, I shared the women's photographs and stories with the State College community through a month-long exhibition at a local bookstore.

Throughout this thesis, I will explore the personal and emotional experiences of international women in State College. Chapter Two introduces relevant literature of

belonging and local attachment. It focuses on the intimate and emotional side of belonging at an individual scale, as well as the politics of belonging located within sets of social relations at a collective scale. I will also review literature of migration and transnational practices, as well as literature about the relationship between belonging and migration. Chapter Three describes the geographical and social context within which the study is set, and presents the qualitative and participatory methods used to conduct the research into the women's lives in State College. In Chapter Four, I explore the participants' stories, concentrating on the emotions the women experience and how they negotiate belonging in State College. Chapter Five brings this thesis to its conclusion with a review of how participants experience places in State College, and the ways in which photographing State College and telling their stories helped participants in the study. I will also present limitations within this research, and outline directions for future work.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1) Belonging

The need to feel a sense of belonging in the social context is so widespread that Maslow listed it third in his hierarchy of needs, following only the needs to fulfill safety and physiological requirements (Maslow 1943). Belonging as a concept has been studied by several disciplines including geography, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. Despite this multidisciplinary focus on belonging, the process through which people connect to places and establish a sense of belonging at a local level remains poorly understood (Lewicka 2014). Researchers have examined a variety of ways in which people attach and develop a sense of belonging within places and social groups. Belonging is multidimensional and diverse, and is experienced at a variety of scales including home, neighborhood, region, and nation (Antonsich 2010).

Place attachment research studies the emotional bonds and connections between people and places (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001). People who report stronger attachments to place tend to experience higher life satisfaction (Lewicka 2014). Duration of residence in a location is the biggest predictor for local attachment. However, duration does not explain the processes through which people attach to places. Research has identified a host of factors that play a role in how people connect to places, including connections based on memory and personal history, family history, daily routines, sense of identity, and psychological resources.

Within the field of geography, research concerning belonging has concentrated on territorial belonging and citizenship. Until recently, little research effort had been devoted to understanding feelings of belonging to local places (Antonsich 2010). Geographers have criticized the sense of local belonging in a contemporary mobile world, saying that it “has no place in Geography” (Antonsich 2010). With the increase of mobility and global influences across localities, places are fluid and changing quickly. Geographers have described the concept of belonging at odds with today’s increased mobility patterns, stating that a more cosmopolitan attitude is more valuable in a mobile society than local belonging (Antonsich 2010). Local belonging is associated with conservative and narrow-minded values while the cosmopolitan outlook is associated with being more open-minded. Recently, however, some geographers have shifted back to accept the notion that a sense of local belonging continues to play an important role in the lives of individuals and groups (Tomaney 2014).

Belonging, at a personal level, creates a connection between a person and a location that provides a person with a distinct sense of feeling safe and ‘at home’ in the location (Antonsich 2010, Yuval Davis 2006). The idea of feeling ‘at home’ refers to a place that is a familiar place of comfort and safety (hooks 2009). This connection between person and location is created through daily routines and movements, commitments and obligations, and hopes and desires for their future in that place (Antonsich 2010, Probyn 1996). Belonging to a place becomes connected to a person’s narrative of identity and it develops along intersecting axes of difference according to one’s social groups (Bourdieu 2005).

Belonging involves creating an emotional attachment to a place. Emotions are not just internal states within individuals that exist within humans, but are external realities that are expressed and negotiated in a hierarchical social and spatial world. They are realized within bodies as well as within places. While research in geography has often downplayed emotions and portrayed geography as an emotionless landscape, more recently there has been a scholarly trend in geography to recognize and validate human's emotional involvement in places and the role that emotions play in creating the landscape. Though research in emotional geographies does not specifically discuss belonging (Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2007) it brings to light the ways in which emotions reproduce socio-spatial relations (Antonsich 2010). There are many factors that contribute to feeling a sense of belonging. If belonging is not established, one may feel lonely, alienated, displaced (hooks 2009).

Antonsich outlines five factors that influence and create an intimate and emotional sense of belonging: autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal. Autobiographical factors relate to how memories and personal experiences in a place provide a sense of attachment to place. Childhood homes, particularly if family members still reside in these places remain an important place for many people. These places become connected to people's identity as they narrate who they are and where they are from. Relational factors are the long-lasting and positive personal and social connections that people have in a place and that enrich life and sense of self. Cultural factors that influence one's sense of belonging include one's language, cultural traditions and practices. Cultural traditions and practices range from practicing one's religion to food preparation, to using one's native language. Language is a tool that allows people to

create a feeling of being 'at home' as they interpret, communicate, create meaning, and connect to others. Language also connects to the autobiographical factors, as people connect their native language to their sense of self. However, language can also be a way to separate groups of people along cultural lines, creating a palpable division between "us" and "them." A stable economic situation creates a sense of safety and contributes to developing a sense of belonging. Additionally, the ability to be an active participant in an economy creates conditions in which people feel they belong in a particular place and that they have a future there. Legal factors also influence a sense of belonging and security in place. A citizen who has the rights to work and take advantage of social benefits can more easily establish their sense of place and belonging. Insecure legal status negatively impacts sense of belonging in place (Antonsich 2010).

The concept of elective belonging treats belonging not as an attribute of being born and raised in a place, but as a choice. An individual chooses to reside in a place and connects the place to their own narrative and life-story. (Antonsich 2010, Savage et al. 2004). For example, parenting can be a means through which people build an attachment to place. The act of raising children encourages a person to put down roots in a location, as parents participate in activities and go to places on behalf of their children (Savage et al. 2004). Women tend to increase their social network as they participate in the social lives of their children. However, this does not necessarily mean that the networks and social contacts will be permanent, and they may change as children age.

2.2) Politics of Belonging

Belonging is also experienced at a collective level in which people are positioned in relation to others in a hierarchical and rule-based system. The practices and discourse experienced in society and within social groups determine one's position in society, and those that are included or excluded from social space. Our positionality within a location affects how we perceive, internalize, and engage with the world around us. We learn that certain ways of speech and action are appropriate in some places but not in others, and correctly negotiating this cultural landscape of appropriate speech and action is critical to our success within the social hierarchy. Pierre Bourdieu termed this concept of a person's sociocultural position as 'habitus.' The characteristics of one's habitus influence the development of belonging and the ways in which people are included or excluded from places and social situations (Bourdieu 2005).

Habitus is not inherent or instinctual to the human being, rather people learn it through observation and through everyday practices and routines. It is learned in childhood, and it manifests at individual and collective levels. It becomes embedded in the body, affecting a person's speech patterns, posture, and how they see the world and express themselves. The social and physical conditions of a particular place and time produce the characteristics that are common to the group of people in that place. These characteristics are a type of capital that the people exchange (Bourdieu 2005, Friedmann 2005).

Habitus exists within a particular 'field' that is both social and spatial. Habitus is created within the field, but also actively reinforces and defines the social conditions and structures therein. There is a dialectical relationship between spatial and physical

structures in society and patterns of behavior in humans, in which the characteristics and values of habitus flow and influence one another back and forth (Bourdieu 2005, Creswell 1996). Habitus shapes the physical world in each place by influencing how people arrange, display, and even hide belongings in their houses on the individual scale to how larger groups construct and organize buildings and allocate resources to their members on the communal scale. The rules within the field and the capital exchanged there include social, cultural, and spatial capital.

The concept of habitus, however, is not without its critics. Some authors express concerns that Bourdieu's theory of habitus portrays human behavior as monolithic and predestined (Friedmann 2005). Additionally, researchers question whether the concept of habitus is relevant at a time when people live very mobile lives that can span multiple communities, cultures, and countries. Now that places experience myriad global influences, the set of acceptable behaviors and practices, while still defined at the local level, has expanded to include cultural traditions and objects that come from all over the world. Places do not have singular identities but instead enjoy a constant flux of ideas (Massey 1994). As a result, many believe the theory of habitus is too rigid to adequately explain rapidly changing world.

In response to these critiques, Bourdieu emphasized that habitus should not be viewed as a rigid and fixed system of behaviors, but a system of "dispositions." The words "dispositions" and "styles" help to conceptualize habitus as a range of behaviors and attitudes rather than specific attributes. Furthermore, since habitus is learned, it is open to change as a person ages through their life span and experiences multiple influences. This change can come from within, as well as from external influences. As

different 'fields' interact and overlap with one another, habitus changes. However, while there is room for change, there are limits to which these changes can take place. Bourdieu asserts that his concept of habitus is dynamic and allows for change. In a larger city, there is an increased amount of diverse influences upon habitus. There are more social fields overlapping and interacting. Compared to life in a rural area, people in metropolitan areas are more literate and open to change. In being exposed to multiple influences, those in the cities can experience an increased awareness of their own habitus, and consequently, they can experiment with its rules (Bourdieu 2005).

Habitus provides a useful framework for understanding how people fit in within a particular place. When a person is properly engaged with the habitus in a particular social field, he or she feels in sync with that place and the people there. Since habitus manifests at both the individual and collective level, these practices appear as natural and common sense. It is important to recognize that values and expectations within one field do not translate in different fields and at different scales. Thus, it is critical to identify the place and scale: body, home, neighborhood, region, and nation. It is also necessary to identify the specific expectations in place and how the different types of social, cultural, and economic capital are exchanged differently. Success at one scale may marginalize at another scale. For example, behaviors that are appropriate on the playground may be wholly inappropriate in the classroom or in church. By following the rules of the place and being in tune with the practices of a particular place, a sense of harmony and fitting in is established within a particular place (Bourdieu 2005, Friedmann 2005).

Since the rules of the field are hidden and perceived as common sense, individuals in the field are not aware of the legitimacy of their habitus until they are presented with

other options. When a person recognizes a discrepancy between their beliefs and their position in habitus, they can start to question the limits of habitus and realize they can do things differently. However, when the previously hidden rules of the field are exposed, the dominating group emphasizes its common-sense quality and non-negotiability (Bourdieu 2005, Cresswell 1996).

It is within these moments when the normal way of being is questioned and challenged, that we can learn what is considered normal in a social field. To examine these “transgressions” becomes important to identify the “rules of the game” (Cresswell 1996). It is difficult to identify all the behaviors and actions that belong in place without the comparison to what is abnormal. As indicated above, the ‘normal’ practices of habitus are hidden and difficult to identify. Acts that transgress the rules of the field are more easily recognizable. Breaking rules of the field will delineate the margins of the field, and illuminate what is and is not acceptable within habitus (Cresswell 1996).

When implicit social rules are broken, the dominating group portrays the transgression as out of place. They use rhetoric to discredit the people and actions on the margin characterizing them as dirty, unnatural, and threatening. Tim Cresswell’s book *In Place/Out of Place* examines multiple situations in which people engage in actions that upset the expectations of place. Cresswell described when thousands of homeless people in the 1980’s lived in and slept in Grand Central Station in New York City. City officials declared the homeless out of place and inappropriate, saying that the only people welcome in the space of Grand Central Station are those using it for transportation. However, this restriction on the use of Grand Central Station ignores the fact that many people used the space for meetings, eating, and socializing. They declared that people

that are homeless do not have a right to the public place, and when they use it inappropriately, it is a social transgression. Non-homeless people who use the space, even those who use it for purposes unrelated to transportation (provided that those purposes are legal and socially acceptable), are exempt from this transgression. It is natural to use the railway station for transportation, homeless do not belong and do not have a right to sleep and spend time in the public space (Cresswell 1996).

2.3) Global change, Migration, and Belonging

A pattern of increased mobility of people and ideas between places that developed as a result of technological advances in global transportation and telecommunication has led to an interconnectedness between places across the world. People not only physically travel and migrate between regions, countries, and continents, but they connect and share ideas electronically via telephone and the internet. Emailing and talking with loved ones and business partners face to face on Skype is becoming an increasingly common form of social interchange. As a result of the expanded mobility of people and ideas, people and places themselves have multiple identities and are in a constant state of flux (Massey 1994, Savage et al. 2004). These global changes can be identified and understood by examining identities and everyday practices of people in local places.

Doreen Massey's research (1994) on social relations and mobility indicates that place is a distinct combination of local and global relations. Massey emphasized the importance of not distinguishing places as bounded, as this can result in an "us" and "them" mentality. Rather, she suggests to conceptualize place as a "constellation of social relations" and "articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings,

experiences” (Massey 1994: 154). Through changes in telecommunications and mobility, the shape and geography of social relations is changing. It is not possible to provide adequate explanations of a place and social relations by only looking at that place, but it is necessary to set place in its wider geographical context. It is the links and networks that constitute specific local places. Depending on one’s position with these relations, places are experienced in many various and often contradictory ways.

Many theories of globalization have sought to eliminate the distinction between global and local processes. With the changes in global connectivity, communication and interaction were no longer inhibited by distance and boundaries, and became detached from local places. However, without reference to the local, it is difficult to grasp the concept of global. Yet, getting a clear understanding of local is difficult in itself, as it is difficult to define and determine its scale and location. Local is no longer understood as constituting a face to face community with clear boundaries. Rather, it is important to look at local places not as bounded entities, but as complex sites experiencing fixity as well as fluid change, infused with a variety of specific social networks. (Savage et al. 2004).

Local can also be thought of as socially produced by people within and outside of the local place. The local exists and is reproduced through the imagination of those within and outside of the place, as they define their local area relative to other places. Local places in this way are not static, but move and change as people come and go, and travel to other places. Therefore, the local can be thought of as a social construct that can be contradictory and always changing (Savage et al. 2004).

For this research project, I examine migration, mobility, and identity in the context of global and local processes and relations. As described above, mobility is a central theme in what it means to be modern (Blunt 2007, Cresswell 1996). Transnational geographies look at mobility and migration in its various forms and scales and incorporate research of movement, transportation, travel, and citizenship. Transnational networks are made up of an assemblage of socio-economic, political and cultural relations. It is important to look at these socio-economic, political, and cultural relations at various scales that create transnational networks (Conradson and Latham 2005).

Research on transnationalism and translocalism contrasts with research that portrays modern globalization as human mobility through fluid, borderless worlds. In describing movement in this way, research misses out on the everyday life experiences and the ways in which social relations are rooted in place, and how they change as a result of movement (Conradson and Latham 2005, Freitag and Van Oppen 2009, Gilmartin 2008). A recent 'mobilities' turn in geographical research links research on migration to discussion about mobility and transnationalism and emphasizes the importance of examining mobility through everyday lived and embodied experiences of migrants (Blunt 2007). Migrants put much effort into organizing and sustaining transnational lives and relationships through communication, travel, collection of material objects, and imagining and visualizing transnational connections between places (Brickell and Datta 2011, Conradson and Latham 2005, Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Transnational identities are located in multiple places and it remains critical to explore the different ways in which migrants in different physical and social locations negotiate their belonging at different scales (Gilmartin 2008). Additionally, much

research on transnational migration has focused on elites or those from developing countries, therefore little is known of those in the middle that travel and migrate.

Conradson and Latham call for more research on the mobility of the middle class, those who move from and to middle class societies, usually for travel or education.

Migrants make use of transnational ties and practices to transform local places and create belonging there (Ehrkamp 2005). Migrants create places of belonging in their new neighborhoods by actively placing their identities there and engaging with the receiving society and creating relationships with them in their own way. In this way, migrants construct their identities that “cut across fixed notions of belonging” (Dwyer 2000: 475). Their everyday lives and identities become transnational rather than located in a single place, which involves complex negotiations.

Processes of inclusion and exclusion depend on dominant groups categorizing people as belonging or not belonging, and there are numerous studies on how this plays out for migrants (Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging is not entirely about the feelings and emotions of migrants, but how dominant groups determine who gets to belong. Belonging involves being recognized by others as fitting in. Belonging is defined partly by self, and in part by the wider community. Migrants struggle to meet follow normative expectations of behaviors, dress, language, eating habits, and religious practices. These qualities act to exclude the foreigner from belonging to the dominant group, while at the same time reinforcing the qualities through which the dominant group uses to identify and legitimize itself.

There are studies that detail how migrants make it into the dominant group by blending in and adapting to the group’s expectations. Often, the responsibility lies with

the migrant to learn the language and adopt the values and practices of the dominant group to be able to fit in. This often involves letting go of native practices and customs to belong to their new home. However, it is important to take caution and not fall into the “trap” of defining belonging as either in or out (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). Discussion of belonging often struggles to examine how belonging is a process and involves complex negotiations in a wide web of social relations.

Some researchers (Smith 2001) have suggested that transnational ties and practices prevent migrants from adapting to their new home. However, this binary viewpoint breaks transnational ties and local belonging as mutually exclusive and does not allow for an understanding of their complex relationship. It is important to look beyond the dichotomy of local and global ties to conceptualize migrants' identity as constantly negotiating and changing in relation to multiple places. In Patricia Ehrkamp's (2005) study of Turkish immigrants within a community in Germany, she described how migrants transformed their neighborhood into Turkish space through the creation of teahouses, watching Turkish television, and described feeling “at home” there. In taking ownership of the space and the activities there, they were able to feel more comfortable there and engage with the receiving community.

In the early 2000's, feminist research brought attention to the lack of focus on gender in transnational research, and called for research on the specific and concrete circumstances of everyday life of transnational migrants and the various power relations that influence mobility, home building, and relationships (Pratt and Yeoh 2003). Transnational movement was often portrayed as an act of resistance and transgression. Feminist literature highlighted that movement across borders is not

inherently transgressive but that migrants will experience burdens as well as opportunities as they move to establish new lives (Ralph and Staeheli 2011).

Transnational practices may create new spaces, but this does not mean that people within these spaces are disconnected from social expectations from their home culture. While women may move away from traditional and oppressive expectations through migration, the benefits they experience in a new place may involve struggle and conflict, and may not be permanent. Feminist literature calls for future research to investigate the specific paths across space and bodies and the ways in which people negotiate differences in specific places and at different scales (Pratt and Yeoh 2003).

Belonging is experienced internally as an intimate emotion of safety and comfort within each migrant, but is also experienced and defined socially within a set of power relations. Belonging is negotiated at different scales and requires an engagement with other people and spaces that are shaped by local circumstances as well as global networks. Everyone within a place is subject to the social relations and categorization, however, the process is more evident for migrants who negotiate belonging in multiple places: their old homes and their new residences (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). The concept of habitus is useful framework through which to examine migrants' spatial and embodied experiences and the local contexts. Research in translocal and transnational geographies is also useful to investigate local experiences and the agency of migrants as they transform their local places of residence (Freitag and Van Oppen 2009). In the following chapters, I will present international women's daily emotions and experiences in State College, Pennsylvania and examine them in relation to the social networks they negotiate on local and global scales.

Chapter Three

Methodology

I designed my research methodology according to the theory and practices of participatory action research because of its capability to establish a comfortable and safe relationship with participants and provide a medium in which they could voice their concerns and identify and reflect on possible solutions. Those involved in participatory action research seek to reflect on their everyday lives and to understand concrete practices of particular people in particular places. The focus of participatory action research is to enable groups of people to collaborate to consider and openly discuss the circumstances and decisions that affect them as individuals and as group members. The ultimate goal of this methodology is to empower participants to create social change and transform the ways they engage in and with the world (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005, Morgan et al., 2010, Wang and Burris 1997)

Photovoice is a category of participatory action research in which participants take photographs to record and explore their experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to particular themes. Photovoice is participatory in that research subjects take and select photos that reflect their experiences, and then act as storytellers as they narrate their experiences using their photographs. Then with the researcher, they identify themes within their stories. The three primary objectives of photovoice are: 1) to put participant's experiences at the forefront of the project 2) to encourage critical discussion of important issues in the lives of participants, and 3) to communicate concerns to policy makers (Wang and Burris 1997). Photovoice can be an effective way to reach policy

makers because as a visual medium, it is a powerful medium for communicating emotions and experiences.

The methodology and underlying concepts of photovoice originate from multiple sources including research from feminist theory and Paolo Freire's educational praxis for critical consciousness. Critical and feminist research proposes that power accumulates to those who have a voice and decision-making influence. Feminist research method seeks to address and attempt to break down the power relations between researcher and participant with the use of more collaborative relationships and research methods while also validating personal and everyday experiences (Peet 1998, Wang and Burris 1997). Photovoice also incorporates ideas of Paolo Freire, particularly research approaches that focus around working with people, not on them, by creating conditions in which people voice the concerns in their lives and solutions through dialogue with others (Freire 1970, Wang and Burris 1997). Photovoice gives participants an opportunity to voice and share their concerns, and through this collective reflection, create strategies for change so that participants can shape the conditions of their own lives.

Participants in photovoice projects are often chosen from marginalized groups in society (Morgan, et al. 2010, Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001) Photovoice provides an accessible way for people to record their experiences as nearly everyone can use a camera. The use of a camera does not require participants to read and write. Additionally, photographs can reflect complexities of everyday life, and positioning the participants as photographers and recorders situates them as experts of their own lives. Participant photographs can give insight into communities and lives of the participants that professionals may not perceive through observation. It allows researchers to understand

the perspectives of those who do not usually have a voice and power to shape their world. When conducting data analysis, photovoice does not fit data into a predetermined framework, but rather involves the participants in defining issues and themes. By having international women in State College take pictures of their everyday lives, I hoped to understand the experiences of international women in State College and how they perceive their place in it.

3.1) Study Context

State College, located in Central Pennsylvania, is home to Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) and is surrounded by natural wooded areas, rural farmland, and low-lying mountains. Larger metropolitan cities such as Pittsburgh and Philadelphia are located approximately 150 to 200 miles away. Originally a rural community, State College experienced early growth and settlement with agricultural practices and extraction of natural resources. With the founding of Farmers' High School, now known as Pennsylvania State University, in the mid 1800's, the urban center has expanded to support the growth of the university. Penn State now serves as the primary employer for residents in the area.

State College encompasses the Borough of State College and multiple townships. For the sake of this research project, the boundaries of State College include the College, Ferguson, and Patton Townships, as well as the Borough of State College. Most of the Penn State campus lies within the Borough of State College, and a portion of it lies within the adjacent Township of College. While each of these municipalities operate under their own code of laws, they were included for 1) being

identified as State College by participant, and 2) being a continuous metropolitan area that encompasses the university, shopping centers and high-density residential housing. According to the United States Census taken in 2010, this area was home to 84,556 inhabitants, with 10.63% of residents being foreign-born and 13.10% of residents speaking a language other than English in the home (U.S. Census Bureau).

When designing my research study, I knew that I wanted to work with international people residing in State College, as I have career interests and experience teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to adults and children. One experience, in particular, motivated me to focus my research on international people. I used to tutor an international woman in English, and we met on a weekly basis to review grammar, vocabulary, and talk about our lives with one another. I valued our relationship as we began to get to know each other. However, I also started to feel conflicted as she started to share her stories of her struggles of adapting to her new life in State College. Not only did she have to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture, she also had to try to find meaningful work, make friendships, and navigate her role as mother and wife in a new place. She talked about the ESL classes she took, the field trips she went on with her classes, and the relationships she made with her classmates. While she enjoyed attending the classes, not all places, people, and teaching practices resonated with her, and she expressed that she continued to be very lonely in State College, and that she went to few places outside her home, and that even her home could be a site of struggle. She also needed other resources in State College, but did not know where to start looking, and did not understand how certain agencies would benefit her as there were no similar resources in her home country. As an ESL teacher and volunteer, this relationship inspired me to

find ways to create classrooms and networks that recognize and attend to ESL student concerns and struggles, and reflect what they want from me or the institution as a resource.

Already having an established connection to a local ESL outreach agency, the Mid-State Literacy Council, from past volunteer work, I collaborated with the leadership in the agency to outline a research project directed towards the needs and interests of foreign language-speaking adults in the State College community. One of the topics that surfaced in these discussions was a project focusing on foreign-born women. Such women are commonly accompanying spouses attending or working at Penn State, and they often face challenges integrating themselves into the cultural landscape of State College. US immigration policy states that internationals residing in the United States on a Dependent (H-4) Visa may not work or attend a university, which restricts the activities in which the international traveler could participate. As the Mid-State Literacy Council often works with women from these backgrounds that attend their ESL courses to teach them English and help them learn more about the community of State College and the resources it offers, I decided that this population would form the basis of my research sample.

The participants in this study do not make up a statistically representative sample of the international population in State College. It was my intention to sample broadly from the diverse experiences and perspectives of international women in the community. Qualitative research methods do not seek to make statistically-representative characterizations of the population of interest, but rather allow for an exploration of subjective and individual experiences and interpretations. Additionally, due to language

barriers and my choice not to use an interpreter, I limited my sample to participants with a conversational proficiency in English who could actively participate in the interview process. Therefore, I sought out women participants from diverse backgrounds and countries that could speak and understand English, and that came to the United States for a variety of reasons.

I actively recruited participants from April to July 2015. I contacted two organizations that serve immigrant and international women in the State College community: the Mid-State Literacy Council and Global Connections. The latter is an organization associated with Penn State. Both organizations offer English classes to immigrants and internationals in the community, as well as other services such as private tutoring, cultural competency workshops, craft and music groups, and friendship programs. The Mid-State Literacy Council announced my project to their students and allowed me to attend English classes to explain the details of my project and build rapport with their students. Global Connections posted my project flyer on their Facebook page and allowed me to make announcements in some of their classes. I also recruited participants by asking friends and family members to inform their acquaintances of my project and provide them with my contact information if they expressed interest. I then used snowball sampling to search for more participants. I also emailed Korean, Chinese, and Russian churches in the community, but I did not receive a response. Initially, I hoped to recruit between 25 and 30 participants. However, I began recruiting in April of 2015, a time when university and ESL classes finish for the semester and many students and immigrants go on vacation or move back to their home country. In total, 17 international women participated in the study process.

I collected demographic information from 15 participants. Three participants were from South Korea, two from China, two from India, two from Japan, and there was one participant from Colombia, Brazil, Poland, Iran, and Indonesia. One woman was born in Puerto Rico, and while a United States citizen, she was included due to her distinct position as not living within the States, and often considered “international” by residents of the State College community. Participants ranged in age from 25 to 50 years old, though most participants were in their twenties or thirties. Length of residency varied from two months to fifteen years. The majority of participants were recent arrivals, five participants having lived in State College for less than 1 year, four participants for 1-2 years, four for 3-5 years, and two participants lived in State College for 14-15 years.

Residency and visa status varies among the women, with most participants defining themselves as “housewives” or “homemakers.” Six of the participants reside in the United States on a Tourist or Dependent Visa and are unable to work or study while here. Three participants were graduate students studying at Penn State, while four participants worked as Post-Doctoral Scholars or Research Assistants. Nine participants were married, one was engaged, and five participants were single. Four participants had children, while one was expecting her first child.

3.2) Study Methods

When I established my methodology, two theses served as models: Cheryl Sutherland’s Master’s thesis on identifying and mapping immigrant experiences and emotions in Kingston and Peterborough, Canada and Courtney Richter’s Master’s thesis exploring Muslim women’s experiences in Columbia, Missouri. Both of these projects

utilized photovoice and mapping exercises to document and give voice to participants' stories and emotions experienced in particular places. At the outset of the project, I met with each participant to explain the details of the project and provide her with project materials. Each participant received a folder with instructions for the study, Photography Release forms, colored pencils, and the Consent form. I offered a single-use camera to all participants and gave them the option of using their own digital camera. Every participant that took pictures elected to use their own cameras. During this initial meeting, we discussed all written materials in the folder, as well as the ethics involved in taking photographs of other people, and the risks and benefits involved in the study. Each participant consented to participate in the study and stated that they understood the risks, benefits, and ethical implications involved.

I also took this time to establish a conversational rapport with each participant. As I was asking questions about the women's personal experiences and emotions in State College, I attempted to establish a sense of trust and openness between myself and the participant. I introduced myself and inquired into the participants' backgrounds and their reasons for coming to State College. Throughout this process, I encouraged participants to ask questions about the projects and share any reservations they felt about their participation or about the project as a whole.

I invited participants to reflect on their experiences in State College after the conclusion of our initial meeting, and I asked them to complete two exercises: one involving photography and another involving marking on a map. For the photography activity, I asked the participants to take at least 10 pictures that demonstrated their everyday life in State College. I also asked the women to consider questions regarding

their perceptions of safety, comfort, and belonging when they photographed the community. In order to avoid causing any harm or distress to the participants, I emphasized that if a place made participants feel unsafe, that they did not need to go there to take pictures for this project and that they could write down the names of the places or mark the places on the maps provided.

I provided women with a set of colored pencils and three maps of different areas within State College: two large-scale maps of Pennsylvania State University and downtown State College, and a smaller scale map showing most of State College. The women used the maps and colored pencils to indicate places they go within the community and how each place made them feel. Once a participant finished taking photographs and completed the map exercise, I scheduled an interview to discuss the photos and maps.

Of the seventeen participants, fifteen women completed the map activity and fourteen women took photographs for the project. Participants provided me with copies of their photographs via email or transferred the photographs to my computer at the beginning of the interview. One woman also met with me to discuss her concerns regarding resources for women in the State College community, but did not take photographs or complete the map activity.

I used a semi-structured format to interview each participant about their maps and photographs. The women chose the venue for the interview, and I encouraged them to choose a place they felt safe and comfortable having a conversation. Several interviews were held in the classrooms of the Mid-State Literacy Council, while other interviews were held in public places such as local coffee shops, the library, or campus meeting

spaces. With the permission of participants, I audio recorded each interview. At the beginning of the interview, I inquired into each participant's residential history, and then proceeded to discuss all photographs and topics that were brought up while looking at the photos. Finally, we looked at the maps and discussed the different places that the participant went to in her everyday life and the emotions connected to each place.

After all interviews were complete, I contacted the women again to remind them of the opportunity to participate in a focus group with other participants in which they would discuss their pictures and experiences in State College. I set up an online calendar to determine times that best worked for most women that were interested in participating. While eight women expressed interest in participating in the focus group, due to scheduling difficulties, only four women were able to participate in the focus group. I asked women to choose three photographs that best represented their experiences. Two women chose their own photographs while the other two asked that I choose relevant photos.

I used a semi-structured format to guide the focus group discussion. As a group, the women discussed their photographs together and responded to one another and asked questions to the group. I also asked questions to delve further into the women's experiences in State College. Women talked with one another about the places they went and groups they attended in State College, and asked how they found the resources. Together, they also discussed what they wanted out of organizations such as Global Connections and changes they could make. However, it appeared to me that not all women felt comfortable sharing the same personal experiences of struggle and making relationships that they shared during their private interviews with me. Two women that

appeared to take a lead during the discussions were women that had stayed in State College for at least a year and had a strong grasp of English. They shared their stories of struggle and described the wide range of resources they used in State College. Despite how much each woman spoke during the focus group, all of the participants were eager to continue talking with one another after the discussion, and shared their contact information. The women expressed gratitude for my organizing the focus group so that they could listen to each other and share their stories about their experiences.

I conducted grounded theory analysis on the interviews, photographs, maps, and notes once I started to complete interviews with participants. Qualitative analysis through grounded coding of interview data provides a way to generate theory by systematically extracting ideas from the responses of participants and tracking the appearance of common themes throughout the data (Charmaz 2006, Strauss and Corbin 1994). This methodology enabled me to uncover the personal significance and meaning that international women give to State College and the processes through which the meaning is formed. It was important to sort through what seemed like mundane and routine experiences to discern and bring to light the processes and assumptions that shape the participants' lives.

Grounded theory data analysis begins before data collection is complete (Charmaz 2006). When I finished transcribing an interview, I began reading through the transcripts and creating initial open codes categorizing the participants' experiences. After coding interviews, I adapted questions during the interviews to sample for theoretical concepts. Once the interviews and open coding were complete, I engaged in the process of focused coding in which I looked for frequent or significant codes. As grounded coding is an

emergent process, coding one section of data helped me understand other experiences and data. I compared and contrasted the women's perceptions of and experiences in State College, and drew connections between their experiences.

After collecting and analyzing the data, I shared the results of my study in multiple ways and I have plans to continue sharing these results. When all of the data were collected and initial coding complete, I displayed the photographs, stories, and maps in a month long exhibit at a local bookstore. The bookstore is centrally located in downtown State College and it is free for patrons to view the work. More than half of the participants in the study attended the opening event, and many came with family members and friends. The women were proud to share their photographs of their experiences and have their stories heard by the community. Representatives from the Mid-State Literacy Council also attended the opening event and spoke with me regarding the results. Leadership from both the Mid-State Literacy Council and Global Connections expressed interest in a detailed report of my results. They want to incorporate the results of my analysis into a larger program that seeks to understand how to best reach potential students and meet the needs of international women in State College.

Chapter Four

Results

In this study, women identified and reflected on the places that they encountered in their daily lives, and how they established relationships, both positive and negative, with those places. There were numerous factors that influenced how women experienced different places in State College, including but not limited to time of day, seasons and weather, positionality as international women, and visa status as student, worker, or dependent. Additionally, participants experienced various levels of adaptation to life in State College depending on how much time they had lived in the area, how proficiently they spoke English, and the ways in which they connected to social groups in State College. As a result, the women experienced emotions and connections to places that were diverse, fluid, and at times discordant as factors relating to these locations or to the women themselves changed during their time in State College.

4.1) Places of Joy, Comfort, and Connection

Before women in this study could begin establishing connection to the places and people they encountered in State College, they required a sense of personal safety as a prerequisite. This need for safety occupied two realms: the need for safety from injury and theft (physical safety) and the need for safety of personal expression (expressive safety). At the base level, they needed to feel that they were safe from bodily harm as they encountered places in State College and traveled by foot, bike, bus, or car. Outside of their own physical safety, participants with children also spoke about safety in terms of

their children having safe places to play, go to school, and grow up. It was also important for the women to feel secure in their possessions, such that they could collect and store their personal belongings in safe places away from others that might steal their things.

Apart from the need for the physical security of self, family, and possessions, the women also described a need to feel safe to express themselves. They described a need to feel an emotional security that enabled self-expression, which they explained as the need for locations and situations where they could freely express their ideas and emotions. The participants also expressed a need for cultural safety, which manifested as the ability of women to participate in their own linguistic and cultural activities, including speaking their native language, celebrating holidays, observing religious customs. Once the women felt a sense of both physical and expressive safety in a location or social situation, they became open to establishing personal connections to those places and people.

This openness to connection allowed women to explore their neighborhoods and travel between places in State College. Many women described walking neighborhoods and parks as a pleasing and relaxing experience that enabled them to learn different places and resources. One woman explained that running through the neighborhoods near her home helped her get a feel for State College. She describes her experience, “Running, just exploring the layout of the city, that helped a lot. Knowing where things are, what is a good place to go, where not to go.”

Observations of behaviors and actions of the people in places also helped women determine which places were physically safe. One woman regularly saw people walking and jogging in the parks near her home and seeing the joggers convinced her that the

parks were a safe place for everyone to spend their time. She discusses a park she frequents with her husband in the following passage.



Figure 1 Neighborhood parks are safe places for women to relax, and walking through them enable women to develop a sense of familiarity with their neighborhoods.

This is the Orchard Park. This is one of the familiar places for me because I think it's so safe. It's so beautiful and good place for walking. So I usually go here. I often come here with my husband.

Another woman describes finding places to walk around her neighborhood with her dog. She walked her dog multiple times per day and together they enjoyed looking for new parks and paths in her neighborhood. Maps also proved to be a useful resource to explore different areas of State College. She found maps online and used them to map out new paths through her neighborhood. However, while maps provided pathways around her neighborhood, they left out other information. In one incidence, she found a map online but once she followed the path she outlined for herself, she was concerned for her

safety due to the lack of sidewalks. This forced her to walk on the road. However, she noticed that cars gave her space for her and her dog walk safely, which allowed her to she feel more at ease in the environment.

This particular loop... I looked on a map and I said, well I don't want to keep going back and forth in the same spot. I hate doing...going down one road and then coming back up the same one. I usually like to do loops. So I had looked up a map and I said, let's do that. At first I actually didn't feel safe on this road because you can see that there... There are cars, and there is like this little spot for bike riders, a bike path to go up and down. So I might as well give it a shot. People really like swerve out of your way, to make sure they're not hitting you. I have my dog, there is no sidewalk. So I stick to the sides.

Some women express that their feelings of safety in State College are influenced from their experiences in their home countries. One woman from Brazil discussed different modes of transportation in State College and how she feels comfortable and safe riding her bicycle on bike paths through State College as she feels there is not as much traffic as in her home in Brazil. She also expressed interest in school buses in State College and how she admires that children have a safe way to get to school. Another woman from Colombia expressed feeling safe in State College, even at night due to her inability to walk safely at night in her home country.

Even so, the dark, I feel safe, because in my country I can't walk in the night, or in the day because it is very unsafe. This is the reason I like State College to live, for me, I feel very safe. I can walk with gold chain, necklace. In my country, no. It is a difference.

Working to build common ground with others in the community helped the women establish a sense of connection to people and places in State College. The women believed that it was important to learn English so that they could communicate and engage with Americans in State College. Learning English also represented critical step in preparing the women to pursue academic interests in the United States. Many of the women in the study described the process of learning English as stressful, but the act of improving their language skills on a daily basis also provided the women with a sense of hope and accomplishment.

Stores and restaurants provided useful and accessible environments for the women to practice English and create this sense of accomplishment. These places provided a safe, predictable platform for them to build and test their English skills without the pressure to engage in long and unpredictable conversations. Women gained experience interacting in English and learned short but useful common phrases they may not have learned in English classes. These places also enabled the women to gain hands-on experience with American culture in State College. One woman explains the excitement she felt when she learned how to order a beer for the first time. It was an exhilarating experience for her to do something new and try out her English language skills.



Figure 2 Restaurants and bars provide locations where the women can practice their English and socialize with friends.

This is my first experience in the bar. I didn't know the location was a bar, so when I arrived at 9pm I was a little late. One guy at the entrance asked for my passport to know how old I am. I didn't have some experience like that. I'm lucky I took my passport that day. I happened to have it. I thought as long as I'm here, let's order a beer. And I just looked around, looked through the menu. I didn't know them so I searched on the internet. The name of the beer. What kind of beer. Which brand is famous. I found that everything is new to me and I could not make a decision. So I asked the waiter for a recommendation. He recommended 2 to

me, so I chose one. I liked it. It was good. I thought it was exciting. I just did something I had never done.

In practicing English, women felt a sense of accomplishment, knowing they were building a skill that would help them communicate with others in the community. Additionally, by practicing English in these situations and contexts, women gained confidence in their English speaking skills, which helped them to confidently venture into new situations and join new activities. One woman describes her experience grocery shopping and practicing her English.

I go to [the store] alone, sometimes I need to speak with the cashier, or if I want to buy clothes, I try to go alone because my husband is impatient. Because I need to talk. And the people need to understand me. It is difficult. But it's very nice there. At the end of the day, I feel good because I talked.

Grocery stores were not only an environment in which women could learn English, but also learn about and try American foods. Several stores in State College offered both international and American foods. Several women in the study reported enjoying learning about American culture through American foods. One woman describes her experience at a grocery store trying samples, looking around, and examining new foods.

I like this place. I feel this place is very cheap and delicious food, and they offer samples to taste. So every time I go there I go to the new foods to taste, and then I decide if I buy it. Sometimes, I'm not sure I have to buy it, so they give me more chance to choose new food. And actually taste the Korean Food also there. But I like to see, look around at new things and examine it.

As women began to feel more confident in their language skills, they participated more and more in activities with other Americans and native English speakers. Getting involved in activities around State College also provided a window into American culture, as well as a way to pursue personal hobbies and interests, and establish friendships. One woman enjoyed going to church groups in State College, not only to learn about American culture, but to make friends, “ I found, as I told, probably I can connect with Americans through their religion. So I sometimes go to church. I would like to know their mindset. The Spiritual Center helped a lot.”

The HUB, the student center on Penn State Campus offers a variety of activities for students and families, including arts and crafts nights and movie nights. Several women in the project enjoyed going to these activities and making friends. The woman below explains how she enjoys participating in the activities.



Figure 3 The HUB is a central place on Penn State campus where women go to study, meet friends and participate in organized activities.

This is the second photo, which is of the Hub. Once again, because I don't work here and I don't have any work permit or anything. I am on a dependent visa so I can't do anything, as of now. So I used to go here because there were other people my age, or students, or senior, or junior. And the interesting thing over here in the Hub at the University is that a lot of activities went on over there, especially they used to be photography competition, arts and crafts. There were movies being shown there. And I was allowed as my husband's guest. So I spent a lot of time there making arts and crafts, taking part in competitions, and watching movies. And I did actually make a few friends over here. They used to come regularly on the weekends. So the Hub is another interesting place for me and I spend a lot of time here.

While the HUB proved to be an important resource for many of the women in the study to pursue hobbies and make friends, not all women were aware of the activities at the HUB, and many felt excluded from participating as they were not Penn State students

themselves. The woman below, engaged to a Penn State student, researched into HUB activities but found the website confusing, assuming that the activities were only for Penn State students and staff. When she participated in the focus group for this project and heard other women talk about their experiences at the HUB, she wanted to try going to the activities, though she continued to feel unsure if she would be eligible to participate as she was only engaged, and not married to a Penn State student.

[A friend] told me about the Hub. I checked the web site many times and I wanted to do the pottery classes, but I'm not married, so I don't have any relationship like that. I didn't know if the spouse would be able to do those classes. You said they are, because it is amazing that on the website, it says it is just for Penn State students or professors. And said, it is not for me. I thought I was not allowed to do that.

Places that the women associated with their personal values and future goals also brought them a sense of joy and comfort. Some women in the study were actively working or studying in programs at Penn State. While not all women felt a strong connection to their work, some women felt a strong connection between their workplace and sense of self. The woman below describes her experience working as a research assistant. She felt a sense of community within her workspace, a connection to her personal values, as well as a sense of movement towards her future (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Participants experience many different types of emotions in their offices, from disappointment and disconnection from not knowing peers to an intimate connection to their sense of self and future.

The office space I don't particularly care for, but it symbolizes moving towards what I really like to do, developing new ideas, problem solving, and working with [my advisor] and being a part of the community I really like being a part of this lab. So, yes, I don't mind at all spending time here. It is a good thing I like what I do.

Several of the women in the study who were in the United States on dependent visas also took pictures of places that represented programs in which they would someday work or study. One woman took a picture of a daycare in which she felt an

“instant connection” because “the philosophy that they hold is very similar to what I hold and where I would like to work permanently, so it was very similar to the day care center that I had worked in Vancouver.” Women in the study would take tours or walk through places that inspired them. One woman from Colombia who came to State College with her husband took pictures of the Industrial Engineering Building (Figure 5). When her husband was admitted to Penn State, she began looking into programs at Penn State that interested her. As she walked through the laboratory, looking at the machinery and equipment, she felt a sense of connection to the mission of the program to improve the quality of life for workers. She actively worked towards attending the program by taking English classes that would prepare her for academic study.



Figure 5 This laboratory represents a space that inspired one women to feel connected to State College and work towards her goals.

I am interested in this area because when my husband was admitted to his program here, I wanted to study, and the opportunity is here with him. I saw the industrial engineering web page and saw all the areas, and the area I'm most interested in is this. I didn't work in this area before. But I read, it is interesting because it is a way to help other people. And as an engineer, I want to help people. [In this department], you can design products to improve the quality of life. You can simulate work stands and help people in industrial security and occupation health.

While many of the places of comfort that women described were exciting places where the women went to encounter and learn about American culture, each of the women also required places of peace and reflection where they felt a sense of ease and belonging. Such locations provided opportunities to get away from the stresses of daily life, relax, and have time to themselves. Often, these places were identified as being separate from work space. One woman explains that she does not take her school books to the park because she does not like to taint her relaxing spaces with thoughts of work, “But when I take a book here, it is usually something like for fun. That way I don't use my nice relaxing space for not fun stuff.” Many women in the project identified parks and natural areas as places they went to for relaxation and peace, while others reported feeling this way in gyms and exercise classes.

The Arboretum, a large garden on Penn State Campus, was mentioned by more than half of the women as a place they went to for relaxation and reflection (Figure 6). Located within walking distance of home, work, and/or school for many women, the

Arboretum represents a location of meditative beauty where the women could go to reflect and enjoy the cultivated natural scenery.



Figure 6 The Arboretum provides a space that allows women to walk, relax, and reflect on their lives.

So the Arboretum, I took pictures of it because it is kind of my safe place. I mean not that I need a safe place, but it is kind of where I go to when I want to relax. I've been sad because in the winter I could not go much, so now it is nicer again. But my boyfriend and I, whenever we want to relax, we go on a walk around, just sit and look at the flowers. So it is kind of like a place away from work. It is near work, but it is a place to just think about other stuff and relax.

Another woman enjoyed walking through the Arboretum as it reminded her of her home in Iran. Below, she describes the first time she went to the Arboretum and how the landscape reminds her not only of the physical environment of her hometown, but of the

attitudes of its inhabitants as well. While walking through the Arboretum, she reflected on an expression she heard in her hometown that “people take on the characteristics of the environment,” and this experience would help her make sense of her new home and identity in State College (Figure 7).



Figure 7 The wide open spaces of the Arboretum reminded some participants of home, while also presented a contrasting landscape for those from dense urban areas.

This is the panorama picture I took of the Arboretum. I like the light. My homeland back in Iran and my home city is like a bowl. So the mountains are around and it is in there. And when you go to the other city, you through deserts, and you have a wide field in front of you when you are on the road. So they say it makes the vision and attitude of my hometown people to view far away. They don't see near, close. They have a very wide vision over their work. When I first went inside the Arboretum, it reminded me of my hometown, as it has a wide vision. So I like it. I like it a lot. The sunset makes it... I like it. Orange and blue. The sky. Yes.

For some women, places of peace and reflection were best enjoyed in solitude. Other women preferred to share these places with friends and family. One mother explained that there were parks in which she walked with her family, but that there was

one place she went by herself or with friends. She explained that it was a peaceful place that was “separate from the family place. It’s my own place. It’s nice.” Another woman liked to spend time with friends walking through a local marsh (Figure 8). However, she also found it important to share the experience with her children, to teach them that there are places to find peace and calm when life gets busy and stressful.



Figure 8 Millbrook Marsh represents an area of peace and reflection that some women went to and shared with their friends and family.

I would like to let them know this place, this environment. When they reach 20’s and 30s, they will get busy and competitive, but I would like to let them have this calm place for meditation. So that is why I would like them to go there with

me. But I would like to, next time go to there with my friends. And talking about our generation.

Many of the women looked to parks and other natural settings to find their places of reflect, but one woman identified her peaceful place as being the gym (Figure 9):



Figure 9 Gyms serve as a place that some women could go to spend time to themselves and let go of their stress.

Oh, my gym. I love my gym. It is for any kind of body type, any age group, so it is quite safe, and depending upon how much you want to work out and what your goals are, she is very good about telling you this is what you need to do, this is

how many times you need to repeat a certain program or not. So I love Fitology. It is clean, it is great, it is very motivating, I think the philosophy of fitness is not just about weight and becoming more healthy, but it has a lot to do with just your mental health and this is your time for yourself. You have certain goals that you want to achieve, but it is really just to let go of everything during the day or the week and just be there. I love this place.

There were places that women felt a sense of connection and joy, but also a deeper connection, a sense of belonging. When the women in the study described feeling a sense of belonging, it often related to connecting to other members of the community in places where they felt comfortable and safe. This connection with others could be established in several ways, but most commonly the first connections that the women in this study made that provided them with a sense of belonging in the State College community came about for two main reasons. Either the people that they formed these connections with spoke the same language as them, or they had a similar life situation. Interacting with others who spoke the same language as the women provided relief from the stress of having to converse using a language in which they lack fluency.

Homes and neighborhoods were places that women felt a sense of connection with family or friends. For some women, home was a place they could speak their native language freely with their family members. Language differences led to feelings of separation and frustration for many women. Home offered a safe place for them to relax, and even hide from the pressures to speak and learn English. The woman below described the home she shared with her husband as being the only place she felt a sense

of belonging. In being free to speak Spanish with her husband, she was released from the pressure of communicating in English. Though even the daily pressure to speak English left her wanting to spend time to herself, not speaking or listening to anybody. She could do this in the safety of her home.

I felt a sense of connection in my home. Only my home, because at the beginning when I came here, it was very hard because I didn't speak English, and communicating with other people was difficult. And now it is difficult too. But not more than when I arrived. Sometimes I feel, I don't know, sometimes I don't want to talk with anybody. I want to stay alone, and not talk and not speak and not listen, no, no.

Another woman described a place she goes to regularly to talk with someone from her native home, someone she sees as a mentor (Figure 10). In having a person that she could speak to in her native language, she was able to express herself differently. Not only could she talk about things more freely than if she were in her own work office, but she could express her emotions more authentically. In a private office with her mentor, she could open herself up and express the more vulnerable parts of herself.

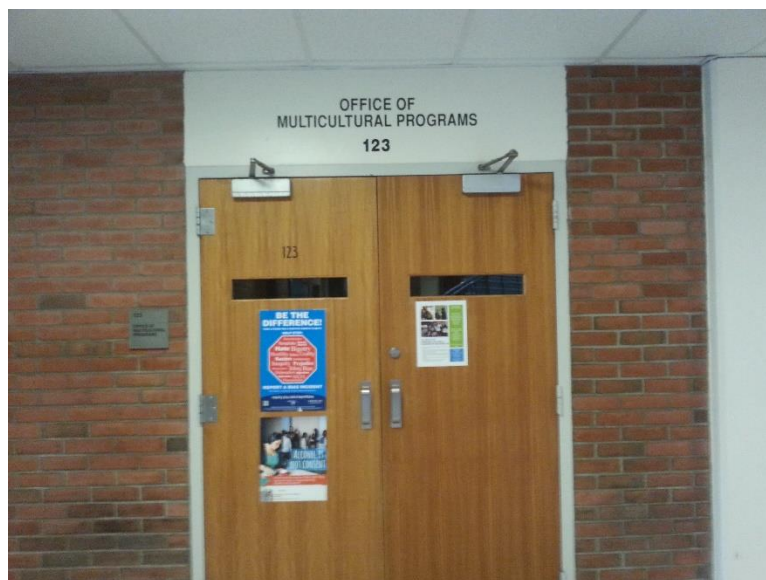


Figure 10 Women often had places they could go and talk with others in their native language. One woman found colleagues in the Office of Multicultural Programs with whom she could speak and express herself in Spanish.

She is kind of like my mentor in that sense. But I think it also helped that I can express...I was thinking about that the other day, I usually don't get angry - - it is hard for me to really get angry. I don't think people have seen me really angry. It is just easier to express anger in Spanish for some reason - - I can just... So I think in that sense it feels more comfortable to just go to her office, then I can just talk. I can just say things. So in that way it feels even safer than in my own office if I'm frustrated with something that has to do with people in the department. I would say it is safer, not that the other one is unsafe. But I feel like I can really say a lot. So I going here in being able to express in Spanish to someone who understands my craziness or whatever it is good.

A sense of belonging was fostered when speaking with individuals who shared a common language and heritage. The woman below describes how she felt a sense of

belonging when attending a traditional festival that reminded her of home. The festival offered her a space to express her Bengali identity and connect with other Bengalis (Figure 11).



Figure 11 This picture of a Durga Puja celebration represents a space in which a woman was able to express her Bengali identity and connect with others from her native country of India.

This is actually a Bengali festival that is called Durga Puja, which is biggest festival for the Bengali community for the Hindus. I particularly, for obvious reasons, felt very close to this place. This festival is like Christmas to us. We used to buy gifts, exchange gifts. A lot of people used to go out a meet a lot of people, relatives and everybody. Here for the first time when I couldn't attend this [festival], I felt very homesick. But once I went here, I saw there were many

people out there who...once again, I found those common grounds of meeting people out there together celebrating at this particular festival. And once again, being a part of where I belonged to.

Establishing a sense of belonging as a result of sharing a common life situation took many forms among the study participants. For some women that took English courses, the English classroom environment was closely tied to their sense of belonging in the community. Several of the women reported feeling more comfortable when engaging with other internationals at classes for English language learners, even those with whom they did not share a common language and culture. Despite the fact that the barriers to communication that these women experienced when talking to native English speakers remained when they conversed with other internationals, the women felt more comfortable in these situations than they did when talking to native English speakers because with other internationals they perceived themselves as undergoing a common challenge of being away from home in a place in which culture and language differences made the process of making friends and fitting in more difficult. In communicating with other internationals, the women's confidence in speaking English increased. One woman explained that she felt "less shy about speaking and talking to other people" when she participated in activities with other internationals and that it made a big difference in helping her feel confident in speaking with Americans and joining new activities. Below, a participant talks about the closeness she feels with classmates in her ESL class.

I love this picture. It's here in the Mid-State Literacy Council. I love this class. It was a TOEFL writing class. This class helped me a lot. There were only 4 students. It was personalized. I got close to another friend. The four students, we helped each other.

While Global Connections and the Mid-State Literacy play an important role in the State College community, churches and individual families in State College also hold regular gatherings for international students. These groups organize cooking classes, bible study groups, and holiday get-togethers. The international woman below explains a friend she made through a family that often hosts international people at their home. She describes a shelf at her friend's house that is filled with souvenirs from international students, and for her this shelf symbolizes the welcoming atmosphere and sense of community that she feels with the family and other international students (Figure 12).



Figure 12 One woman took a picture of a shelf in an American family home that hosts bible study with international students. This space represents a welcoming place that affirms the collective identify of the internationals that attend the group.

This is a house. This is a shelf on one of my friend's house. We usually go there for gatherings or bible study. They have some bible studies. I usually go to ... the lady there, the couple. She would like to do baking and cooking so she sometimes brings international students into her house, like bake a cake or yeah something like that. They have some connection with international students. They collect many souvenirs from them and they set up their basement as a collection of souvenirs. So they have all types of Chinese tiles, other nations' souvenirs. I like their shelf. It seems like they're mostly from China, and other nations. I cannot

remember the nations that they have, but they have a very pretty house. A very friendly, warm place.

And for some women, their sense of belonging expanded to include their neighbors and neighborhood. While not sharing language, the woman below still described the importance of having a community of internationals and like-minded professionals to connect to. Her feelings of belonging in her neighborhood were also related to a sense of being separated physically from different groups or places that did not necessarily fit in with her neighborhood's goals and lifestyles.

This is the complex I live in, I definitely feel belonging in community. So it is a cute little complex of these, well, they are Split Town houses. And it is only young professionals, no students, and mainly academics. So it is really a cute little community of people, and a lot of us are international in that area, in that particular complex. So it has a little courtyard in the back, so people get together, have wine and cheese, and just hang out there. So it is really nice. It is a nice area, is close to downtown. Close to work. Plus you can get away from the crazy frat houses and the bars.

Other participants experienced a sense of belonging when interacting with other members of their academic department on the Penn State campus. In this situation, the barriers to belonging that the women might experience in other places that they visited

within the State College community were alleviated by the common interests shared by the women and the members of their department.

Several women in this study had children, and these women were able to establish a sense of belonging to local places and people as a result of their engagement in the education and socialization of their children. Schools and playdates offered atmospheres in which women could connect to other parents and adult figures that worked with children (Figure 13). Shuttling children to different places after school up to 10 times per week, some women connected to other parents at the after school activities, such as soccer fields or dance studios. The woman below described her child's school and then her child's dance studio at which she volunteered and built a sense of community with other parents.



Figure 13 Schools are safe places in which women establish a sense of belonging by building connections to teachers and parents of their children's friends.

Easterly Parkway Elementary. Both of my kids went there. I tried to volunteer in many ways here. So that is a kind of belonging for me. I helped in some classes. Maybe once a month when kids were in Kindergarten. And some big events, I

helped. And still I know many... I don't know parents from high school or middle school. But from elementary school, yes. They are nice. It's a safe place because I know my kid's friend's parents. And I'm still connected to some of the parents. We don't get together anymore but when we see each other, we shake hands, and still have a little conversation. It's nice. Now I volunteer at [my daughter's dance studio]. I am here 8-10 times a week. Compared to other parents, I chat more with parents here. I have a conversation with them. It's a kind of belonging also.

Book clubs also represented a warm and welcoming community for several woman. Meeting in coffee shops or homes, women spent several hours a week discussing books, as well as chatting about family, friends, and other aspects of their daily lives. Women reported that book clubs helped them to make friends and open them up to other resources in State College, as women shared information about places and programs in State College. Even for those that no longer had time to participate in book clubs reported fond memories of book clubs that they someday wished to rejoin.

I would have to say the strongest - - I guess it would be my book club leader's house. She always makes us to feel so welcome. She is always there with like baked goods, so welcoming. I am the newest member, but from day one she was so welcoming. I see her quite often. I look forward to going to book club.

While language barriers were the most common reason that participants identified for not being able to find places where they were able to establish a sense of belonging,

several women that participated in the study did not express language difficulties or barriers when describing their experiences in State College. These women had advanced English skills, because they received education in English during childhood. These women were more easily able to make connections in places without internationals than their non-fluent counterparts, and as a consequence their sense of community and belonging was expanded to include places like cafes, exercise studios, and nature trails (Figures 14 and 15). In these locations they were able to engage and make friends with Americans and other English speakers.



Figure 14 For one woman, a nature trail represents a place that she feels a sense of belonging as she walks the path regularly with her dogs and friends she met while walking her dogs.

This one, I took the photo in the State Gamelands, just behind Toftrees. There are open fields, trees, and a nice trail. And we've brought our dogs. We moved from Vancouver to State College, but we brought our dog with us. I took this photo because we spend a lot of time there regardless of weather, whether it's snowing, sunny, or even right now it's terrible with mosquitos. But we still go back there. The reason we go went back there is because we met somebody at the dog park in our apartment complex that was like – hey, do you want to go walking with our dogs? So the four of us went. They are a couple as well. And then our dog. So that, to me, was the first time I was able to sense that there was somebody similar to me. And I felt a little bit more of a belonging here. And that, again, was through our dogs. So for me, that was an important connection that I had built.



Figure 15 Some women also developed a sense of belonging to places such as cafes in which they spent time reading and studying.

Cafe Lemont. This would definitely be where I feel a sense of belonging and community. I love Cafe Lemont. The people who own it are fantastic. And they just, yes, I really like just being in there. It is one of few cafes that they don't monitor how long you have been there working, so you can be their working for a few hours and they really don't care. They don't say, oh no you have not ordered anything for an hour or so, so please leave.

For most women, a sense of belonging was felt in private or smaller places with several people with whom they had relationships. However, several women discussed feelings of belonging and connection in a larger sense to State College itself. One woman was expecting her first child when I interviewed her for this study. Below, she described how having a baby in State College helped her to feel more connected to State College. Going to her regularly doctor's visits for her pregnancy, she connected with medical staff as they guided her and her husband through the process of having their first child. Having a child in State College, she not only felt connected to people and certain places in State College such as the medical offices and hospital, but felt connected to the town itself. Her baby would be American, and there would be a permanent connection to State College and the United States for the rest of her life, whether or not she lived there.

And my third picture is the Mount Nittany Park Avenue location. And the reason, you can probably tell, is that I'm expecting a baby in October. So, I've never been...I don't really go, I don't get sick very often. So for me to have to go to the doctor every month, and now every two weeks is a big deal. But it's a location

that I frequent, and right next to it is the hospital. So obviously that's where I'll have my baby as well. So the medical staff have been great. It's a whole new experience for my husband and I. But it's a location that I go to often. But they answer my questions, it's exciting. So it's another symbol in State College that feels like I belong here. And then having a baby here. He'll be born here. He'll be from State College, so he'll be American. So for me, it's a symbol, like I have a connection to the community.

Another woman expressed an expanded sense of belonging related to State College itself. She grew up in larger cities and had spent much time in her childhood in New York City. Thus, she struggled to develop a connection to State College, a small rural town. Below, she describes feeling a sense of belonging to the bus that takes her out of State College, as it represents the cities to which she feels a stronger connection (Figure 16).



Figure 16 This photograph of a bus represents a lack of connection that one participant felt to State College, as it takes the participant to places she feels a stronger sense of connection.

This would definitely be, I don't know if it is a sense of belonging, but, man, when I see Megabus, I get a warm fuzzy feeling, because it takes me out of State College. But there are good things about this Megabus. We don't have a train station near, right? The Megabus is convenient, it is reasonably priced, and it is a direct route to New York and a lot of other places. So I think to me this is more about getting out of State College, and I take it a lot.

4.2) Places of Discomfort, Fear, and Alienation

While the women consistently reported that State College is a safe place to live, each of them also identified places in the area where they felt uncomfortable or unsafe. Often, the women's comfort level in a location was affected by temporal factors, such as the time of day and the time of year. In particular, winter in central Pennsylvania produces sub-freezing temperatures, snowstorms, and icy roads and sidewalks. Many of the women in the study come from climates with little or no cold weather, and as a result they experience both physical and emotional discomfort when driving and walking in State College during the winter (Figure 17). Below, a woman describes her difficulties in traversing snowy sidewalks during winter.



Figure 17 Snowy and icy roads and sidewalks are places that many women felt unsafe.

So if it is a winter storm, no one cleans the roads. So the snow is like here....to my knee. They clean the road, but they don't clean the sidewalks. So that's why I feel unsafe. But I don't feel unsafe all the time. Sometimes it is uphill and you have to catch the bus. And then I have to go down, and it is so slippery. It is not safe actually. And I have to catch the bus, so I have two choices. If I miss the bus, then I have to wait for 1 hour or 45 minutes. And sometimes I say OK, this is crazy for me. I just go to the road, the real road, and just run there. I know that the car is behind me, you know, it sends me noises. But I say whatever, I have to catch my bus. But that is my experience.

Another woman describes a fearful experience of driving through the snow (Figure 18):

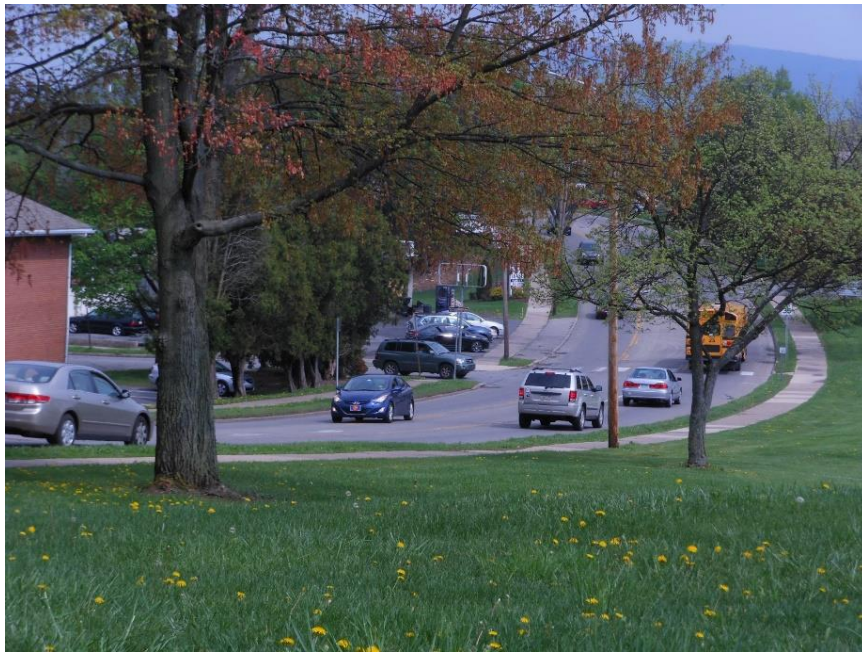


Figure 18 Many women feel unsafe driving on snowy and icy hills and often opt to take buses instead of drive to school or work.

This hill. It's downtown to Boalsburg. It's always happening in the winter, when the wet snow is falling. And sometimes I couldn't drive up the hill. And I always turn right to avoid that. But once it looked terrible. The car in front of us stopped. So we have to stop. But we could not stop that time. And we couldn't go up. It was terrible. I don't like that place to drive. It was scary.

Much greater than the sense of insecurity that the women experienced during winters in State College was the anxiety they felt when walking through the city at night. Campus, downtown, and residential neighborhoods were identified by participants as having streets that felt unsafe because they lacked streetlights, and were consequently very poorly lit after dark. As the women experienced these places at night, they recognized the need to alter their behaviors by making changes to their schedule or paths they took through the town. One woman described knowing that an area of downtown was safe, but she felt insecure walking there due to it being very dark at night.

I forgot to say at Allen Street at night it is very dark and it is not comfortable because it is too dark and if you walked there - -it's not as if it is not safe there, but it is dark and there are not many cars. You can go up Allen Street without seeing any cars driving by. Sometimes just some lights from people's houses.

Another woman avoided a portion of the Penn State campus for multiple reasons involving inadequate lighting, her awareness of crime in the area, and her relative lack of

familiarity with the location. While she recognized that her fears were not entirely grounded in reality, she continued to be fearful of that place and avoid it at night.

The dormitory area. I heard there's a lot of crimes. There are not many light poles and it is very dark at night, so I just feel a little bit of fear. I think it is imaginary fear. I do not live there or have any connections to this place. But the crime itself makes me very fearful about this place.

The participants reported many positive experiences of downtown State College because they met friends there during ESL classes, book clubs, and other activities. However, at night, downtown became a different place for many women. The women's awareness of alcohol-related crimes downtown and on campus caused them to change how they moved throughout these spaces. Some women continued to walk downtown at night, but did so only when with friends or family members. Other women avoided these areas at night entirely.

One woman described multiple experiences in which she was approached and followed by being approached multiple times by American males while walking through downtown State College. In one instance, a man approached her and asked her to have coffee with him. When she told him that she was married, he continued to follow her and state that he did not believe her. She called her husband on her cell phone to help her contact the police, and at this point, she explained that the man ran away. After this encounter, she started to wear a wedding ring to signal to Americans that she was married. She and her husband also devised a plan for her walk to a safe public place if she were to be accosted again. A similar situation occurred again during a St. Patrick's

Day celebration, and she followed the plan by changing where she was going, and instead went to her husband's office.

I turned back and I went to my husband's office, because we already discussed this, if this happens we don't go back home. That is dangerous. We need to go to some public space, like the library. If my husband's not in town I just go to the library and call my friend to pick me up. If he's on campus I just go to his office. This really scared me, but I don't think they...they were just drunk.

Another woman from Indonesia describes her experiences in downtown State College at night.

Sometimes I went home after midnight at 1:00 or 2:00 and there are the police and I always cover my face because I'm so cold. But there are a lot of police and they are staring at me, my veil. I wear it because it is so cold actually. And there are always drunken boys yelling in the streets, so the police take care of that. Even the boys are yelling at the police. And there's a lot of puke, like in front of the McDonald's and the Subway, and I have to watch carefully to make sure I don't step on it.

And I'm just thinking that if I stay late, it is better for me to stay in the library and go home early morning than to go home late in the evening. Because actually I feel safe, but because of the people who are drunk, maybe they can do something

harmful to me. While actually they - all the men here are really gentlemen. If you go to the bus they will give a space for a lady. It is not happening in my country. So I feel very good. But in the night, I don't expect all of those things. So I learned that the hard way.

Not only did she feel unsafe around intoxicated men downtown, she also felt out of place wearing her veil, feeling that others, including the police, were staring at her. She preferred to spend the night in the Penn State library rather than walk back home at night feeling unsafe and out of place. Also, her reflection on how American men treat women with respect on buses by giving up their seat illustrated her recognition of how people's behavior changes depending on time and place. For her, these situational factors mattered and she made decisions accordingly to protect her wellbeing.

Many participants were also able to identify locations where they perceived barriers to their integration into the social climate. Often, the women felt a more palpable lack of belonging in locations and situations in which they either had a strong expectation that they should experience a sense of belonging, or situations where they very much wanted to belong. While some women found community and belonging in exercise classes, women in the study that experienced language difficulties expressed frustration when joining exercise classes. Not knowing what to say to others in the class led to a feeling of isolation. These women struggled to make attachments to others in class as a result of these feelings of separation and the inability to properly express themselves, often feeling that the other members of the class had already made friends among themselves and that these social groups were exclusive to outsiders.

Actually I had some expectations for [the exercise class], but I don't think they are interested in making friends there. Because some of the already have their friends, so they just attend the classes together, or some people just go there by themselves and they just enjoy exercising. They do not seem to have any interest in making friends.

While the women often expected to establish friendships and experience a sense of belonging in ESL classes, not all women felt comfortable in these classes. It was a challenge for some women to get to know their ESL classmates. One woman explained that although she started to talk with more students as the semester progressed, she felt that “most of them do not talk that much.” She had hoped to make friends in class, but felt disappointed in not being able to do so. She reflected on her experience, trying to determine a way to talk more and connect with her classmates. She brought up her concerns with her teacher. The teacher provided her with multiple reasons that the students do not talk, but did not volunteer any effort to make talking between members of the class a greater focus of her learning plan. The participant tried to buy into the teacher’s explanation and tentatively resolved to continue trying to connect to her classmates and to better align her expectations to the goals of the class.

I'm just taking two classes. At first I really liked the classes, because I just jumped in the middle of these opportunities. But as time went by, I was a little bit depressed about the way the class progresses. The classes are very teacher

centered. So, the teachers talked a lot. It's not easy to talk as much as I want. The other classmates rarely talk. So I just thought about why. At first I thought it is because the teacher talked too much. The teacher dominated and the class. And the other one is, I guess, actually I just talked about this, with my teacher, and she said that is mainly because students want to talk, but they do not know how to say their ideas in English. But I think now it is OK. I just try to be more connected with the students and a teacher. And the teacher is very amazing, enthusiastic. And the purpose of the writing class is not speaking, according to the teacher. Actually, it's writing. Maybe the purpose is different than mine. That is why.

In other locations, women felt that members of the local community applied rules to them more strictly because they were not born in America. Multiple women cited situations in which they were asked to provide proof not only of their legal status to drink, but their legal status in the United States. These women expressed anger and frustration in being having their identities as outsiders, not from the United States placed as a barrier to entering public places in the community. Two women in particular experienced being confronted and challenged concerning their legal status in the United States several times each. During the initial process of providing consent for this project, they each articulated their displeasure and challenged me when I asked about their legal or international status. I informed the women that, per IRB requirements, I needed to confirm vocally that they reside in the United States legally in order to participate in the project. Below, a woman described her frustration trying to enter a bar with her friends

when the employees not only asked to see her age, but her visa stamp to ensure her legal status in the United States.

So I have my passport with me, it was the first month. And the person at the door kept flipping through my passport. I said it is the first page. It has my date of birth. And I can show you that I am well over 21. Then she kept flipping through, and she said no no no, I saw that but can you show me your visa stamp? Yes. So so I was like my visa stamp? That doesn't have any information. But it is the management, they say we have to see your visa stamp. This is the second time this happened in State College within the first month of being here, so I was really pissed off. I asked, Do you have any sort of INS, you know, whatever? INS? What is that? So anyway, we walked out. My friend was more upset than I was. We just walked out. So that is why I think that is a place I have never been back to.

While she felt able to walk out and not return to this establishment, she did not feel the same freedom with every place. There was another bar at which large groups of her friends liked to meet. And so instead of asking a large group to move to another place, she had to face this experience of her legal status being evaluated before entering.

Another woman from Puerto Rico further described the frustration of having her formal identification, and thus her insider status called into question. Born in Puerto Rico, this woman is an American citizen but regularly feels the need to give a “history lesson” to other U.S. citizens regarding her citizenship status, even though a United States flag and the word “Citizen” are printed on her driver’s license. Being born in a United States territory, she often felt frustration being perceived as a foreigner.

This is the first place I went out for drinks. It was orientation week with some people from my college and I was fine, like I was able to order a drink, the inside, eat, whatever. And then I went again, I think it was orientation week or the next week, but it was at night, but I had my ID so I didn't think there was going to be a problem there. So when I tried to go in I was told I could not go in because my ID was not authorized. The first thing they said was this is international. I'm not international. I am a United States citizen like you. It is not accepted. But you have to, because I am part of the United States. You need a passport. Well I don't carry a passport because I don't need it. It is safe in my house. I don't need it for anything. I'm a US citizen. So I asked for the manager and I try to give them a history lesson, and they said something which I think was interesting. I don't even know if they knew what they were saying, but only mainland IDs. We say that someone from Hawaii or Alaska cannot use the ID they are Americans too. No. That is the rule. Well OK. So I left and I am not going again. And after that I had to carry my passport all the time and so I got a Pennsylvania driver's license. But for me that night I just felt like do I have to teach people where I come from, and the history, and that I'm not international, and that I'm a US citizen just like them, and that I don't need a carry my passport for anything. So then after that I was frustrated. I went back home. I had one beer. I would just drink here.

In cases such as these, the study participants felt a palpable sense that they did not belong, which was intensified by the fact that they had approached the situation with the expectation that they would be able to successfully participate in normal social activities within the community. The fact that they believe that they were treated differently because they were not born in the mainland United States, coupled with their expectation that they would be able to participate in the anticipated social activity established in their minds a strong sense of a barrier between themselves and American-born members of the community.

Since several of the study participants moved to State College in order to pursue postgraduate education, the departments in which they learned and worked provided both an opportunity for the women to experience a sense of belonging and a place where the failure to achieve this sense of belonging could create powerful feelings of isolation and exclusion. For instance, some women did not feel a strong sense of belonging in their offices, oftentimes as a result of a lack of connection with officemates. The woman below describes her disappointment in not being able to connect with others in her office, despite feeling comfortable and familiar with the people there. She struggled with feeling apart from people in her office due to language differences and her short stay in State College.

But it's the most familiar place here. And a place where you feel a sense of belonging, you have a question like that? I don't have that feeling, I guess. It's in the basement, too cold in winter. Because it's under the ground and the weather is so cold. I cannot stand it. Even now, it's too cold. And I think it's because of the

language. I don't know what to say to people in my office. I don't know how to keep...to make our distance closer. I think because I only have a 6 month program here, some people think I cannot make a long relationship with them. So it's a little bit hard. Especially when I first got here, I didn't go outside, I just stayed here (in my home). I spent little time with them. I think I lost the chance for us to get to know each other further.

One woman experienced a struggle in obtaining a scholarship in her doctoral program after her department assured her that they would provide her with one. As a result of her inability to secure funding, she was not able to continue in her program. She felt she had little control over the situation and had few choices: move home or find another program in another place. While she shared that she had friends, places, and organizations she liked, she was reluctant to say that she felt belonging in State College. In fact, as her departure from her department and State College became more definite, she seemed to establish an emotional barrier between herself and the State College. She felt proud to not relate too strongly to things she did not believe in. She considered this quality part of her identity.

I have friends here. But my name means free woman. I try not to relate or belong to something that I do not believe in. If I have to leave here one day, I would definitely miss my friends, as I miss the friends I got to know last year that are leaving now. I like the Spiritual Center community. It has an international fellowship. I participate some in the Muslim Association too.

The ability to effectively communicate with other members of the community in English was the most common and critical factor in establishing a sense of belonging among the women in the study. To know English was to fit in. Many women found themselves treated as outsiders as they attempted to go about normal community daily activities, such as going to a bar for drinks, walking through a park, and spending time with friends. The women often perceived themselves as outsiders in some places within the community because they did not know the language. Feeling like a foreigner was connected to the sense of not knowing English well enough. These feeling of being foreigner left some women feeling unsafe and out of place as they moved about State College. To create a sense of safety, they traveled throughout town with friends, as described in the following passage: “We are foreigners, and my English is not good. I go everywhere with my friends. If I’m alone, maybe I feel a little unsafe, but with a friend it’s okay.” Though the feeling of being a foreigner and needing to learn English followed some women so that even in times they spent with friends, they worried that they needed to practice their English. A woman describes her experience, “When I go to my friend's house, I feel safe...because we talk in Spanish, yes. But at the same time I feel that I need to practice English, and if I talk always in Spanish, I will never learn English very well.” A sense of being a foreigner was even felt when spending time with friends from her home country.

Some women, regardless of their length of stay in State College, reported not experiencing a sense of belonging in State College. Each of these women expressed frustration with language barriers, and all of them apologized to me during the interview

process for their perceived lack of English skills. Despite their belief that they were able to complete the interview in English, they still felt self-conscious in the attempt. As a result of the perceived language barrier that all of these women experienced, their social circles were much smaller than those that could communicate in English more effectively and confidently. This feeling of alienation from others in the community not only impacted the size of the women's social circles, but also negatively affected their perception of the quality of their friendships. As some women have described above, the pressures of speaking English moved them to spend much time at home, alone.

The woman below described her experience living in State College. While living in State College for more than 10 years, she felt she did not have strong friendships. However, participating in the lives of her children, she interacted with parents of her children's friends and built attachments in this way.

I like State College, but I don't feel belonging, community because I don't have enough very good friends here. I can feel comfortable with some friends who has the children, because we can share information and we know same feeling while we raise the kids. Usually I have only my kids' friends' parents.

A dependent visa status often compounded the difficulties in developing a sense of connection as women tried to learn English and find their place in State College. While not all students and workers felt a sense of belonging with those in their departments, a workplace or department often offered a starting point and group for women to build their relationships. Women on dependent visas often described how they struggled to find

opportunities to get out of the house to meet people. The woman below explains her struggles as a housewife on a dependent visa. She reflected on an earlier experience in the United States as an exchange student, and how much harder she needs to work now to develop relationships. As a housewife in State College, she has to put in more effort to join activities and make connections.

And eight years ago when I came here to America as an exchange student, there were a lot of opportunities that I can join. But as a housewife, it is really hard to connect with certain people and certain programs. It is really hard. I'm still struggling with a lot of stuff I guess because of the language, because the culture. Most of the part is because of the people, I guess. Because while I am doing this research for you, I just found out it is all about people. Whenever I think about the place, and if I have someone I feel comfortable with, then I feel comfortable with the place. But if I do not have anyone in that place, then I do not feel I belong to that place.

4.3) Places of Conflicting Attachments and Feelings

Many of the places that the participants referenced during their interviews carried both positive and negative associations. This is relatively unsurprising, as any location that a person visits on a consistent basis is likely to be a site of both positive and negative experiences. However, among all of the locations named by the participants, two places were consistently described as locations to which the women attached conflicting feelings. The women described the city of State College and their homes as paradoxical

places where they would go to find comfort, but where they also felt a sense of confinement and a need to escape and experience other places.

State College was experienced in conflicting and diverse ways. Many participants came from urban areas much larger and denser than State College. The vast majority of participants reported that they felt safe and comfortable in and around State College. Many women specifically chose State College for schooling or work because of Penn State University, and the others came to State College because of family. They viewed it as a safe, inexpensive, and beautiful place for them to live, as well as a place that offered programs in which they could participate and meet other people. Several participants, however, had conflicting emotions surrounding State College. While they appreciated the simple and safe way of life, they yearned for more challenging and diverse experiences, for themselves and their families.

Many participants moved to State College from large metropolitan areas. State College offered a pleasant contrast to the noisy and congested urban lifestyles they experienced in their home countries. Nicknamed Happy Valley, State College lies nestled within the Appalachian Mountains. In addition to the mountainous scenery on the horizon around State College, the area has large parks sprinkled throughout that offer women opportunities to walk and appreciate the open space and greenery. The woman below expresses her appreciation of the aesthetic beauty of State College and compares it to her home in the region of Bengal, India.

And from these photos especially, something that I feel is even the natural beauty of this place is very nice. I feel it is because it is in the valley. Because I come

from a place where the population is very huge, and like in any point of the day, like it is almost like in a city that never sleeps over there. So here to see so much of the greenery, and less pollution, and less noise pollution, so it is very calm and relaxing in State College. So that is one thing I really enjoy here that I did not much have back home. The natural beauty of this place is very beautiful.

In addition to the beauty of the surrounding mountains, wooded areas, and parks in State College, some women also expressed their liking for State College as it has a sense of community and offers a variety of activities and ways to connect with others. One woman reported feeling that State College is a “pretty cohesive community because it is such a small little pocket in a humongous state. Like this little tiny pocket, people who have gotten together at the university.” Several women felt that Penn State contributed in building a sense of community by organizing events and festivals, and allowing everyone to enjoy the large grassy areas to engage in relaxing activities with friends. Feeling “cheerful” and “safe,” many women enjoyed walking downtown and on the Penn State campus (Figure 19). One woman expresses how Penn State contributes to a feeling of safety and community.



Figure 19 Penn State campus represents a safe place in which many participants feel comfort and a sense of belonging as they watch and participate in campus activities.

The other one is Old Main. The reason I took this picture is that there are many free concerts and plays, and interesting things to see in State College. And they are free. So everybody can go and spend time there. Some people go and spend time on the grass, like playing volleyball or whatever. It's a nice place and you don't have to be a student to be there. You can go there and spend some time, read a book, anything. I think it's a place that people feel safe and comfortable. They have a nice time there. So I think it's nice that Penn State encourages people to stay there.

Several women from large urban areas reported enjoying the feel of State College as a college town, a place of education and research where a new class of enthusiastic college students flood the town every semester. For one woman, the experience of being surrounded by young students and fresh ideas made her feel energized. Despite her

experience that college students could be “annoying,” she enjoyed living in a “place of learning” where “new things come first.” And for another woman, she liked how with every semester and football game, State College would be deluged with people, making the town feel active and vibrant (Figure 20). But then the city would slow down again after a game or the end of the semester, and she would have more freedom to do things like drive without worry.



Figure 20 A woman took this photograph of the football stadium to represent her enjoyment of living in a college town as the school and football program brought in many ideas and people, and gave State College the feel of change and urban excitement for a portion of the school year.

I like this place because the football stadium makes State College active. That's why I like it. I like vacations. During vacation times because I'm not good at driving. When it is vacation, you know, you can drive by yourself on the road. So

I like it. But if the whole year was that kind of situation, I wouldn't like it. So boring, and we couldn't get any city life from the community. But when the school starts there are actual people who come here. It feels like the city is loud, awake again. So this is why I like State College. It is sometimes quiet, and sometimes a very active city.

Some women's experiences of State College were more ambivalent. While the woman felt an appreciation for the safety and beauty of State College, they felt that something was missing. One woman described her ambivalence towards downtown State College due to the lack of stores and establishments that interested her. She feels that State College does not offer places that feel different or alternative.

I don't have any strong feelings about the downtown. I know it is very pretty and it is nice and has interesting stores, but I have no real feeling, the bars all seem the same. I wish there were more, like an alternative coffee shop. There is one, but it is always crowded. But I wish there were a used bookstore or just a place, something different. But it doesn't, so I think that is why I don't really have feelings for it.

State College as a small-town was a concern for several women in the study. One woman from South Korea worried that she would not like the small-town life in State College. Though she recognized that life in State College was “nicer than [she] expected,” because she found programs like Global Connections, her church groups, and

had easy access to Asian markets, she still did not like the “simple life” in State College. Another woman attempted to put life in State College in context of other aspects of American life that she had experienced:

And I think as an immigrant, or as a new immigrant, people really need to realize that the U.S. is a huge, very very diverse country, and State College is not even representative of Pennsylvania. It is actually the New York City of Pennsylvania, or of at least Central Pennsylvania, I would say. So I think people have to be very open-minded to not associate the United States with what they see in State College. This is a college town, it is not your typical college town, but it is a college town, it's diverse in its own limited way. It doesn't even have the stereotypical American food, so I don't really think this is representative of anything I have seen in the U.S.

When asked what she thinks of as a stereotypical college town, she reflected on a former college town in Michigan in which she lived. A typical college town for her attracted people from more than the immediate area and state, and offered a variety of experiences.

It also attracts people not from Michigan per se, so I think that helps the town's feel, that the whole vibe. That for me would be a college town, exposure to every single thing. And State College does not have that.

Another woman described her safe and comfortable experience living in State College, explaining that she felt like it was a safe place to raise her kids and for her husband to study. Growing up in Seoul, South Korea, she was accustomed to a life in a big city, with its competitive and challenging lifestyle. However, she also expressed that she felt tension between the sense of comfort and security that she felt in State College and her desire to strive for personal achievement and fulfillment.

I definitely like living in State College very much. But I need more motivation and challenge. I definitely recommend living here because it is safe, clean, organized, comparatively cheap. And you can feel comfortable to raise kids and that your husband can study, but I would recommend don't be too comfortable, because if you're comfortable, you cannot reach your goals.

Multiple participants described a connection in their minds between urban settings and motivation while discussing their concerns that life in State College could result in a lack of motivation for them. This concern extended to their children. Several women described State College as a safe place to have children, but they also had reservations about State College's limited cultural offerings. The woman from South Korea above realized the lack of challenges she experiences in State College, and reflects on how it affects her children, and what she wants for them.

So when you raise your kids, this place is very good. But I feel I need more experience. After my kids went to high school, I felt this way. During middle school, I didn't have this kind of feeling. Then after my kids started high school, I imagined their university and college life. After they go to college, what will life

be like? And then I realized, I should have gone to the city when they were in middle school to get them more motivation. Kids here don't have the motivation compared to kids who live in the city. They know life as only living in the State College countryside. I was raised in a big city. So I know they can have that kind of motivation, because I have that kind of motivation. But I forgot they never lived somewhere like a big city, so they don't know how to live in the city. I'm afraid they can't survive the big city. So I plan to let them go to their relative's house who live in a big city next summer vacation.

Another woman felt the need to express her dislike of State College as a place for raising children, despite not having children herself. Below, she reflects on her own childhood visiting large cities, and how these experiences helped foster a love of learning about and exploring the world around her.

[My friends] said it is a great place for kids and raising a family. But I have the opposite feeling. If I had children, I think I would probably have left within the first year. I don't think I would want to raise my kids here. When they start speaking and talking, and start exploring the world, I don't think I'd want them in a place like State College. It is not diverse enough and there are not that many cultural outlets. It is also not the kind of upbringing I had growing up. We would spend our summers in New York City. Watch Broadway shows, be exposed to a lot of different things, culturally, socially, I don't think that State College offers that, so I would not want to raise my kids here. But on the other hand it is cheap. It is very safe for children, you know a big city you will always have to watch out for what your kids are doing and monitor their activities, which I think

State College, you really don't have to do that. So the pro in that would be it is very reasonably priced and it is safe to have a family, but the con is that it doesn't offer very much in the sense of getting to know the world really.

For many participants, State College is a safe community nestled in the mountains. A community that offers programs and resources such as ESL courses, international grocery stores, and community events. However, this feeling was not shared with all participants. For some, especially those that spent a significant part of their lives in larger cities such as Seoul or New York City, State College feels small and homogenous. Life in State College is safe and uncomplicated, but also offers few resources, experiences, and opportunities to explore and learn about the world. These women felt that they liked their life in State College, seeing as it was only temporary, but expressed not wanting to stay in State College on a long term basis.

Home was also a place to which participants attached a set of conflicting emotions. Women did not commonly avoid their homes, but they often conveyed a sense of push and pull as they vacillated between the emotional states they attached to these locations. The women often wove their identity into the threads of their homes, as their homes often provided a sense of comfort and ease. The comfort, however, was at times accompanied or followed by uncomfortable and isolating feelings that acted as an impetus to get out and experience other places.

Many women indicated that they felt a sense of safety and security in their homes. For some this meant something as basic as the ability to leave one's personal belongings in a bedroom without fear of them being stolen. For others, comfort and safety meant coming home after a long day at work to relax and let go of stress with loved ones or

appreciating the aesthetic beauty of the neighborhood. Home was often a place where women could speak their native languages and interact with family members or friends from similar backgrounds after having to put forth the effort to communicate in English when they were out in the community (Figure 21).



Figure 21 For some women, home represents a safe place in which they can speak their native language and relax away from the pressure of adapting to the linguistic and cultural practices of State College.

This is a picture of here, my home. I think it's good. My roommates are also Chinese so there is no difficulty in conversation, communicating. I think it's safe. I can leave my things here. I do not have to lock the door. If I lived with other people, I could not leave expensive things here.

And in describing their homes, their sense of home often extended beyond the physical structure of their apartment or house to include their entire complex or neighborhood. Having a clean and aesthetically pleasing environment was important, as was having people with whom they could talk and connect on a regular basis. The woman in the example above goes on to describe her apartment complex:

I think it's very good, quiet, clean, safe, and beautiful. Everything is very beautiful, and especially very clean. I think the big reason that is that there are fewer people here, so it's cleaner here than China. Like in New York, it's not very clean.

However, feeling “at home” in one’s domicile or in State College as a whole was not automatic. Multiple women expressed that it took them time to develop and nurture a sense that the location where they lived was their home. Women took action to make their apartments feel “homey” through everyday activities such as spending time with friends and family and household activities such as cleaning. Creating a physical environment through the collection and arrangement of personal items also contributed in building a sense of identity and comfort within their own apartment space (Figure 22).



Figure 22 Some women developed a sense of belonging within their own homes as they went about their daily routines and decorated their apartments with personal items.

So that is just a picture outside of my apartment. It is weird that it would ever feel homey. When I first moved here I was like, Vancouver is my home, and we're in the middle of Pennsylvania. What are we doing here? We're Asian. We're not even Hawaiians. We don't even fit in here. The apartment...it felt foreign for a while, it was just a rented apartment. It was so blah. It has carpet. It is so cookie cutter yuck. But it is weird. After like seven months of living there you start to feel like it is your home. You feel comfortable. You feel safe. You want to go home, and home is that. It is really an odd feeling.

And when asked to describe what makes home feel like home, she said,

I guess all the stuff that you know, like all your furniture is there, but at the same time I spend so much time at home, I spent quite a bit of time it home. So is all the things that you associate with it - - that you do all your daily business there, like cooking, like sweeping. When it is cold outside you go inside and you go into your home and it is warm.

The amount of time they spent in their living space also played a role in how much women connected to their home environment, though spending more time either in their living space or in State College in general did not necessarily lead to feeling “at home” for all the participants. Women often spent more time at home after first moving to State College. This occurred for several reasons. For some women, home was a place that eased the transition of moving to the United States, while they built up courage to engage with the community and practice English in public. It also took time for participants to connect to other people and resources in town. It commonly took the women months after they arrived in the community to learn about any programs and organizations that they felt comfortable actively engaging. However, participants with active connections to the university through work or research did not express the same levels of difficulty in finding resources or developing a social network, and as a consequence they were less likely to report an initial period where they felt confined to their home as a result of a lack of social resources.

Weather also played a role in how much time women spent at home or in the community. Especially for women from warmer climates, the cold temperatures, snowy roads, and shorter days during winter resulted in more time at home. Women often felt unsafe traveling on snowy roads and sidewalks, as well as navigating unfamiliar neighborhoods in the dark. These women often felt more comfortable staying home in their warm apartments during the colder months. For many women that arrived during the winter, it took more time to reach out and develop friendships because of the relatively large amount of time they devoted to staying at home. When the women recounted their first winter in State College, it often resulted in paradoxical descriptions of their homes, which were places where they felt warmth and comfort but often experienced isolation and loneliness.

The participant below described her experience of home as a place of ease, a place where she did not need to wash her face or change her clothes. However, while explaining her home as a comfortable place, she simultaneously described feeling stifled and “cooped up.” For her, too much time at home led to her feeling sick and depressed. Home was a hideaway from the world, a safe place away from the stress of interacting with others in English, but the safety of home conflicted with her desire to go out and meet others.

It was very nice, but it gave me a headache, if you do have not any sunlight. If you spend a lot of time inside the house, that makes people a little depressed, a little bit blue. So I just decided to go outside again...And actually I have mixed feelings. Like if I have a plan to spend

with English speakers, I'm very excited. At the same time I just do not want to do that. I just want to stay at home. But at the same time I have to go out, I really want to go meet others, but I just live like this, hiding...something like that.

Other participants also described their homes as a place to speak their own language and relax from the pressure of speaking English. Home as a temporary hideaway was often positive, as it allowed them time to relax and rejuvenate. However, after spending what felt like too much time at home the women often began to feel lazy or guilty, which compelled them to go out, practice their English and socialize with others again.

For several women, moving to State College with new spouses meant more responsibility in the home. Without the support of family members such as mothers and siblings to share in household responsibilities, some women found themselves struggling as they began their new lives in State College in the role of housewife with additional cleaning and cooking responsibilities.

And a change was very hard because I lived in Colombia with my mother, with my brother. She took care of me. And here it is different, because I need to cook, I need to clean, I need to attend to my husband. It is difficult. Yes. I need my home. My mother, when you are sick, it is different, because she attends to you. And your husband, no. If you want to eat, cook. But I know it is a good experience. And I need to live this. It is a custom.

The process of finding housing was not easy task for women in this study. They reported searching for housing online at advertisements, on Facebook, and through connections to people they knew that had lived in State College before. Leases that end and start in the summer further complicated the matter as many women arrived in State College before or after summer and encountered limited availability of apartments for rent. Several women reported staying in hotels or in living rooms of acquaintances temporarily until finding a place to stay for themselves. Also, it was difficult for women to learn about neighborhoods or the kind of people that would be sharing their living space prior to their arrival in State College. The woman below, a 43 year old graduate student, explains her frustration living in an apartment complex with younger students during her first year in State College. Living in a noisy apartment building made it difficult for her to focus on her studies which sometimes led to her spending nights on campus. Before moving to State College, she attempted to find contacts from Indonesia that could inform her of housing information in State College, but she still struggled to find a place that met her needs. After her lease expired, she found another living situation with people she connected with and in an environment in which she felt safe and able to study.

This is, like, all students. But this building is better than my building because in this building, you have to swipe your card to enter the building. While in my building, there are no scanners. So during a party, like anyone can enter the building. So can you imagine there is like a seven

story building and all of them partying? So the building is shaking. And sometimes I didn't go home for two days because I have to stay overnight in the library, and I go home just to sleep. And it is so noisy. But if I'm so sleepy I just sleep. The problem is sometimes they do silly things. For example, they started the fire alarm at 3am. It was so freezing outside and my friend wake me up. I was so tired, so sleepy. I think it's not really a fire. I just want to sleep. No no no she said we have go down. And it was so so cold. I think it was below zero Celsius. And they laugh. They talk to each other and they are all drunk. And I'm just saying, oh my god. I cannot sleep after that.

Many of the participants described their homes in a paradoxical and conflicting way. A place that many women could speak their native languages and interact with family or friends, home was often a place of comfort and ease. These “homey” feelings were created slowly as women went through their everyday routines of cleaning and caring for others, collecting and placing personal items through their home space, and creating memories with loved ones. Women also carried with them, however, feelings of responsibility to speak English and engage in American culture, which led to conflicting feelings as they relaxed at home, away from outside English speaking world. And for those women that did not share similar lifestyles and goals with roommates and neighbors, home was not a place of comfort, which led them to seek out other places of comfort and safety to spend their time.

In summary, there are various factors that produce similar and different experiences of belonging and safety among the participants in this study. A primary factor that influenced the ways in which the participants negotiated relationships and belonging in State College was their gender. For instance, as mentioned previously, women expressed a need to feel physically safe as they moved throughout State College. Time of day was an important variable that influenced how women experienced safety. Several women in the study mentioned that they felt safer walking with friends or with their husbands, particularly when walking at night on campus, downtown, and on dark streets. Also, women experienced a sense of frustration when trying to learn their role as wife, several describing how they tried to maintain cultural norms from their home country such as cooking native foods and attending to their husbands. Additionally, as 7 out of 15 women accompanied their husbands to State College on a Dependent Visa, their ability to actively engage in certain activities in State College was markedly limited in that they could not work or take college courses. As a result, these women had to put additional effort in to find and become familiar with places in State College as well as establish social networks. Many of these women reported feeling lonely as they knew very few people in State College, and it took months to years to find groups in which they felt a sense a connection and belonging.

While not all women that worked or studied in State College stated that they felt a strong sense of belonging in there, the majority discussed finding friends among their colleagues and feeling some sort of belonging in their workplaces or within some departments at Penn State. However, some women on dependent visas found ways to develop their sense of belonging and find social groups despite being unable to work

outside the home. A desire and need to learn English encouraged many to enroll in English courses and engage in activities to practice their English such as book clubs. Several women found a sense of community and belonging through the lives of their children, either through school or the activities in which their children were involved.

Additionally, women's background experience in their home countries influenced how they created and negotiated belonging in State College. One of the most important factors that impacted how women developed belonging in State College was their proficiency in English. The ability to speak English proficiently and confidently allowed women to connect with more people in State College and expand their social network. Many women that reported a need to practice and improve their English expressed feeling isolated due to their lack of English skills and that they often spent much time at home to relax from the pressure of communicating in public. Also, women used their prior experiences in their home countries or through traveling to make sense of State College and develop a sense of safety and belonging. For instance, some women from dense populous areas in their home countries describe State College as having open spaces. They spoke positively regarding these open spaces, and chose these places as spaces to relax, destress, and enjoy the beauty of the area. Also, while most women described State College as a safe place to live, several women from areas with higher rates of crime described feeling comfortable and safe in State College, and expressed appreciation for safe streets and modes of transportation compared to their homes. These women talked about walking at night and moving through State College alone with a sense of safety that not all women in the study expressed. Thus, women's prior

experiences and their own understanding of their homes impacted how they engaged with State College.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Places are changing more rapidly and becoming more diverse than ever before as a result of technological advances that increase the global mobility of people and ideas. Describing places and the social relations within requires researchers to set place in a geographical context within networks of social, political, economic, and cultural relations. A person's position within these relational sets will influence how people perceive and experience places and the privileges they enjoy in those places. Immigrants and temporary migrants relocate to State College for several reasons, including migrant workers into the rural farming areas, refugee resettlement programs, though the primary reason that brings international people to State College is through Pennsylvania State University. As a college town, many internationals come to State College to attend the university to study or conduct research.

Through this study, I explored the lived realities of international women in State College, and how migration and their identity as international migrants influenced their daily lives. I provided opportunities for women to record their experiences in State College through photovoice and mapping activities and reflect on and critique their experiences through individual and collective interviews. Through the interviews, I gained insight into the challenges the women encountered as they adapted to State College, learned the language, and adopted local cultural and social practices. The international women in the study came to State College for multiple reasons and were at different stages and places in adapting to life in State College and developing, or failing to develop, a sense of belonging there.

On a daily basis, these international women negotiated the cultural and social landscape of State College. These women experienced different ways of belonging to State College and the groups within it. In my conclusion, I will discuss the women's experiences and results of the study along four topics including 1) Place, Emotion, and Belonging, 2) Translocal Connections and Belonging, 3) The Power of Photography and Storytelling, and 4) Limitations and Future Research.

5.1) Place, Emotion, and Belonging

Literature on belonging and place attachment indicates that people establish connections to places in a variety of ways and at multiple scales. Furthermore, belonging is not a static state in which people belong or do not belong, but rather a process that is in a constant state of flux. Women in this study often negotiated their belongings in many places including their neighborhoods, workplaces and classes, as well as to State College and their native homes.

The need for security was expressed by many of the women in their interviews. They described this need at two different levels. The first was the need for physical safety, which was the perception among the women that their possessions, their family, and their selves were safe from outside harm. The second level of expressive safety, which was a feeling of emotional security that allowed for self-expression in locations that the women perceived as "safe" or "welcoming." Once the women perceived a sense of both physical and expressive safety in a location or social situation, they were able to establish a feeling of personal belonging and emotional connection to those places and people.

The concept of elective belonging developed by Savage et al. (2004) helps to illustrate how some women in the study connected to State College and started to develop a sense of belonging there through choosing to connect to State College and weaving it into their life story. For some women, places in State College symbolized movement towards their future. Consequently, State College became a part of their personal narrative, a step along the path they take to reach their goals. These women identified with places that represented their values and interests that they someday wished to pursue such as work in a research laboratory or preschool. Additionally, the women in the study that had children took multiple photographs of places related to their children, where they took their children for school or recreational activities. These women described feeling a sense of belonging with parents of their children's friends, even if they no longer socialized with the other parents on a regular basis. Another woman described feeling that she now belongs to State College because she will be having a child there, and that the child will be an American *from* State College.

Belonging is experienced as an intimate emotion of safety and comfort within each migrant, however, it is also set within and defined by hierarchical social relations within each place. To develop a sense of belonging in State College, the women in the study needed to adapt their habitus, their ways of seeing and engaging with the world around them, to the expectations of behavior and practices such as language, dress, and religious practices in State College. Language presented a barrier to communication that hindered the women's ability to engage in daily life activities and also led to feeling of being separate from the dominant group in State College. Women felt a sense of connection and belonging to those that could speak the same the language, partly because

it was stress relieving to not have to speak in English, but also because they felt understood and could express themselves fully. Several women described their home as a haven from the pressure and stress of speaking English, but they also felt contradictory feelings about staying at home. Some women described feelings of guilt or escape as if they were hiding from the community they wanted to be a part of. The women regularly negotiated the tension between staying at home with people from their own countries that spoke their native language and wanting to go out and socialize with Americans and become part of the community in State College.

Several women experienced a palpable sense of separation and not belonging when interacting with the dominant group in State College, particularly when their status as foreigners was highlighted and brought to attention. One woman felt out of place wearing her headscarf as she walked down the street in downtown State College, saying that she was stared at by college students as well as by police officers. Several women in the study were asked to show their passports to enter drinking establishments in State College, not only to identify their age, but their legal status in the United States. One woman was asked to show her visa and exit stamps. Another woman from Puerto Rico was asked to show her passport despite being a United States citizen. Other women felt a sense of separation in classes they attended while in State College. It was common for some women to feel that other people in the class had already formed social groups and were not interested in talking with them. While some women felt this way while in other classes with ESL students, this was most commonly felt in classes that were mostly populated with American-born students.

As Cresswell described in his book, *In Place/Out of Place*, transgressions of the ways of being within a place can reveal what is considered normal by the inhabitants there, and when a person transgresses the expectations, they can be met with authority to re-establish and uphold the rules of that place. In this study, there were instances in which women transgressed boundaries of expectations (e.g. language, wearing headscarves), and oftentimes the women tried to adapt their behavior to follow along with the expectations in State College. One woman who wore a headscarf avoided downtown State College at night because she felt out of place walking there as she experienced people staring at her headscarf more during the evening than during the day. In the incidents described above regarding the passports, the one woman who was asked to show her legal status challenged the employees asking her to do so, asked to talk with management, and refused to return to one establishment. She even challenged me during the consent process saying that I did not have a right to discuss her legal status. The woman from Puerto Rico was forced to show her passport instead of her driver's license because employees did not believe she was a citizen. Her response was to get a Pennsylvania driver's license so that she would not have to prove her citizenship on a regular basis, but she now gives a "history lesson" to those in State College to educate them that Puerto Ricans are citizens too. Other women found small ways to challenge the dominant ways of being and acting. For example, one woman confronted her ESL teacher to request more opportunities for students to speak in class. However, the teacher responded with saying that talking was not the purpose of the class and that the other students may not have enough knowledge to participate in discussions. The woman responded by saying that perhaps she needed to change her expectations of the class.

Other women found and developed spaces in which they could speak their own languages and participate in their own cultural practices. While some women transgressed ways of behaving, these challenges and concerns were met with authority and invalidated. This demonstrates their lack of power as internationals in State College.

5.2) Translocal Connections and Belonging

Through investigating the experiences of the women in this study, it was important that I attune to the everyday experiences and emotions as well as the connections that extend beyond State College. The recent shift in migration research focuses on the everyday experiences and how migrants maintain transnational ties and relationships as they establish lives in new places in order to explore the different and particular ways that migrants negotiate belonging in multiple places and at different scales. In this study, many participants talked about State College in comparison to their hometowns or home countries. Their understanding of and engagements with State College was influenced by their experiences in their home countries. For example, several women compared local libraries and school buses to their situation at home, saying that they liked how State College valued literacy and education and demonstrated it through the easy access to educational resources and schooling. Many women discussed safety, and how they felt that State College was much safer than what they experienced in their home countries, in that they could do things like walk alone or at night. Others, particularly from dense populous countries discussed the open spaces and fields in State College, and made an effort to enjoy that space. Some ways that women thought about State College mirrored how they thought about their homes, and it created

a sense of connection, feeling like they understood the place. For instance, one woman from Iran was reminded of her hometown when she hiked a mountain nearby State College, and when she walked through a local park. This sense of connection was a source of comfort for her and a way for her to understand the place and the people there.

Women also expressed feelings of frustration and confusion as they struggled with gender expectations from their home country while also navigating their new lives in State College. One woman studied in State College while her children and parents lived in Indonesia. She spent very little money on herself in State College so that she could send home remittances, yet she continued to worry about her mothering being questioned by those in her home community as she pursued education in a foreign country. Several women expressed the frustration they experienced trying to abide by gender expectations by being a good wife by cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the household. For several of these women, they started their role as spouse in the United States and felt overwhelmed as they took on additional responsibilities so far from home without the help of an extended family.

There are locations in State College in which internationals made use of their transnational ties and practices to create their own spaces, such as the Korean, Chinese, and Russian churches. These spaces were a way for some women to enter the community, establish a place where they felt secure and comfortable, and then branch out into the wider State College community. One woman from Korea started attending the Korean church to make friends, and then after making connections, started to try out new churches. Many of the other women in the study engaged with similar locations and organizations such as ESL classes, book clubs, and bible study groups, since they were

places that internationals gathered together to socialize. They talked about these locations very fondly, describing them as warm, welcoming, and accepting that nurtured sense of connection and friendship.

5.3) The Power of Photography and Storytelling

A primary goal in this project was to put the voices of the women at the forefront of the project and focus the research on the experiences of the participants. Photovoice provided a tool that enabled the women to share, document, and criticize their experiences in State College. Photographs were an excellent way to start a discussion as they were rich with meaning and covered multiple topics. Photovoice also served as a way for women to share their experiences with one another. During the focus group, I asked women to choose three photographs that represented ideas they wanted to present to a group of other participants. They described their experiences, resources they used in State College, needs, and challenges they encountered. It was a way for women to learn about new resources, ways to access those resources, and validate one another's experiences. At the end of the meeting, the participants exchanged contact information and expressed desire to meet up with one another again. They expressed gratitude for my organizing the session as they were able to connect with others and learn more about State College.

I also wanted the women's voices and stories to be heard by myself as well as by the community to help heighten awareness of the uniqueness of the immigrant experience. The women in the project were proud of their role in the project and over half attended the community photo exhibit celebration. Photovoice can be an effective

way to reach policy makers because as a visual medium, it provides a powerful basis for communicating emotions and experiences. Global Connections and the Mid-State Literacy Council have also expressed interest in the study, and have asked me to share the results of my study so that they may make changes to better serve internationals in State College. After collecting and analyzing the data, I recommend the following strategies to better reach potential students and better meet the needs of the international population in State College:

1. **Listen carefully:** During the interviews, several women shared the ways in which they expressed their concerns and suggestions to the organizations and people that serve them, but that their suggestions were not understood or taken seriously. As many in the international community are not confident in their language skills, they may not be willing to be persistent in communicating their needs, or they may doubt their needs in the first place. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to take seriously all concerns and comments that are brought up, and provide opportunities for the internationals being served to be involved in the decision making process when designing classes, events, and activities.
2. **Increase connectedness between students, classes, and organizations:** Many of the women I interviewed indicated that they were not aware of other ESL classes and resources for internationals offered in State College, even if students in the same ESL classes used these resources. And in general, many women wanted more opportunities to talk to one another in class. I recommend setting aside time in ESL classes to have students and teachers talk to one another about resources and classes they know of and use. Also, many participants did not know of resources offered by

- similar organizations. If possible, I recommend more collaboration between similar agencies, and linking these organizations and resources on one another's websites.
3. **Increase visibility of resources:** After discussion with some participants, participants expressed that they do not necessarily recognize the posters and symbols used to advertise resources and events in State College. This applies to organizations that primarily serve the international population such as Global Connections, as well as organizations that serve all those residing in State College, such as the Women's Resource Center. One participant that was associated with the Women's Resource Center, a local organization that serves women that have been victims of domestic and sexual violence, highlighted the lack of visibility and understanding of these resources for internationals that do not have a strong grasp on the English language. I recommend translating pamphlets and flyers for the Women's Resource Center as well as other organizations that serve women and internationals and placing these in locations such as libraries, study halls, cafes, and on Penn State campus.
 4. **Increase use of social media:** I would also suggest that people at Global Connections and Mid-State Literacy Council make language-specific social media groups that allow people to connect and share information related to available resources in State College. A Facebook group could be created for each language group that allows people to interact with others who speak their language. It could also link to a wiki that has information about resources, such as the Women's Resource center. These organizations could have students create pages like this as a collaborative project for internationals. It would be a big assistance in organizing informal events as well. It also provides a platform for polling students about their wants and needs. Social

media is not the end-all be-all by any means, but it is a relatively democratic means of communication. Using social media platforms like Twitter would also give people a good way to practice their English, and classes could integrate it as a way to teach sentence construction in English and critique the language use of others.

5.4) Limitations and Future Research

When conducting this study, I encountered multiple limitations of the photovoice methodology. First, I offered a choice for women to use their own cameras or a single-use camera that I would provide for them. All women opted to use their own cameras on their cell phone as it was easy to take with them around State College and they were familiar with its settings and mechanisms. I showed the participants the single-use camera in our first meeting, and several women had never used one before and did not know how to work it, and therefore expressed preference for their own phone. At the outset of the project, I asked the women to take pictures of places they go in their daily lives. During the interview for most women, it became apparent that many women chose photographs that they had taken before the project. This resulted in the women including beautiful pictures that they felt proud of, instead of or in addition to pictures that provided the most accurate window into their daily lives.

Limitations of this project also relate to the project being participatory action research. In developing a participatory project, I attempted to address inequalities and relationships of power and privilege, yet the extent to which the project empowers women needs to be further examined. My position as researcher and as the ultimate editor of the project perpetuates the set of power relations in some ways. For example,

when planning the photo exhibit and focus group, I asked women which photos they wished to include for peer or public review, and approximately half deferred the decision to me, thinking that I have a better knowledge of the experiences to show the community. Also, I was the final editor in choosing the photographs and stories to include in my thesis.

Furthermore, I could have incorporated more participatory practices by including more focus groups, as they were a way for women to share their stories and come up with solutions to their concerns collectively in a group with women in similar situations as their own. In the one focus group in the project, women shared their stories, shared knowledge of resources, and together, came up with ideas on how they could find more resources in town, and came up with messages to communicate to organizations that serve internationals. Due to time constraints on my part as well as the participants, I was only able to conduct one focus group.

Also, while I was connected to two different organizations in town, Global Connections and the Mid-State Literacy Council, I was still considered an outsider to many groups and people. While there is a large Russian and Eastern European community in State College, I was not able to recruit participants from the Russian community as I did not have any connections to it.

The results of the study created potential avenues for future research. Such research could continue to explore how the everyday lived experiences of women immigrants and how gender affect migration. Building connections with more organizations that offer resources to internationals could provide input and help establish rapport and a sense of safety between researcher and participants. Interviewing a larger

number of participants from different international groups in State College and then examining the particularities of each group's position (ie. student, permanent migrant) could help to tease out the differences in the challenges that participants experience and strategies they employ as they adapt to a new place. Also, conducting more focus groups revolving around photovoice could be beneficial for participants, as they can help women connect to others in their situation and validate each other's strengths and potential, and together form solutions to address the challenges they encounter in their daily lives.

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