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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PLACE-MAKING ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADJUSTMENT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, who supported my decision to study abroad and have been a part of my life every step of the way, and to my husband, who believed in my ability to juggle life and graduate school. I also dedicate this dissertation to my son, who gave me the greatest gift I could possibly ask for: looking at life through a child's eyes. And to my advisor, friend, and mentor, Dr. Terry Pace, who believed in me and opened the door to my journey of realizing and achieving my potential as a human being.

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of place-making activities on the adjustment of international students at an American university. A total of 19 international students over the age of 18, attending the university and living in the community for at least one year, participated in an in-depth interview about their experiences of places in the Midwestern state where they are currently enrolled as students. The research method used was phenomenology following the method proposed by Moustakas (1995), which focuses on the lived experience of individuals and requires the researcher to bracket assumptions about the world with the goal of uncovering the unique experiences of the participants without imposing his or her own biases on the interpretation of the results. Results from this study suggest that international students need places to fulfill a variety of basic needs, including opportunities, restoration, sociality, and safety. The study results indicate that international students benefit from having access to a combination of places that foster growth, social interaction, and reenergizing as well as places to provide physical and emotional boundaries between the person and the world. In addition, narratives of international students in this study suggest that certain places are experienced as exclusive and invalidating. This research contributes to the knowledge of the impact of places on resettlement of international students, and the results are discussed in the context of strategies that universities can implement to facilitate adjustment among their international students.

Chapter 1: Introduction

International students are a critical resource for institutions of higher education in the United States. In addition to their economic impact on the higher education system in the United States, international students' experiences internationalize classrooms in America's universities, which enhances the quality of research and diversity on university campuses (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009; Obst & Forster, 2005). The numbers of international students in the higher education system have steadily increased over the past 25 years, and experts expect this trend to continue (Daily, Farewell, & Kumar, 2010; Rose-Redwood, 2010). The latest report available from the Institute for International Education (2013) estimates there were more than 800,000 international students in the United States during the 2012-2013 academic year. Although international students comprise about 4% of the students enrolled at American universities in a given year, they contribute more than $13 billion to the U.S. economy every year (Obst & Forster, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). However, research on retention of international students is relatively scarce (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985; Evans, 2001; Evans et al., 2009). Moreover, research has found that the international students are more likely to have experienced a form of emotional distress or related problems that significantly affected their well-being and academic performance (Arthur, 2004; Aubrey, 1991; Bradley, 2000; Jacob, 2001; Leong & Chou, 1996; Mori, 2000; Yakushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Zhang & Dixon, 2003). The objective of this research is to explore the types of relationships that international students construct with places in the environment of a Midwestern community following relocation to a Midwestern university in the United States. This

research seeks to elucidate the impact of establishing relationships to places in the local community on the students' adjustment and acculturative stress. The goal is to find out whether certain types of place relationships are conducive to adjusting to the new environment.

Significance of the Study

The majority of the research on international students has been quantitative in nature. Use of qualitative techniques will attempt to explore the essence of a participant's lived experience, which typically leads to a much richer and greater understanding of the phenomenon explored than in quantitative research (Giorgi, 1985). Current retention research shows that understanding of the academic, social, and personal issues of adjustment is integral for universities to provide meaningful support to all students (Evans et al., 2009; Seidman, 2005). The literature in the field of international student retention is scant and mostly in the form of unpublished dissertations. International students are a resource for American universities because of both their financial contributions and the rich diversity they bring to college campuses. Therefore, understanding the process through which students develop relationships to places in the new community can provide knowledge of the way in which these relationships shape their adjustment experiences. As research suggests, international students appear to be more likely to experience clinical forms of psychological distress than domestic students do (Arthur, 2004; Aubrey, 1991; Bradley, 2000; Jacob, 2001; Leong & Chou, 1996; Mori, 2000; Yakushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Zhang & Dixon, 2003). Therefore, exploring their lived experience and the kind of relationships international students develop towards the new

place of residence may elucidate factors acting as buffers for acculturative stress. In addition, acquiring knowledge of international student adjustment may result in development of specific university programming aimed to ease the process of acculturation through retention initiatives.

Philosophical Foundations

The philosophical foundation of this study is phenomenology. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenology is concerned with studying the appearance of phenomena as they are seen by our consciousness. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings of the phenomena studied and describes the meaning of lived experiences of individuals experiencing a particular concept or phenomena (Dukes, 1984; Moustakas, 1994). This study is well suited for phenomenology because it is the meanings of the international students' experiences that provide the best information about the study of the phenomenon of creating relationships to places. Specifically, it is the meaning that each international student places on his or her experiences that will allow for enhanced study of the phenomenon and allow scientists to better comprehend what it is like for the international students in this study to recreate and redefine relationships to places upon relocation to the U.S. The questions for the study were designed to be open-ended and to encourage participants to share their own personal experiences with establishing relationships to places in the Midwestern community where they have relocated to attend college. Descriptions and meanings given by each participant will compose the thematic structure used to identify patterns between each participant and ultimately define the meanings international students place on their relationships with places in a new community.

Epoche: "My Experience Being an International Student"

My selected research topic focuses on the multidimensional experience of place identity among international students. I would like to understand the process through which place identity reshapes when removed from a familiar, native environment into a new cultural landscape. Place identity is a concept that has gone largely unstudied in the psychological literature on individual adjustment, yet spatial surroundings carry profound meanings at the cognitive, social, and affective levels. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of international students following relocation to the Norman, Oklahoma, area. My target population is international students at the University of Oklahoma. Specifically, I would like to interview international students who have lived in the Norman, Oklahoma, area for at least two years. These students would have had the opportunity to go through the process of adaptation to their new surroundings as well as coping with the accompanying changes in their social, emotional, and familial lives.

Prior to taking on the task of attempting to capture the essence of international students' relationships to places, I engaged in the process called *epoche* (Ashworth, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). The process is also called "bracketing," and it requires the researcher to let go of prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about international student adjustment and their relationships to places (Ashworth, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). The goal of the epoche is attaining a clearing of the mind, awareness of the researcher's own biases and preconceptions, and how they affect the researcher's ideas about being an international student and developing relationships to places (Asworth, 1999; LeVaseur, 2003).

My prior experience on this topic is that I was an international student myself. I was born in Mexico and moved to Wichita Falls, Texas, a midsized town the United States, in order to earn my bachelor's degree in 2001. My move to the U.S. posed the challenges of adapting to new surroundings, new people, and new perspectives on everyday life. After living in a culture that values the outdoors and being in open spaces, moving to a small and cluttered dorm room was a shocking experience. The new surroundings were flat, and the city of Wichita Falls did not have a pedestrian-friendly structure. While I lived in Mexico, public places were the spaces where people lived their lives. Couples took a stroll at the plaza, grandparents lazily sat on rocking chairs after the *merienda*, or the meal between lunch and dinner, and children were allowed to play outside freely and with only minimal adult supervision. My experiences as an international student have also been shaped by my gender. In Mexican culture, women tend to be subject to the protection and guidance of men and are expected to defer most decisions to men in their families. These traditions are in stark contrast with predominant cultural values and expectations of American culture, which emphasize freedom of choice and personal responsibility.

Because of my experiences, I hold some underlying assumptions about my topic of study. I tend to assume that individuals have strong attachments to their native land, which may not be the case for all international students. It is possible that those who have weak attachment to their native countries or geographical surroundings do not go through the same adaptation process. I also tend to assume that international students coming from non-English-speaking countries have the necessary English proficiency to attend college. However, there are those individuals who lack minimal proficiency and

must take remedial English classes. For this population, the lack of language proficiency may add a different dimension to their relocation experience. Another assumption related to my experiences is that men and women may face different levels of stress related to their relocation depending on the 'values regarding gender-appropriate behaviors in the culture of origin.

Based on my experiences and identified assumptions, I have the goal of exploring the process through which people derive meaningful experiences of their surroundings as well as the factors that influence that process. Acknowledging that everyone's perceptions and experiences are different, I would like to find out if there are similarities in the process of adapting to a new culture and a new place. I believe that understanding the role of place in the reconstruction of life in a different country is a crucial component of a successful academic experience. Therefore, my research has the goal of finding out what factors foster or hamper the adaptation of international students to academic and everyday life in a university setting.

Being a former international student has shaped my approach to this topic. My experiences have informed my professional development and research interests. I believe my previous experiences have the following strengths: I am able to identify with the interviewees given my experiences. English as my second language may also provide an initial common ground to establish rapport with the interviewee, which may result in opening up to discussing the topic freely. I believe being a doctoral counseling psychology student may also be a strength in that interviewees may feel comfortable disclosing personal information to someone they perceive as trustworthy and professionally competent. For instance, a large portion of training to be a counseling

psychologist entails learning to build relationships with clients by fostering trust, respect, and empowerment. I believe these same skills will be valuable as an interviewer. On the other hand, some limitations may be that in certain cultural contexts, women are perceived as being less competent than men are; therefore, my gender may affect the interviewees' willingness to share their experiences with me. Moreover, my previous experiences in a way may limit my research findings, as my own perceptions may unduly influence my interpretations of the interviewees' experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Early scientists in environmental psychology and humanistic geography referred to the attachment and development of bonds to places as *place identity* (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), *topophilia* (Tuan, 1974, 1980), and *rootedness* (Relph, 1976). Several terms have been used in the literature to refer to person-place relationships, including *place attachment*, *place identity*, and *sense of place*. Each definition emphasized different aspects of the person-place relationships. For instance, Hay (1998) defined sense of place as a superordinate construct to which definitions of place identity and place attachment are linked. Other authors separate place attachment from place identity in claiming that former emphasizes the affective ties of the person-place relationship and the latter focuses on the individual experiences derived from this relationship (Hernandez et al., 2007). Proshansky et al. (1983) developed one of the first comprehensive theories of place identity and linked it to self-identity development processes through which the individual integrates, organizes, and unifies experiences and behaviors across situations and in responses to specific situations. In this framework, place identity is defined as "a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person, consisting of, broadly conceived, cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 59).

Often neglected in exploring place-person relationships, French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualized places based on whether they facilitate movement and growth or promote status quo and homeostasis in their essay "The Smooth and the Striated." Deleuze and Guattari argued that in "smooth" places, human beings are free to move and develop their identity, as they are emancipated from

traditional meanings and rules. On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari defined "striated" places as containing specific and differentiated meanings assigned by the individual, where movement is not free but structured. These places provide a sense of security and predictability, but over time may not allow for growth.

Emplacement: Adjusting to a New Place

Although research has documented the importance of places for individuals, groups, and communities, there are no inclusive frameworks to understand the impact of place-making activities and relationships on uprooted individuals. Turton (2004) and Sampson and Gifford (2010) made a case for focusing on "emplacement" or "resettlement," that is, the connections individuals establish to places in the context of resettlement. Although emplacement as defined by Turton refers to place-making among refugees (individuals permanently removed from their homeland), this framework can be equally useful in providing perspectives about the adjustment of international students (individuals temporarily and voluntarily removed from their homeland). Sampson and Gifford studied the impact and meaning of places on refugee youth in Australia and found that youth who reported having places to engage in meaningful leisure and educational activities, places where they were able to appreciate beauty and express emotions, and places where they could relate to others were more likely to express a sense of growth and well-being. Sampson and Gifford referred to these places as places of opportunity, places of restoration, and places of sociality, and places of safety based on curriculum designed to help refugees heal from the traumatic experiences they endured in their homeland (Kaplan, 1998).

Places of opportunity. Sampson and Gifford (2010) referred to places of opportunity as places that contribute to an individual's well-being through meaningful activities. For example, Korpela and Hartig (1996) proposed that person-place compatibility is achieved when an individual is able to find a match between personal preferences and places where these activities take place. Galster and Killen (1995) created the term *geography of opportunity* to define the impact of places on individuals' sense of control over their lives. For instance, Squires and Kubrin (2005) argued that places are often a main determinant of access to opportunities in neighborhoods throughout America, and researchers found that when individuals living in poor neighborhoods moved to wealthier neighborhoods, they reported an increase in their self-efficacy and safety (Rosenbaum, Reynolds, & Deluca, 2002). Sampson and Gifford (2010) found that for refugee youth in their study, having the opportunity to attend school regularly fostered a sense of meaning in their lives. In a similar way, leisure researchers argued that places promoting recreational activities provide an opportunity for self-expression, identity development, and well-being (Green, 2010; Kyle & Chick, 2007; Kyle et al., 2003; Smale, 2006). Research in marketing and tourism has found that the individual self is attracted to places that match certain aspects of the individual's personality, values, and beliefs and vice versa, thereby facilitating expression of the self through selecting destinations congruent with their preferences (Droseltis & Vignoles, 2009; Sirgy & Su, 2000). For example, Beerli, Meneses, and Gil (2007) found that the match between the individual's self-image and the destination place's image predicted the likelihood of choosing a touristic destination, thus opening up opportunities to reaffirm individual values and identity.

Mazumdar et al. (2000) referred to the role of religious and spiritual places in providing immigrants with opportunities for connection to both places in their homeland and places in the new country. For example, McMichael (2002) found that Somali women living in Australia were better able to cope with resettlement through their daily practice of Islam, alluding to the idea that "everywhere is Allah's place" (p. 179). In the context of education, Engstrom and Tinto (2010) reported that first-generation ethnic minority students attending college benefited significantly from having places where there was an opportunity to express themselves and learn from others. In general, the empirical evidence accumulated to date suggests that places play an important role in providing access to opportunities for identity development and engagement in meaningful activities.

Places of restoration. Sampson and Gifford (2010) described places of restoration in terms of their impact on reducing fear and anxiety and promoting dignity and value. Within this framework, restorative places allow pleasurable experiences and serve ti contain emotional expression (Kaplan, 1998; Sampson & Gifford, 2010). Strong empirical evidence for the positive effects of restorative effects of places from multiple disciplines has been documented (Frumkin, 2003; Gifford, 2014). Research in health and environmental psychology has found that nature and natural landscapes positively affect individuals' health. For example, research with post-surgery patients found that those who had rooms with a view of trees and nature healed faster and experienced less post-surgery complications than those who had rooms without views of nature (Ulrich, 1984). Exposure to natural places can provide recovery from cognitive fatigue and stress, as well as psychophysiological recovery (Evans, 2003;

Gifford, 2014; Williams & Harvey, 2001). In addition, Davis, Green, and Reed (2009) found that living near green areas is inversely correlated to crime rates in the same area. Abraham and Sommerhalder (2010) argued that being in natural places allows time for reflection and clarifying thoughts. Moreover, observing aesthetically pleasing scenes or objects has been found to reduce stress and increase positive feelings (Abraham & Sommerhalder, 2010; Hartig et al., 1996; Hartig & Staats, 2006; Keyes & Kayne, 2004).

In a similar way, interacting with places where leisure activities take place including parks, trails, lakes, and museums has been linked to increased well-being (Clark & Uzzell, 2002; Kaplan, Bardwell, & Slakter, 1993; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1995; Kearns & Collins, 2000; Korpela et al., 2008; Korpela & Ylen, 2007; Kyle et al., 2003). Moreover, spiritual and religious places have also been documented as prominent sources of restoration (Herzog et al., 2010). For example, a group of individuals reported a sense of renewed faith and purpose after engaging in pilgrimage to Lourdes, a sacred place for Catholics in France, and Hindu Indian immigrants in the United States reconstructed ties to their spiritual identity by creating sacred spaces within their own homes (Gessler, 1996, 1998; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1994; Mazumdar et al., 2000; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). Emotional connections to places also have a restorative effect on individuals through performing culturally significant activities or having meaningful personal experiences within places (Easthope, 2004; Manzo, 2003, 2005; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Routines, familiar experiences, and physical features of places provide an intimate sense of belonging and comfort, of being at ease and secure (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Feldman,

1990; Gustafson, 2001; Lewicka, 2011a, 2011b; Manzo, 2005; Theodori, 2001). Places also allow individuals to express and contain emotional experiences, which lead to experiencing a sense of belonging sometimes referred to in the literature as "sense of place" (Hay, 1998; Hernandez et al., 2007; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Hinds & Sparks, 2008; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003).

Places of sociality. According to Sampson and Gifford's (2010) framework, places of sociality facilitate the building of social connections and cultivation of interpersonal relationships. Places allow the individual to express norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors in a social context (Easthope, 2004; Manzo, 2005, 2009). Fried (2000) stated that "people-place relationships are manifest as the profound attachment people often develop to the places they live in, where they share familial, communal, and ethnic or cultural bonds with their neighbors" (p. 193). On the other hand, Hummon (1992) argued that a communal sense of place involved the subjective interpretation of both the environment and the people inhabiting the environment. In fact, Lewicka (2011b) found that community members who saw themselves as attached to their community reported having better social capital than those who identified as non-attached. Moreover, recent studies have found a direct link between experiencing attachments to places and higher levels of social well-being (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010; Warner, Talbot, & Bennison, 2013). For example, a study including college students in three countries (United States, Italy, and Iran) found that social well-being was predicted by the experience of a sense of community within their place of residence (Cicognani et al., 2008). Milligan and Wiles (2010) found that places designated for

social activities enable caring interactions and the development of affective community ties.

Similarly, strong empirical evidence accumulated to date has documented the important role of places as focal points for socialization activities (Abraham & Sommerhalder, 2010; Becker, 1995; Evans, 2003; Frumkin, 2003; Gifford, 2014; McCoy, 2002). For example, employees in workplaces with furniture arrangements facilitating gathering of people, as well as activity generators like having food or drinks available, tend to report higher levels of social support and interaction (Becker, 1995). Likewise, sacred places are often a source of social meaning and interaction whether the place is a geographical location, a sacred city, or a specific area of the home (Altman & Low, 1992; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1994, 2009; Mazumdar et al., 2000; McMichael, 2002). For instance, for Muslims all over the world, the sacred city of Mecca serves as a reference point for mosques' and homes' orientation, thereby serving as a symbol of their religious identity (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993). Overall, there is strong empirical evidence regarding the impact of places on fostering social interaction and social well-being.

Places of safety. Sampson and Gifford (2010) defined places of safety in terms of their function of keeping the individual safe from the outside world, thereby promoting a sense of security and stability. According to Burris and Rempel (2004), the sense of self includes persons, objects, and places, which allow an individual to acquire a sense of environmental control and mastery. Burris and Rempel argued that the self is expandable, and as such, it can include the physical body, intimate others, social groups, owned objects, and familiar surroundings (also see Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-

Halton, 1981; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Dovey, 1985; Kron, 1983). Burris and Rempel (2004) argued that the spatial self serves as an identity marker that helps people anchor who they are, where they come from, and why they are in a specific place. These identity markers help ground the individual in an existential sense as well as provide a sense of continuity and safety (Burris & Rempel, 2004; Lewicka, 2008). For instance, Writz and Harrell (1987) found that victims of nonviolent crimes such as robberies or burglaries exhibited similar and parallel psychological profiles of distress as those victimized in a violent crime (e.g., rape or assault). Similarly, Shenk, Kuwahara, and Zablotsky (2004) found that older women living at home after their husbands passed away derived a sense of comfort and safety through being surrounded by familiar objects and carrying out their routines. Sampson and Gifford (2010) noted that refugee youth in their study emphasized the need to have places where they feel safe. Their finding is especially significant given the backgrounds of the refugee youth in their study; their taking on refugee status was a result of fleeing war, violence, and prosecution in their home countries. Thus, Sampson and Gifford (2010) proposed that individuals also need to have places of safety where there is freedom from conflict, where there are both symbolic and physical boundaries protecting them from the outside world.

Relocation and Re-Definition of Relationships to Places

International students relocate to a host country and face the challenge of adapting to a foreign culture, one that will be their home for the length of their studies. As opposed to other groups of immigrants, international students face acculturative stress in the context of navigating a different educational system that requires mastery

of the English language for academic achievement (Bradley, 2000; Kashima & Loh, 2006). In the process of adjusting to a new environment and learning a new language, students begin to develop new relationships with the surrounding places (Chow & Healy, 2008; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Exploring these individuals' lived experiences and relationships to places in the new cultural environment have the potential to enhance the student's' sense of mastery and provide the context in which they can build new bonds to places in the host culture.

International students make a voluntary choice to relocate to another country in order to further their education. Removal from a familiar place and entry into a new environment has repercussions on the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional experiences of the individual, which in turn affect self-identity (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Mori, 2000). The effects of relocation reverberate in every domain of life for international students moving to another country. International students tend to have difficulties adjusting to the new environment (Aubrey, 1991; Bradley, 2000; Misra et al., 2003; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). In fact, Furnham (1997) stated that culture shock is the result of an individual's "lacking points of reference, social norms ad rules to guide interactions and understand others' behavior" (p. 16). In this context, places act to provide a point of reference and a background to facilitate social interactions and, ultimately, adjustment.

In addition, research on retention of college students has shown that student involvement with their university environment is the key for keeping students in college (Astin, 1993; Chow & Healy, 2008; Evans et al., 2009; Qijing & Maliki, 2013). In fact Astin's seminal work resulted on his recommendation that educational policy should

directly address its capacity to increase student involvement (Evans et al., 2009). Moreover, research by Tinto (1993) suggested that integration of the student at the social, personal, and academic levels is likely to increase chances of continued persistence in college. However, higher education scholars have noted that Tinto's model had received only modest empirical support and has significant limitations (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). For instance, Tinto's model did not take into account the role of culture in student departure, as he proposed that in order to persist in college, students must break bonds with all pre-college relationships (Tierney, 1992). However, research with domestic students of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds has revealed that, in fact, establishing connections to their cultural heritage is a protective factor from college departure (Gonzalez, 2000; Guiffrida, 2003, 2005). This research is congruent with Chow and Healy's (2008) finding that college students benefited from both creating new social ties to the new place as well as solidifying relationships with people in their places of origin. Though international students may face more layers of complexity in adjusting to college life than their domestic counterparts, it appears successful strategies used to keep domestic students in college should also benefit international students as they integrate the university as an important place into their lives.

Effects of Relocation on International Students

Adjustment of international students to university life shows many parallel processes to those observed among domestic college students. For international students, however, a layer of complexity is added by the choice of attending a university in a different country, where cultural and language challenges compound the stress

associated with being a new college student (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Mori, 2003; Tavakoli et al., 2009; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Some of the unique issues involved in international student adjustment are culture shock, academic problems due to poor language skills, social conflicts, confusion about male-female roles, financial difficulties, anxiety about immigration issues, problems confronted by family in country of origin, and anxieties about returning to their home country (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Leong & Chou, 1996; McClure, 2007; Russell, Thomson, & Rosenthal, 2008; Swaggler & Ellis, 2003; Tavakoli et al., 2009). As students leave their home countries and get established in a new environment, cognitions and associated behaviors and emotions may not adequately meet the demands of the university environment. Prolonged dissonance between the demands of the new environment and an individual's cognitive and emotional repertoire are likely to result in prolonged stress (Aubrey, 1991; Evans et al., 2009; Misra et al., 2003).

However, reevaluation of the environment and incorporation of new cognitive and emotional constructs can serve as buffers to stress (Bradley, 2000; Misra et al., 2003; Zhang & Dixon, 2003; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). In fact, positive mental health and adjustment outcomes result when international students are able to build connections with the host culture's environment on a personal and social level (Hyun et al., 2007; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Mori, 2000). Perceived adaptation to new places has potential to foster a sense of mastery over the individual's environment (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Thus, retention of international students in colleges and universities should be based on thorough understanding of the process of adjusting to a new environment.

Research Questions

The following questions will be addressed by this study: 1) How do international students participating in this study interpret their relationships to places in the new environment? 2) What kinds of relationships do international students' form with places in the new environment? 3) How do these relationships affect their ability to adjust to residing in a different country?

Chapter 3: Method

Theoretical Framework

Epistemology refers to the beliefs about how knowledge is conceived and created. I adopted constructionism as my epistemological stance, which has guided my selection of the research methodology for this study. I embrace the idea that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In my view, it is through the existence of the human mind that objects acquire meaning. I reject the notion that there is one truth waiting to be discovered, while also rejecting the idea that meanings are imposed on reality. In other words, I believe that objects are out there, and it is through human cognition and interaction that they are interpreted and understood.

This epistemological stance influences my choice of theoretical framework selected for this research. I believe that human beings interpret things based on the meanings assigned to them, and such meanings are derived from social interactions (Crotty, 1998). I believe that reality and meaning are directly influenced by cultural knowledge that is passed on from generation to generation. While cultural knowledge allows us to learn from our past and look to our future, it is limited in that it restricts the interpretation of objects in the context of a specific culture with a specific meaning. Thus, without awareness of those cultural meanings, it is possible that other human perspectives may be excluded. Therefore, I adopted a phenomenology theoretical framework with the goal of engaging with phenomena in the world and examining the

object of my research as individuals directly experience it. A phenomenological theoretical framework requires that "we open ourselves to the phenomena in their stark immediacy to see what emerges for us" (Crotty, 1998, p. 82). The result of this process is a reinterpretation, a fuller and renewed understanding of the object and the human experience of it. In other words, suspending preconceptions imposed by cultural meanings can lead to a comprehensive understanding of the human experience.

My research methodology is informed by my epistemological stance and theoretical framework. I adopted phenomenological research as a methodology that allowed the researcher to study a group of individuals with the goal of understanding their lived experience of a phenomenon. Specifically, I see phenomenological research as the vehicle to reach for meanings without the restrictions of cultural preconceptions. Moreover, I agree with Crotty (1998) in his description of phenomenological research as one that requires bracketing of assumptions and preconceptions, one that "calls into question what is taken for granted" (p. 82). My selection of phenomenological research as a method stems from the belief that it seeks to unearth fresh and full meanings of human experiences, unrestricted by the limits of cultural knowledge.

In exploring place attachment among international students, I sought to understand the participants' lived experiences without imposing one set of preconceived assumptions rooted in different cultural meanings. I am interested in answering questions regarding the significance of places in their lives, their thoughts and feelings about the experience of removing themselves from their native countries, and adjusting to a new cultural and physical environment. In accordance with my epistemological stance, I believe international students construct meaningful reality in and out of

interactions between human beings and their world (Crotty, 1998). My selection of theoretical framework is congruent with my epistemology in the sense that phenomenological research seeks to "reform understanding and lead to more thoughtful action" (Flood, 2010). International students may construct meanings of their world by growing up in a particular culture, but by bracketing preconceived assumptions about these experiences and perspectives, phenomenological research may truly capture the way in which they relate to places in a foreign environment in order to provide a fresh, full view of the way they establish relationships to places.

Phenomenological Research Design

This qualitative inquiry used a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological studies focus on describing the essence of meaning for several individuals in terms of their lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Wertz, 2005). The basic goal of a phenomenological study is to develop a description of what and how people experience a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology starts by seeking meaning from appearances and ends with uncovering the essence of a phenomenon through reflection on acts of experience. In addition, phenomenological studies focus on descriptions of phenomena and not in explanations or analysis (Dukes, 1984). The main goal of a phenomenological study is "to uncover the inherent logic of that experience or phenomenon, the way in which it makes sense to its subjects" (Dukes, 1984, p. 199). A phenomenological approach to research is deemed appropriate to explore the research question, as the suspension of culturally influenced assumptions about adapting to places will enable the researcher to explore and acquire a fresh, complete look at the human experience of adjusting to new places.

Specifically, international students from different nationalities may interpret their experiences through different cultural perspectives, and the researcher may interpret the participants' experiences through her own preconceived notions about being an international student. However, the bracketing of cultural assumptions required by a phenomenological approach to research will allow the researcher to move past cultural differences to the essence of their experiences relating to new places in a foreign country (Giorgi, 1985; Wertz, 1985). Therefore, a phenomenological approach will shed light on the participants' feelings, perceptions, and understandings of the process international students experience in building relationships to new places. According to Creswell (2007), the following are the procedural steps in the process of conducting a phenomenological study:

1. Determine if the research problem is well suited for exploration using a phenomenological approach,
2. Select the phenomenon that is of interest to study,
3. Recognize and specify assumptions of phenomenology and engage in "bracketing" assumptions and experiences,
4. Collect data through open-ended in-depth interviews with individuals experiencing the phenomenon,
5. Horizonalize statements and highlight significant statements,
6. Develop clusters of meanings to create themes,
7. Provide a textural description of what the participants experienced,
8. Create structural descriptions of the context or setting where the participants experienced the phenomenon, and

9. Based on the structural and textural descriptions, create a description of the invariant structure or essence of the phenomenon (p. 60).

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

Criterion sampling was used for this study. International students from any country currently enrolled at the University of Oklahoma over 18 years of age, living in the United States for over one year, and self-identified as fluent in English were purposefully selected. The rationale for selecting students living in the U.S. for over one year was to interview students who have had time to develop relationships with places in the local community. No upper limits were imposed on the time residing in the community. The rationale for this decision was that longer time living in the local community may distinguish the types of relationships international students build with places. In other words, it is possible that length of time living in the area will be related to different types of place relationships among international students.

An email with a brief description of the study and the compensation for participation was sent to all students in the university, asking those who identify as international students to contact the researcher. The email was specific about the limit of 20 participants for this study on a first-come, first-serve basis due to funding limitations and feasibility of further participant recruitment. Students were informed that only the first 20 to contact the researcher would be eligible to participate and receive compensation. Funds were obtained from the Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education to compensate each participant with a $20 Target gift card. Twenty individuals participated in this research and were interviewed; however, one student had poor English-speaking skills, and the interview was rendered invalid due to poor

language expression and difficulty expressing the extent of the experiences in detail. Therefore, only 19 international students' interviews were included in the present study. Of the 19 participants, six were male and 13 were female. The participants' average age was 26.26, and their ages ranged from 18 to 32 years. Three participants were classified as undergraduates (one participant was classified as a freshman, one was classified as a sophomore, and one was classified as a junior), and 16 participants were pursuing graduate degrees (eight participants pursued master's degrees, and eight participants pursued doctoral degrees).

Participants' countries of origin included China (6 participants), India (3 participants), Colombia (2 participants), Bulgaria (1 participant), the Netherlands (1 participant), Italy (1 participant), Malaysia (1 participant), the Philippines (1 participant), Bangladesh (1 participant), Japan (1 participant), and Latvia (1 participant). Although there is a wide dispersion in the ages of the participants, this is appropriate in consideration of statistics documenting that a majority of international students in the United States enroll in graduate degree programs (Huang, 2012). Moreover, data from the U. S. Department of Education showed that enrollment of students 25 and over rose 42% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In fact, enrollment of students in this age dispersion was projected to grow 20% between 2010 and 2020 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Therefore, the inclusion of graduate and older students in the sample and the resulting age dispersion was appropriate in the context of current trends in higher education (Huang, 2012; Institute for International Education, 2008; Rose-Redwood, 2010). In addition, the number of students from China and India in this study are representative of national trends, as most international students in the

U.S. come from China and India (Institute for International Education, 2013). Specifically, the Institute for International Education (2013) estimated that compared to the 2011-2012 academic year, Chinese student enrollments increased by 21% in the 2012-2013 academic year. In addition, the same report found that during the 2012-2013 academic year, an estimated 28.7% of all international students in the U.S. came from China and 11.8% came from India (Institute for International Education, 2013). Thus, more representation of international students from China and India in the sample is reflective of current trends in university enrollments.

Table 1

Sample Demographic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Age	Gender	Classification	Years Attending University	Years Living in the US	Self-rated English Proficiency
Ajay	India	26	Male	Master's	2	2	6
Anastasiya	Bulgaria	27	Female	Master's	3	8	6
Cheng	China	24	Male	Doctoral	1	2	5
Eduard	Netherlands	29	Male	Master's	1	1	6
Hui	China	29	Female	Master's	2	2	5
John	Italy	32	Male	Doctoral	3	3	6
Juan	Colombia	24	Male	Doctoral	5	6	5
Jun	China	29	Female	Doctoral	4	4	3
Kim	Malaysia	20	Female	Junior	2	2	5
Lan	China	29	Female	Doctoral	6	6	5
Lucia	Colombia	22	Female	Master's	1	2	5
Manu	India	28	Male	Master's	2	2	6
Maria	Philippines	18	Female	Freshman	1	5	7
Mei	China	23	Female	Master's	1	1	2
Priya	India	26	Female	Doctoral	5	5	5
Rajesh	Bangladesh	31	Male	Doctoral	3	5	5
Sakura	Japan	27	Female	Doctoral	2	8	4
Su	China	25	Female	Master's	2	2	4
Svitlana	Latvia	21	Female	Sophomore	2	2	6

Data Collection and Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data for this study. Open-ended questions were asked during the interviews, and probing questions were also used based on participants' responses. Phenomenological interviews focus on eliciting the interviewee's experiences about the phenomenon of investigation (Roulston, 2010). Therefore, questions were open in order to give interviewees the opportunity to answer in their own words. According to Roulston (2010), "the phenomenological interview is relatively unstructured and open-ended" (p. 17) with possible follow up questions aimed

at generating more in-depth descriptions of the interviewee's experiences. In fact, probing questions were restricted to requests of clarification or elaboration of what the interviewee experienced (Moustakas, 1994; Roulston, 2010). The questions were aimed to probe the participant's' relationships to their top three favorite places in the Midwestern state where they did their university studies. Participants were asked to name three places in the state that they identified and/or felt most linked to. The first interview question centered on the first place: "Can you describe your relationship to this place?" This was followed by a question designed to elicit more details about the experience: "What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with this place stand out for you?" The full interview protocol is attached in Appendix A. Participants also answered a short self-report demographic questionnaire asking about their country of origin, native language, length of time at the university, and their most recent Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score (see Appendix A). In addition, students filled out two surveys: one assessing acculturation stress and the other assessing psychological well-being. These instruments were designed to assess specific levels and domains of acculturation stress and well-being among interviewees. The instruments were in survey form and posed questions to be answered on a Likert-type scale (see Appendix B and Appendix C).

The average length of the interviews was 50 minutes, and they took place in the same office located on campus. The interviews were recorded using a digital recording device, and the principal researcher transcribed the data. The demographic questionnaire was administered before beginning the interview and took an estimate of 5 minutes to complete. The acculturation stress measure, acculturation style measure,

and well-being measure were also administered at the end of the interview and took about 10 minutes to complete.

Measurement

Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory (RASI). This measure consists of 15 items that assess stress related to interpersonal, professional, and structural pressures. This instrument explores several domains of the immigrant experience: language skills, work, intercultural relations, discrimination, and cultural/ethnic makeup of the community. Factor analysis of the sample responses yielded five factors representing each one of the domains. The alphas for each factor ranged from .68 to .84 (Miller, Kim, & Benet-Martínez, 2011). The answers to the RASI are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB). This measure consists of 18 items assessing six dimensions of wellness based on a theoretical model of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The dimensions of wellness are Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance. The Autonomy scale measures the individual's ability to be self-determining and able to choose without influence from peers (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The Environmental Mastery scale refers to a sense of competence in controlling the environment and related external abilities in a way that suits personal needs. The Personal Growth dimension represents development, growth, and new experiences, and it is strongly related to the self-concept (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The Positive Relations with Others scale refers to the individual's ability to have trusting relationships with others and the ability to display empathy, affection, and intimacy (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

The Purpose in Life scale represents an individual who feels a sense of direction in life, able to ascribe meaning to current and past life events. The Self-Acceptance dimension reflects a positive attitude toward the self and a positive attitude about life.

The instrument was validated using a nationally representative sample of adults aged 25 and older (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Confirmatory factor analyses using a community volunteer sample supported a six-factor structure. The sample was composed of non-institutionalized, English-speaking adults aged 25 or older residing in the 48 contiguous United States. Households were selected using random digit dialing procedures, and an adult was selected randomly and interviewed for 30 minutes over the phone. Alpha reliability coefficients were modest, ranging from .33 to .56. Comparisons with other measures of well-being found some correlations; however, the Scales of Psychological Well-Being were found to assess more positive aspects of human functioning (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Answers to questions are provided on a 6-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

Analysis was focused on searching for meaning and understanding of the participants' experiences of places in the local community (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; LeCompte, 2000). In conducting a phenomenological study, several important processes take place before actually analyzing the data. The specific method of analysis to be used for this research is the one proposed by Moustakas (1994). The process began with engaging in an analysis of the researcher's own lived experiences, presuppositions, assumptions, and judgments through a process called *epoche* or *bracketing* (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984). By focusing on the researcher's experiences

about the phenomenon being studied, the researcher created a narrative that allowed for identification of biases and beliefs about the phenomenon. This process was aimed at bringing awareness of the researcher's preconceived notions and biases and allowed for "bracketing," or being mindful of how these biases could influence the study.

The next step in the analysis process is referred to as *phenomenological reduction*, which consists of the following steps: (1) horizonalization, (2) develop clusters of meaning, (3) creation of textural descriptions, (4) creation of structural descriptions, and (5) an essence that combines textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Analysis began with the process of horizonalization, which is the process of treating every statement provided by participants as having equal value. Moustakas (1994) stated this process is based on the concepts of unlimited horizons, or the idea that lived experiences are not exhausted even if reconsidered or viewed in a different way. Horizonalization involves grounding experiences and giving phenomena a distinctive character (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The next step was to develop clusters of meaning from these significant statements into themes (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 1985; Hycner, 1985). In this step, statements irrelevant to the topic and question or repetitive and overlapping were deleted, leaving only the textural descriptions, the significant statements of what participants experienced (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) proposed that researchers weave in their own perceptions and experiences within the clusters of meaning. However, Creswell (2007) proposed shortening this procedure by adding these statements in the epoche at the beginning of the phenomenology. This study followed Creswell's (2007) guideline and included

personal statements about the phenomenon and background in the *epoche* provided as a first step towards a phenomenological analysis.

The next step in the process of phenomenological reduction consisted of creating a textural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 1985). Textural descriptions were created for each participant by organizing the horizons into themes in order to create a cohesive description of each participant's experience using verbatim statements from their interviews but also recognizing and interweaving the individual experience of the phenomenon while only maintaining invariable constituents or units of meaning. Following the creation of a textural description, a structural description was created for each participant. The purpose of creating a structural description was to find the "underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In other words, structural descriptions' explain the experience and provide context. The final step in phenomenological reduction was to combine textural and structural descriptions to create an essence of invariant experiences. The essence or invariant structure is a composite description, including structural and textural descriptions, which focuses on the common experiences relayed by participants in the study (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). According to Polkinghorne (1989), the description should leave the reader with the feeling "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (p. 46). The qualitative research software Atlas.ti was used throughout the analysis as a tool to organize data and to represent relationships within the data graphically by using a digital interface.

Last, quantitative data from the Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory and the Scales of Psychological Well Being were compiled, and frequencies were reported. In addition, individual profiles of acculturative stress and well-being for each participant were used to provide a contextual understanding of each individual's relationships to places and if the presence of positive relationships to local places served as a buffer for adjustment issues. The participant profiles obtained from these measures serve to increase trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

In general, most of the international students interviewed in this study displayed high levels of well-being based on the scores obtained on Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB). The highest possible score on the General Index of Well-Being is 108, and the lowest possible score is 18. Most international students in this study reported fairly high levels of psychological well-being, obtaining scores ranging between 53 and 96, with an overall mean of 83.6 and a median of 86. In addition, the SPWB provide subscales indicative of well-being in specific domains of experience, including Self-Acceptance, Positive Relationships, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth. The range for each subscale is 3 to 18. Overall, the international students interviewed for this study reported high levels of well-being across all subscales, with highest scores obtained on the Self-Acceptance and Personal Growth subscales and the lowest scores obtained on the subscales of Purpose in Life and Autonomy (see Table 2). According to Ryff and Keyes (1995), individuals scoring high on the Self-Acceptance subscale display a positive attitude toward the self, including positive and negative qualities, and in general feel positive about past life events. On the other hand, individuals with high scores on the Personal Growth subscale see themselves as continually in a state of development, open to new experiences, seeking out opportunities to grow and improve, and reflecting self-knowledge. Although, on average, the students interviewed obtained lower scores on the subscales of Autonomy and Purpose in Life, these scores are relatively high, as most participants obtained scores above the mean and the median on all scales.

Table 2

Participants' Profiles of Psychological Well-Being

Pseudonym	Self-Acceptance	Positive Relationships	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Purpose in Life	Personal Growth	General Well-Being Index
Ajay	15	14	14	13	12	17	85
Anastasiya	17	14	14	17	13	18	93
Cheng	17	14	15	13	12	18	89
Eduard	16	13	14	15	13	15	86
Hui	15	16	10	17	11	14	83
Juan	17	16	13	13	14	17	90
Jun	11	11	13	15	10	13	73
Kim	16	15	16	12	13	16	88
Lan	16	-	13	13	13	18	-
Lucia	16	16	14	14	12	16	88
Manu	16	18	10	17	13	18	92
Maria	15	11	12	9	10	13	70
Mei	12	16	13	12	12	16	81
Priya	14	9	13	13	15	15	79
Rajesh	8	5	10	8	8	14	53
Sakura	16	11	9	15	12	18	81
Su	16	15	15	15	12	16	89
Svitlana	17	16	17	17	12	17	96
John	12	13	16	14	13	18	86
Mean (Median)	14.84 (16)	13.5 (14)	13.21 (13)	13.7 (14)	12.1 (12)	16.1 (16)	83.4 (86)

In addition, participants in this study completed the Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory (RASI), which provided a measure of acculturative stress on the domains of Language Skills, Discrimination, Interracial Relations, and Work Relations. Within each domain, the lowest possible score is 3, and the highest possible score is 15; low scores are interpreted as low acculturation stress in that domain, whereas high scores are interpreted as high acculturation stress in that domain of life. As a group, the international students in this study reported average levels of acculturation stress due to their English language skills (see Table 3), with scores ranging from 3 to 13. Moreover, the students interviewed reported average concern with discrimination due to their nationality and with their ability to engage in relationships with Americans (see Table

3), with scores ranging from 3 to 12. A majority of students in this study indicated having significant acculturative stress in the domain of work, as they indicated high levels of stress due to difficulty carrying out their duties at their workplace due to their perceived English skills (see Table 3).

Table 3

Acculturation Stress Profiles

Pseudonym	Language Skills	Discrimination	Intercultural Relations	Work
Ajay	3	9	11	9
Anastasiya	6	3	3	14
Cheng	10	7	6	9
Eduard	4	4	9	5
Hui	7	6	4	12
John	9	5	11	4
Juan	3	9	8	12
Jun	13	6	7	12
Kim	10	8	11	9
Lan	12	11	13	13
Lucia	10	7	5	13
Manu	3	3	3	11
Maria	3	3	3	5
Mei	-	3	-	11
Priya	13	9	9	10
Rajesh	3	12	5	15
Sakura	13	8	8	13
Su	11	4	7	12
Svitlana	3	6	9	10
Mean (Median)	7.5 (8)	6.4 (6)	7.3 (7.5)	10.4 (11)

Thematic Analysis Results

International students' lived experiences within places in a Midwestern U.S. state revealed they feel "emplaced" and benefited from having different places serving different functions in their lives. In their narratives, international students described

places in terms of presenting opportunities for growth and meaningful activities, restoring their energy and engaging in relaxation, serving as hubs of social and interpersonal connections, and providing safety and security as well as places of comparison, and places of exclusion. Overall, the themes in their narrative fitted the framework provided by Sampson and Gifford (2010) and places of exclusion, which the authors wrote about briefly in their discussion of the findings. In addition, the theme referring to places of comparison did not fit any of the categories in the framework and warranted adding a separate theme to the analysis. Results are discussed following the framework of healing places in Sampson & Gifford (2010) and adding another one relevant to the data from the study: (1) places of opportunity, (2) places of restoration, (3) places of sociality, (4) places of safety, and (5) places of exclusion.

Places of opportunity. International students engaged in meaningful activities related to their academic and work lives. They sought out places where they could engage in recreational activities and places where they could attain focus and concentration. Participants also mentioned strong emotional attachments to places because of the challenges they encountered and the lessons they learned. In general, there were five types of places that participants identified as places of opportunity: (1) places related to their education, (2) work places, (3) places of residence, (4) places related to leisure activities, and (5) places of worship. These places were grouped in this manner to represent the diversity of participants' individual experiences.

Places related to their education. International students described the many challenges of earning a degree in an American university. Specifically, they referred to the challenges they confronted within the university and the buildings housing their

academic department. For example, Ajay (India, 26, male, 2 years in the U.S.) recalled the challenges he encountered as a first-year graduate student in his academic department building. He remembered,

> Probably the first 7 to 8 months, I did not have an office there. I was new, and I was still searching for my advisor. I mean, I hadn't decided on an advisor, and so even though I belonged to the department, I didn't feel a part of it.

Ajay's experience denoted a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about his academic and professional development. Ajay also recalled his ability to connect with the department once he had an office in the building housing his department. He reported,

> Once I had an office, I felt more connected to the place, more in tune with it, and, um, and definitely contributed to my research because once I had the office space, I could spend […] more time with the department, more engaged in getting things done. Um, it has helped me grow; it's also helped me contribute a lot to the department. It definitely gave me more confidence.

Ajay also referred to the personal growth he experienced in this place by taking on positions of leadership in the department. Ajay described a milestone of his personal growth was "becoming involved in positions of leadership representing the graduate students of his department." Ajay's narrative indicated his academic department was a place of opportunity because it allowed him to become a more confident individual and developed leadership skills.

Similarly, Cheng was unsure of whether he would be admitted to a doctoral program in the US. He recalled, "At the time [I graduated with my master's], I was interested in doing research, but […] my GRE score was really low." In spite of these

concerns, he was interviewed by a doctoral program at the university and granted admission. Cheng described his experience by stating,

> [This university] changed my life. [This university] accepted me and [gave] me [an] on-site interview opportunity. Yeah, so it changed me. And […] I [could] get into the program because of them, because of the [faculty's] help. Yeah, it changed my life.

Although he was unsure of his language skills and his ability to connect with American students, Cheng was able to make friends with non-international students and learn from those experiences. He recalled,

> At the beginning [of my doctoral program], I was afraid that maybe I could not, um, keep a good relationship with [my officemate]. Afraid that because my English skills, I cannot express myself well. […] Because my English was very poor at the time, and, um, it's hard, um, to express yourself, and it's hard to make a conversation with American guys.

Expressing his thoughts about the role of the university on his personal and professional growth, he stated,

> [My department] teaches me how to communicate with Americans. In one year, [my officemates and I], we understand each other, and we talk a lot with each other. Yeah, I belong here; this is the right place [for me]. Um, they changed my way to get along with Americans.

Cheng's academic department provided the opportunity for him to grow in his understanding of American culture and to become a more confident individual.

Likewise, Eduard (Netherlands, 29, male, 1 year in the U.S.) referred to his academic department building as a place where he had to adjust to being a student. He reported he had worked for several years for a Norwegian company, and coming back to school presented a challenge. Eduard stated,

> You know, [my academic department's building] was a place where you go and have classes and then go home. Um, I think, um, the whole coming back to school experience… I'd been working for a couple of years and then came back, so [I] think [I] changed, you know, being more open for learning and stuff.

Eduard referred to the academic program as challenging, but positive experience and stated "Um, I think the campus [is] positive. [The program is], um, challenging. But in a good way. Um, it's busy. There's a lot to do." In spite of the challenges, Eduard reported appreciation towards the department, highlighting the many opportunities it provided to learn.

In a similar way, Hui (China, 29, female, 2 years in the U.S.) referred to the building that houses her academic department as a place where she faced challenges due to her status of international student. Hui compared her experiences as a graduate student in China to her experiences in the US by stating,

> I [didn't] know anything about research. […] And all across my study, uh, learning strategies also changed a lot. […] Before I […] came to, uh, America, […] I just go to classroom and listen to the lecture. And […] I didn't read a lot. You know, I didn't read a lot even though I was a Master's student. But here, at the beginning of my Master's program, I felt that I was pushed to read.

Hui pointed out the challenges she confronted through speaking and understanding English. She recalled,

> I think my English speaking is not very good. […] You know, sometimes you can't completely, [say] what you want to say […]. And, um, I remember that […] when I took the first class, […] I was very nervous. […] And then my speaking English [was] poorer than now, my writing, reading, speaking, all of these things [were] poorer than now. […] I remember that [I] understand 50% [of the class] content.

In spite of these challenges, Hui's narrative also included a theme of growth and development in the same department building. Hui reflected,

> I have the opportunity to improve [my] research skills. I changed here a lot. And all across my study, [my] learning strategies also changed a lot. […] But now, I think I automatically, I want to read to enrich my knowledge. Now I am driven by my [own] goal[s]. And by [my] future plan[s]. […] Frankly, I can say that [this university] changed me a lot.

Hui reflected on her improved English skills and the feeling of accomplishment she derived from being able to participate in class. She reported,

> But now, […] I can understand 100%. Yeah. […] I pushed myself to speak at class. […] I can […] talk with the professor after class and communicate with other students and ask questions and reply to other [students'] questions. And, uh, I think my speaking, at least my speaking improved a lot compared to the first class.

In addition, her academic department has provided opportunities to realize her potential to be a leader, as she reported,

> I've enjoy[ed] the life at this campus. I think my work […] is especially significant to my life and, […] this semester, I participate one, uh, community, uh, sorry, I can't remember the name, a long name of this community. It's like the […] Cultural Committee.

Hui's narrative refers to the academic department as a place that provided an opportunity to improve her language skills and develop her professional identity as a researcher and a leader.

In a similar way, John's (Italy, 32, male, 3 years in the U.S.) narrative indicated he has benefited from 'opportunities on the university campus to express himself through his work. Although John received his undergraduate and master's degrees in other European countries, he described his lifestyle as unfitting with European values. He reported,

> I did my Master's in England, and I liked the campus much better. It was, um, better connected and, uh… the […] architecture behind was better. Have you ever been to England? People get drunk, like, by 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Come on. So I think I had way more problems in getting adjusted in Italy or in Europe than here.

John expressed his work ethic is significantly more valued within his American university campus. He expressed,

> I think that I'm getting integrated in the way that I always wanted in Europe, but I couldn't. […] It's a series of things, not just work. Um, you know, I never

> really felt a part, I never felt Italian to begin with, um, I never felt European. Um, yet Europe is all these different states, talking different languages and fighting each other, and it's just a mess.

He described his experience by stating:

> Well, as you probably got it by now, I'm a very hardcore worker. And here, I found a tremendous support for that. And, and that [was] a great thing for me. And here, everything is, it's more, uh, connected, and, uh, you know, if you want to work hard, you can.

Based on John's narrative, the university campus provided opportunities to reaffirm his identity as a hard-working scientist.

In a similar way, Jun's (China, 29, female, 2 years in the U.S.) narrative reflected the challenges she encountered in her department building as a doctoral student. She recalled,

> I realized it is very hard to get a Ph.D. degree even though I haven't gotten it yet, but I know it's hard. […] So at the beginning yeah, I feel frustrated. Uh, I need to work hard in order to get accomplishments.

Jun encountered challenges in her academic department through conducting research, stating, "It's a place where I can do experiments, some of them worked, some didn't, so it's pretty long and so frustrating." However, Jun cited the same place as the source of confidence by stating, "I think I am feeling more confident, much more confident than when I get here for the first time." Jun also talked about the positive growth that stemmed from these challenges, as she referred to this building as the place that provided her the opportunity to develop her academic research agenda. She credited her

department building with "improvement in my academic field. […] Um, it affected me a lot, it [taught] me a lot, in terms of academic study. Um, […] I learned a lot in knowledge base." Similarly, during her time in the academic department building, Mei (China, 23, female, 1 year in the U.S.) became keenly aware of the limitations of her English proficiency. She reported,

> I often stay [at my academic department building] studying. I'm an international student, every time I do [a] presentation, it's my first attempt to say the words when I do the presentation. So sometimes for me, it's hard to think about the words, I'm not a native speaker.

Although Mei expressed doubts about her ability to give presentations in English, she reported learning to be comfortable giving her best effort every time.

On the other hand, Lan (China, 29, female, 6 years in the U.S.) perceived her office as a place of opportunities to learn research skills. She described in her office she learned to perform many activities, including

> a lot of data analysis, a lot of writing, prepare for teaching there, I have my office hours there. We have meetings there with my advisers or the lab meetings. I see it more as a place of associated with my work here. Because I mostly do my work there. I feel everything I achieved, almost everything I achieved, I did it there. In one way, this office is really nice. And I really love it. There's everything I need there. I like it. I go there really often.

Lan's office is a place where she had the opportunity to develop as a young researcher and future professional and to accumulate enough experiences that will eventually allow her to realize her goal of being a university professor.

Likewise, Sakura (Japan, 27, female, 8 years in the U.S.) referred to her undergraduate university, located in the same state, as being her second home. She reported that when she did her undergraduate studies, she learned about people from other cultures and was challenged by the environment of an American college campus. She reflected that during her time as an undergraduate, she realized the truth about stereotypes: Not everyone she met fit the stereotypes she believed before coming to the U.S. Sakura recalled,

> The [biggest challenge] was of course my English. […]And then also I learned there are so many, uh, kinds of people, […] there are so many people from Nigeria, and the Caribbean countries, and my image of, for example, of Nigeria[n] or Caribbean people are, like, specific. But then after I met more people, like, some of them are really, you know, loud and party type. But also there are so many quiet [ones who] like reading books. So I think I finally noticed that we cannot distinguish people because of where they are from. Of course, they [have a] kind of tendency. But there are so many [varied] personalities.

Sakura associated her current university with challenges and struggles related to her academic studies. She reported being surprised by the rigorous studies she had to maintain in order to have good standing in her graduate program. Sakura reported,

> I have to challenge my skills, ability, and knowledge […]. Because first year, I was thinking if I should quit school, because it was so hard. […] When I was feeling kind of low, I was [asking myself], "What am I doing?" […]. So it was kind of challenging.

Sakura reflected that the challenge of living in the local community was finding a way to overcome the academic challenges she faced as a doctoral student. She reported, "Here [in this university], I feel the challenge in myself, inside. […]Yeah. Like I said, um, I'm still challenging myself. [I think about] struggle." In spite of the challenges, Sakura reported a feeling of confidence in herself:

> So I think after I […] break down this wall, then I can be stronger. And I can get more confident. Personally, my, my personality is not confident kind, but I think after I […] overcome any problems or challenges, then I can be stronger and get confident.

Sakura's undergraduate and graduate universities were places that afforded her the opportunity to overcome challenges and develop confidence.

Similarly, Su (China, 25, female, 2 years in the U.S.) associated the university with the challenges she experienced due to her international student status. She expressed a major obstacle in her academic work was her insecurity about speaking fluent English. Su reported,

> I think, okay, since my English is not good, […] I think study[ing] is the top challenge for me here. And it is very difficult for me, and, because I need to read more and to write […] a lot, [and] since English is not my native language, so, yeah, it is very hard for me.

However, she also conceded, "I am not American. I'm different. But I still […] want to have a balance, like I'm Chinese, I know who I am, and my English level, and I know where's my advantage and disadvantage." Her academic department provided an environment of opportunity for her to improve her English and communication skills.

In general, international students emphasized their development of strong relationships to educational buildings and departments due to the challenges and growth experienced through their academic and educational work.

Work places. International students in this study described encountering challenges in their places of work. For most of the students who participated in this study, their work consisted of academic research related to their field of study through graduate research assistantships. For instance, John (Italy, 32, male, 3 years in the U.S.) associated nearby mountains, where he conducted experiments with migratory bird species, with a myriad of challenges. He recalled the previous summer, when he realized there was a problem with his experimental design, and because of this "glitch," all data collected were invalid. John recalled,

> After a few weeks, I realized that the experiment was not going to work because a glitch in what I was trying to do. And after several days, I, uh, just, uh, realized I, I couldn't do it. And that meant, basically, all summer lost. And I remember I was driving back from the field site to a little house that we have in that place, and I just stopped the car, and I was very down.

In addition to the stress of the project not working out, John also served as the crew leader for the experiment by supervising field assistants. He reflected that being a leader is difficult because

> you have to deal with the situations where, you know, people working with you are tired, physically, and mentally. Because you have to tell them what to do, how to do it, when to do it all the time. […] It's a challenge. It's very difficult, so […] I try to see how these people can, uh, receive my […] my orders in a way

> that is not […] going to upset them, or in a way it is very, uh, productive for both [of us].

John also described his realization that science does not always work the first time and it requires time and effort. He was able to fix the problems with his experimental design and recalled,

> Together with my advisor, we fixed that problem, and we actually got very good results. You never get things right the first time. So, so the second year, we kind of got the revenge. […] But then when things went right, I was very happy. […] There was a strong reminder that, you know, sometimes things are difficult to achieve, but you, you need to be persistent.

For John, these mountains were a place that provided him an opportunity to remember the importance of perseverance and persistence in the face of challenges.

Similarly, Lan's (China, 29, female, 6 years in the U.S.) narrative of relationships to places is one of overcoming challenges in her workplace. Lan described her office as a place where she encountered culture shock. She remembered,

> In the beginning, when I had the door open, I was sitting right there, close to the door. People would just walk by, they wouldn't look in, or they wouldn't stop to say, "Good morning." And sometimes I saw people coming, and I would say, "Good morning," but maybe he didn't hear anything, just walked past it, and that would make me feel really bad. […]So for a long time, I believe[d] that people hate[d] me.

Lan not only encountered problems in interpersonal communication with her colleagues but also encountered problems with her English skills as she recounted:

> In the beginning, I was mostly really frustrated about schoolwork. I was really slow in reading, and I wasn't very good talking to other people. When I go to lecture, I couldn't follow the lecture, so I mostly read the books on my own. So I feel I was really behind.

Lan admitted to being depressed for those first two to three years of her attending graduate school and reported seeking out counseling. She reported counseling improved her ability to cope with everyday challenges. Lan recalls that at one point,

> I think I just sort of accepted, I noticed that there are people here that are very nice, that they say good, "Good morning" or "Hi" to me all the time, but there's, there's certain people, it's just their way of life. […].

Despite the challenges she encountered, Lan was able to move on and grow both personally and academically. She now sees her office as

> a place that reminds me this long way I have walked until this day. So whenever I, I feel bad about myself, or I didn't do really well on a test or something. Um, that place sort of remind me I have come this far. So I'm sure I can go one more step."

Because of those experiences, Lan's office was a place of opportunity because it allowed her to remember the strengths and the skills she has developed in the context of her personal and professional development.

Manu's (India, 28, male, 2 years in the U.S.) narrative emphasized his relationship to his work at the academic department and its role on his acquisition of in-depth knowledge of the field. Manu reported he selected his university because

> it was a premier institute in petroleum engineering […]. They have a lot of experience, they have a lot of knowledge with them, and, uh, so working with these kind of professors, taking their courses and all of that, has, uh, changed me, I would say, because, uh, the, my technical expertise was in one aspect of petroleum engineering before this. […] But I was not aware of [other] aspect[s] so much. I mean, I just had some basic idea. But no, I've been working in this for like two years or so. So, uh, I would really say that, uh, it has given me a lot of exposure. So, uh, my knowledge has increased.

In addition to knowledge, Manu also referred to his professional development as a mentor and leader in the academic department. He reported,

> Undergrads […] are doing […] the basic work that has to be done, the ground-level work which is an input for every graduate student and which every company wants to see. It's a basic set of data that has to be connected all the time. […] Maybe one or two [undergraduates] can [help you]. So if you get […] that kind of support, then it's very fruitful. […] And it has been, uh, symbiotic sort of relationship; they have learned in the process. Because if they work with me, they get to know about my thesis as well, and that prepares them for the future. […] I'm very happy that, uh, those people who are there in summers, who I used to talk to, three of them have applied to graduate school now.

Thus, his workplace provided opportunities for Manu to evolve professionally through his experiences of academic and personal growth.

Although Priya (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) grew up in India, coming to the U.S. provided her with other cultural ideals and values. As a result, Priya

associates the university campus with opportunities to learn and grow and to find herself while also exploring possibilities outside her culture. For instance, she reported,

> For me, coming to [this university] was getting the freedom to do what [I] want in terms of [my] education. It's not easy to make a choice with so many people compelling me to do something. Oh, it has changed me tremendously. I look back in my life, and I would have been married, having kids, and being submissive to my husband because that's the culture in India. But now, I feel like no, I can live without a man, you know.

She referred to the fact that in India, only certain professions are acceptable for a woman. For example, she noted, "In India, you only have two majors, engineering or a doctor. It's frowned upon if you do something else." However, Priya credited the university and her academic department with helping her develop a passion and love for research and making the world a better place. She reported,

> The passion for research, the passion to make the world better is something that [this university] gave me. […] [Through] seminars, which talked about how they were doing research in weather, they were talking about how they did research in biochemistry and, like, the whole exposure of everybody working as a community to make something better.

In addition, Priya believed that being at the university opened her horizons and her ability to make decisions. She stated, "You have to find yourself. And [this university] made me do that, so this place has changed me profoundly." Thus, the university was a powerful catalyst in Priya's search for herself. She reported joining an international student organization and became closer to students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Although in the past, she had negative stereotypes about black students, she came to appreciate that all are human beings deserving respect. Priya recalled,

> [The international organization] has shown me a broader perspective of different culture[s]. I'm not proud when I say this, but […] we had been projected in our minds that Afro Americans are not good people, when I saw them, when I talked to them. I was fearful. I was like, "'Oh, my gosh, I have to keep my distance,"' you know. But then, you know, sitting down and eating lunch, and we were like hanging out, I'm like, "They're human." Everybody is human. […] So for me, that's, that's the thing that after I came to America, I have tried to understand everybody as human, which is at a very deeper level than we think to think about.

The university served as a place of immense opportunities for Priya, as she experienced growth in many areas of her life, including the personal, social, and professional.

On the other hand, Su's (China, 25, female, 2 years in the U.S.) work at the university's English-language learning center has been pivotal in her developing more confidence. She spoke highly of her supervisor and coworkers and expressed thankfulness for their support and encouragement. Su reported,

> My boss […] trust[ed] me […] and encouraged me, and she told me I can do [my job]. […] So I really appreciate her. […] She encouraged me to take notes for our staff meeting, [which is] actually is very hard because I try to understand and to write down everything. And, and there, at the beginning, I think, "Oh, I cannot do that." [...] But she told me, like, "'Yes, you can do that. I know you

can do that."' […] And [she] always [thinks] my English is good enough, so [she] always encourage[s] me.

Su credits her workplace with her developing confidence and trust in herself. She stated, "I feel I'm so lucky, and […] I really appreciate this. It is a good place." Su's experience with her American coworkers at the English-language learning center made her feel valued. Su reported, "Most of my American friends, they have [an] interest in China. And then […] sometimes we will [have] discuss[ions] or sometimes just talk about our daily lives." Su had heard negative things about Americans from other Chinese friends, as she stated, "Maybe other international students feel different from me. I heard a lot [of bad things] from my friend." Nonetheless, Su has a positive image of American people based on her interaction with coworkers. Su reported, "American people, they're so good […]. I know some people [are] not good. […] I always remind myself to keep a balance and appreciate people who are nice to me." Su developed a strong relationship to her workplace because she received support and encouragement to overcome her insecurities there. Su's workplace provided an opportunity for her to engage in activities that enhanced her sense of confidence. Overall, international students' workplaces served as places of opportunity because they confronted challenges that ultimately fostered personal and professional growth.

Places of residence. Participants in this study indicated facing challenges within their home, which ultimately led to having opportunities for growth and development. For example, Anastasiya (Bulgaria, 27, female, 8 years in the U.S.) reported learning from observing her boyfriend's mother's behavior towards other people. She reported that spending the weekends at her boyfriend's home "has

definitely changed me, because especially [my boyfriend's] mother, she's really giving and she's very good [and] forgiving." In her boyfriend's home, Anastasiya was able to observe and learn from her future mother-in-law and expressed admiration for her tolerance and understanding towards others. Anastasiya also reported personal growth when she moved in with her boyfriend, for in their apartment, she learned to take on new roles and responsibilities. She referred to her learning to become more responsible once she moved into this apartment by indicating,

> I have become, so to speak, a housewife in this place because I love cleaning it, uh, and I love cooking in it. I never really liked doing that before, but I know it's like I'm in charge of my house. […] Yes, because especially this past year, I […] became more responsible […] in the sense that […] I have to pay the rent, all the bills, so I'm always like trying to do this on time. And I'm, you know, going to the store and stuff. I feel like, yeah, it had made me a little bit more responsible, even though it sounds a little strange."

Anastasiya experienced an important shift in her life as her relationship strengthened with her boyfriend. Both her boyfriend's home and the apartment they share were places where she has grown at a personal level.

On the other hand, Juan reported at one point in time, he struggled with his financial and academic responsibilities. He described going through a period of desperation and uncertainty about his future. Juan recalled,

> So I was going through a lot of desperation when I first came. [As a graduate student], you have more responsibilities [both] financially and the work that you have to do. And things were not going that well, and I didn't know what to do,

> or, um, whether just leave everything and go back to Colombia. And I was just, like, very desperate."

He reported that his room was the only place where he could express his frustration and desperation without being seen by other people. Juan reported,

> So I would talk to [my friend] sometimes [about our] frustrations and things like that, so she told me, well, "'Why don't you come, uh, you know, like [to] small groups? We meet and talk about God. Maybe that's something that you want?'" So I started to go, and that's how, I went there over a year and learned more about God. […] And just kind of in a personal moment with God and hearing from Him is when I realized, like I kind of have that revelation God is real. So, so it was the turning point for me in that moment.

Juan stated he was able to find peace and determination to continue with his degree through cultivating this personal relationship with God, which took place in the privacy of his room through prayer and meditation. Thus, Juan's room was the place that provided him the opportunity to face and overcome challenges.

In a similar way, Maria (Philippines, 18, female, 5 years in the U.S.) referred to the challenge of relocating her family of five from the Philippines to the U.S. when her mother started graduate studies in the U.S. She remembered,

> When I came here, we stayed at an apartment for, like, two months, and […] we're a family of five. And we're crazy. So we can't really, like, contain ourselves [in], like, a three-bedroom apartment because it's, like, it's small. And back in the Philippines, we used to live in, like, a big house.

Maria also recalled her having to adjust to a different school system: "Like when, when I came here, it's obviously different. […] I went to a private school in the Philippines. It's like back in the Philippines, like, my classmates [are], like, my own demographic. Like, that freaked me out at first." Maria recalled,

> There's, like, rich people and not so rich people [in my high school], and, like, everybody's in the same place, which is kind of weird for me at first […]. Yeah, but actually it was, like, so [much] nicer than I thought it would [be], like […] high school in movies [looks] crazy, [showing] the popular kids and whatever. And like in the movies, it's like, "'Oh, my god, they're going to bully you because you're like this or whatever.'" I didn't really experience that at [my high school]. I feel like everybody was nice.

Maria experienced personal growth in the local city since coming with her mother when she was still a pre-teen. Although she was anxious at first, she realized many stereotypes about American teenagers are not true. Maria established a strong emotional bond to her place of residence in part because of the opportunities for learning during her developing years.

On the other hand, Mei (China, 23, female, 1 year in the U.S.) reported encountering difficulties with roommates due to disagreements on apartment cleanliness. She stated, "We have some disagreements with each other. My apartment? Not clean apartment. It's horrible. Yeah. Because the girls here, sometimes they are not really clean." Although Mei has had a somewhat disappointing experience with her roommates, she also related her apartment to her learning to be more tolerant of others. She realized her roommates may not be extremely clean but they are very supportive

emotionally.

> For me, it's a process to learn to how to forgive someone. So maybe now, I will choose to communicate more and don't blame [my roommates] too much like this. It [taught] me how to be, how do you say? [A] forgiving person. Don't be [bothered] by such little things like [cleaning the apartment]. [Being] more flexible. You don't know before [leaving your home].

Mei also said she has learned the value of having friends and getting help while living in the US, as she stated, "I don't have a car. It's hard for me to go to [the supermarket]. So here, I just know how to appreciate others' help." Even though she encountered conflict and difficulty upon moving into her apartment, she also credited her apartment with her learning to be more tolerant, forgiving, and better able to communicate with others. Mei even said, "Sometimes, I love this place. Maybe if I leave, I [will] miss it." The evidence from Mei's lived experience supports the concept that individuals build relationships to places where they experience and overcome challenges.

Likewise, Svitlana's (Latvia, 21, female, 2 years in the U.S.) apartment was a reminder of sharing a place with other international students when she was studying English in Norway. Specifically, she recalled the marked differences between her experience in Norway and her experience in the U.S. Svitlana said,

> I was brought to that school [in Norway] with very […] limited English and put in one room with like girls from Yemen, Spain, Denmark. Like [in Latvia], we [look] all the same, we are white people, so for me it was, like, extreme to see Chinese person talking to black person. Or, like, Yemenese girl, she was a super-

> Muslim, so she would not allow a guy to enter the [room]. This exposure to like, it was, it was crazy.

Svitlana said these experiences paved the way for her to become more open with people from other cultures and expressed thankfulness for her international roommates in the U.S. Svitlana said many international students live in her apartment complex and expressed her desire to help them in any way possible. She reported,

> I'm also trying to contact […] Chinese students, but it's very hard. […] So and I don't know, they, first of all, [their] English is very limited sometimes. And some people are not very tolerant of that. So they would be like, "'Oh, you don't know how to speak English, so I'm not going to talk to you.'" But, like, I know how it is to not understand, you know, sit in a class and be like, "What is this girl talking about?" Because I have been through that, you know, when I went to Norway."

In general, Svitlana expressed the emotional bond she has developed with her apartment because she remembered the difficulties she experienced before and reported being appreciative of having good roommates. Additionally, Svitlana's challenges have helped her understand the difficulties other international students face and inspired her to help others. Overall, international students had places that afforded them the opportunity to learn new perspectives. From roommate conflicts and disagreements to frustration and a desire to help others, international students had the opportunity to express their emotions and experience growth in these places.

Places related to leisure activities. Study participants indicated experiencing challenges and growth through attending to leisure activities. In general, international

students indicated activities they engage in outside their academic and work environments provide opportunities to learn new perspectives and confront challenges. For example, Kim (Malaysia, 20, female, 2 years in the U.S.) reported her realization of her becoming independent in her decision-making took place at a local shopping mall. Kim recalled,

> Definitely, like, I was just so used to listening to my mom, but when I'm here, I'm alone. […] But I'll be, like, really nervous, like, I don't know, should I buy this? Should I not? I really want to buy this. It's my own money. I want to save some money for food, like, I don't know. So it's hard, I get really nervous just to buy one [thing].

Kim felt slightly emotional at the local shopping mall when she realized it was her responsibility to make decisions about spending money. The mall served as a place of opportunity because it fostered Kim's realization of her responsibilities and values.

In a similar way, Lan (China, 29, female, 6 years in the U.S.) reported she found a dance school where adult ballet classes were taught. Lan remembered,

> "I went to dance school not to learn how to dance, but it's a way to get out of depression. I think it worked really well. Um, so I was in adult school for, uh, class for about a year, two years. And I think I got […] much better on my, uh, mental state. But I also got better in my dancing. They, they try to stay safe. But I want to do [a lot of new things], so I moved to small kids' class […] I started to do all that kind of things. So now, I think I really got into dance. And I just started to do pointe work. I love it. And it's also one place, if I have anything frustrating, or I was really sad about at school, I know once it's 5 o'clock, I go to

dance school, and I can just enjoy dancing there.

Lan also benefited from observing other dance students facing challenges. She stated,

> Sometimes, while we're learn[ing] a new step that's really difficult, I see [other ballet students], how to learn to do it and practice it instead of stepping back and [being] worried about that. Um, a lot of them […] try to, even if [they] fall, but they, they're not worried about that. I really like that kind of mentality.

Going to her dance school also provided opportunities to make changes in her lifestyle:

> Before I started to dance, I would be hunched over; my back spine wasn't very straight. So you sit in front of a computer all day, and I couldn't stretch, I never do that. But now, I feel my posture has changed, and you become more flexible, your muscles have been tuned much better, so you're more energetic.

In addition, attending dance school has also resulted in her becoming aware of her body, which in turn led to making changes in her eating habits. She reported,

> I started to watch what I eat. I tried to eat healthier food. I tried to eat at the right time. […] I think once you start to eat […] healthier foods, it also physically gives you better [shape]. You just feel better. But it's also this mental feeling that I am eating healthier. It makes you feel good. So... And then I usually don't drink coffee, like two hours before I go to dance, because otherwise you shake. So it also forced me to change my habit, like I quit drinking so much coffee and try to drink tea instead.

Attending dance school enhanced Lan's understanding and awareness of the kind of lifestyle she desired and provided with the motivation to adhere to it.

Cheng (China, 24, male, 2 years in the U.S.) found opportunities to engage in

his favorite recreational activities by visiting the metropolitan area of a neighboring state. He reported "Oh yeah! Bars, yeah. And, um, night life." He referred to his enjoyment of nightlife activities, which were a quotidian aspect of life in Beijing and Shanghai. He compared the nightlife in China and America by stating,

> In China, uh, life is good at night. It… like, after 10 or 11 o'clock, people go to sleep here. In China, this is my life: I go to have dinner with my friends at, like 6, 7, or 8 o'clock. You have dinner, and then after dinner, we can go skating, or we can go to the um, karaoke, um, yeah. I like karaoke. […]. And um, also we have board game bar […], and we play into midnight; you can play until, like, 6 o'clock in the morning. And also [at] midnight or 2 or 3 o'clock, you feel hungry, just go out. All the restaurants are open, and they have very, very delicious snacks. Here [in this state] is totally impossible. People go back home after 8 o'clock! And after 9 or 10, all the restaurants are closed. […].

Cheng established a long-lasting relationship with the out-of-state metropolitan area because it resembled the lifestyle he was used to living back home in China. In general, participants expressed moments of challenges and growth in places related to leisure activities.

Places of worship. Places where international students engage in worship provide important opportunities to reaffirm their identity and cultural values. For example, Priya's (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) Hindu temple is a place where she celebrated her culture's traditions and rituals. She said, "[The Hindu temple] is related to my culture and religion. So it's usually like a sort of celebration [when] we

talk in our language." She referred to the isolation sometimes found on campus, as most Indian celebrations are not observed in the US. She described,

> We had an […] Indian New Year's, so we were like working all day […], and then in the evening, we […] get dressed in our Indian pretty clothes and then go to the temple. It's not, like, nobody on the campus wishes you Happy New Year or anything. And, like, even it doesn't have symbolism for them like we do.

Priya also expressed a comforting sense of familiarity in this place.

> For me, […] the familiarity of what we do in general is what comforts me in the temple. And then we have stories. We have a big mythological history, and everybody is very specific about what they want to project to us, like we have even women goddess. […] We have all the idols, and then everybody sits on the other side, and we all like chant […] or pray, and usually, you get to eat at the end of it.

Priya also described her experiences of the temple by stating, "It's just a familiarity that makes me go back to that place. […]The familiarity of rituals is what makes me like it or feel at home, you know. […] It's like bringing back some of your country, you know." Priya is not a stranger in a stranger land when she is in the temple; she is part of a community.

An important aspect of Kim's (Malaysia, 20, female, 2 years in the U.S.) value system is the belief that her church is accepting of everyone. She recounted,

> I feel like I used to live by rules a lot and those, like, legalistic stuff. That kind of concept. Rather than I have to work for it, I have to always read my bible, always pray, always do this for the Lord.

Kim reported being affected by the accepting attitudes of church members. She said,

> We have, like, a few girls who are not married, but they got pregnant. And usually, what the normal church would do would be, like, reject them from coming just because they think, like, it's not a good thing, like, if we accept them, it's like we are encouraging people to do that, right? But this church is so full of love and just so gracious, and they just welcome them and even have, like, [a baby shower]. And [they] say, you know, "We're here for you if you need anything," and they give them presents and stuff and encourage them.

Kim expressed this aspect of the church and its membership is important for her because

> it's just encouraging when you step into this church, you can see different kinds of people. It's not like those people are, you know, think that they have it all together. But people who really are just there because they're accepted by this church.

Through her church, Kim found opportunities to express and display the values important in her life. In general, participants' experienced a sense of validation when they were in places of worship.

Overall, most international students developed strong emotional bonds to places that afforded them opportunities to learn more about themselves, where they experienced and learned to overcome challenges, and where they were reminded of their ability to master personal and professional development. These challenges ranged from personal to professional and academic. Nonetheless, these places seemed to have become integral to their lives because of the rollercoaster of emotions experienced at

different times while living in this foreign country. It is also noteworthy that most of the places students associated with challenges were located within the university, including academic department buildings and campus housing.

Places of restoration. International students' narratives referred to the impact of places that provided pleasure, contained emotions, and overall increased their self-value. In general, participants identified seven types of places as influential in their state of mind: (1) places within the university, (2) places in nature, (3) places of residence, (4) work places, (5) places related to leisure activities, (6) places of worship, and (7) places of remembrance.

Places within the university. Some students experienced a sense of well-being by being in places within the university. For example, Lucia (Colombia, 24, female, 2 years in U.S.) recognized the university's student union building as one that felt familiar and comfortable. She reported,

> I have a place where [I feel] comfortable […] even though this is not my home country. It's, I mean, I'm still going through this adaptation process, so just like something that is so familiar to me. […] Just because it was something familiar that I was used to.

Even though Lucia is in the process of adapting to a different environment and culture, she found a place where her acculturative stress level decreases. She explained, "I mean, you just sit there with your computer, and you see people doing the same thing, you sit there, and you fit. Because you fit, you feel like you fit, because you're doing what people are doing." Lucia was able to decrease the stress of being a new international student in a foreign country by being in a place where she no longer stands

out as a foreigner but looks like any other student spending time at the student center.

Eduard (Netherlands, 29, male, 1 year in the U.S.) experienced a sense of well-being within the university campus because "I like the layout [of campus], I like the busyness with people around. Like [how] it's now, the weather and all the seating areas outside. I like the buildings." He experienced a relaxed atmosphere whenever he walked around campus. On the other hand, Juan described his office in his academic department as a peaceful, quiet place where he is able to appreciate the beauty of the landscape. Juan indicated,

> My office was on the 12th floor. […] Whenever I get up there, it's like always quiet. You can see the sun dawning, dawning, is that how you say it? Like when the sun rises? Yeah. It's nice to see from my window. So, so that makes it special, too.

Juan also reported his enjoyment of observing the season's changes, which consists of "watch[ing] the view and kind of see how it changes […] with the seasons. Like winter, it's like all desolate. And summer, like all dry and green." For both international students, the physical characteristics of campus buildings were pleasing on an aesthetic level.

Similarly, Jun (China, 29, female, 2 years in the U.S.) reflected on the beauty of campus buildings and the friendliness of the people in this part of the country. She reported, "Campus is very beautiful, and people here are very friendly, so I like the feeling of the campus. [I like] the grass, the plants, […] the quietness." Jun also appreciated the open spaces surrounding the campus and the view she has from her office because "there is a big window in my lab, so it's a big, it's a good view. I can,

when I'm tired, I can look out the window." Thus, viewing the layout and features of the campus even through a window proved restorative for Jun. On the other hand, Manu (India, 28, male, 2 years in the U.S.) enjoyed the architecture of the campus library, as he perceived it as a beautiful, impressive building. He reported,

> I went to that great reading room. It almost felt like I'm in Harry Potter movie, the dining hall; I always feel like that. And whenever all of us, the Indians, when we talk about that Great Reading Hall Library, we always talk about that great reading hall and associate it with the Harry Potter movie.

He derived a sense of satisfaction from attending a school that has a sense of greatness and tradition. He also recalled that other Indian students often took pictures of themselves in this hall to share with family back home and added, "I mean, the aesthetic sense of people who designed [the library] is very good, I feel so." International students expressed valuing the restorative nature of observing aesthetically pleasing buildings, building layouts, and overall design of the campus.

Places in nature. International students expressed a fondness for places within nature, including lakes, mountains, and ponds, all of which are accessible in the Midwestern state where they currently reside. For instance, Cheng (China, 24, male, 2 years in the U.S.) found an escape from everyday stress by going to a lake on the weekends, referring to the lake as a "really good way for […] relaxing." Cheng added, "You know, as a Ph.D. student, [I am] really under pressure, so it's a really good way to relax myself. [This place] just make[s] me feel comfortable. […] Yeah. Like, it makes me feel happy." He expressed his appreciation of nature in the Midwestern state by recounting, "So I really like this kind of life [in the U.S.]. You know, the sky is blue.

Before I came to the States, I never thought the sky was blue. It should be blue, but I never saw this before." Cheng reported he found joy in absorbing nature, especially when "you can feel the nature and the environment […]. Because you just seat on the bank of the lake, and you can spend a whole afternoon there, and there's some wind in your face, and you feel really good." For Anastasiya (Bulgaria, 27, female, 8 years in the U.S.), visiting nearby mountains was a way to overcome the stress of everyday life and of breaking with her weekly routine. She reported, "I need to be amongst nature. I feel good there; it affects me in a very positive way. […] I'm just calmer. I, like, I mean, just [have] calmer thoughts, you know; I'll kind of get rid of my stress."

Similarly, Ajay (India, 26, male, 2 years in the U.S.) mentioned a duck pond at the university campus positively affected his state of mind. Ajay described "feeling goose bumps" whenever he was at the duck pond and experienced it as welcoming and leading to serenity. Ajay described his experience, "I really like the duck pond. [There is] serenity, a peaceful feeling, a calmness, happiness, warmth. If you want some solitude, you get that as well." Ajay admired the serenity of observing nature on his way to work or class and stated,

> and I really like the fact that, […] compared to the place that I come from, [this place] is much cleaner […]. Um, because the country is so clean and I can definitely see that you get to enjoy nature, and, um, there's a lot of space.

John (Italy, 32, male, 3 years in the U.S.) described visiting a nearby lake as an experience that deeply influenced his state of mind. John reported the lake

> represents an escape opportunity for me. So when […] I had enough of the roads and buildings, I take my bicycle, and I go to the [lake]. And [I like] going away

> from everything. […] I kind of try to forget all the people that I don't like when I get there, so I think more than a connection is a disconnection because, uh, it's pretty much the only place that I have where I can go and, uh, just be away from everything.

John referred to a sense of peace achieved in this place by stating,

> I can have that time for myself, get lost in a place that I can enjoy. […] I have much more freedom; I'm in charge. I decide where to go, when to go, and what to do, um, so it's, um, it's a place that offers peace.

Overall, international students in this study perceived places in nature as sources of relaxation and peace.

Places of residence. International students in this study noted the restorative impact of their home through facilitating reflection and introspection. For example, Juan's apartment brought into focus his long-term goals. He stated, "I look at [my apartment] and it's like [I am] thinking about the next place that I want to have." Juan's room promoted a change in his state of mind because

> it's the place that when I get there, it's like, everything in me kind of changes to "This is the place to rest." So when I get there, I'm not willing to work. Um, sometimes I have to, but I try [not to].

Similarly, Maria (Philippines, 18, female, 5 years in the U.S.) shifted to a state of comfort and relaxation when she was at home. Maria described her feelings:

> [Being at home], like, it relieves the stress. [You feel] relaxed, really, because you don't really think of anything; you don't think of school when you're just there. […] And, like, going home, it's just like you kind of, like, take

> [everything] off your mind and just, like, come home, and my family [is] here. […] I guess because I'm at home, [I am] not really guarded; […] your guard just like wears off.

Thus, when she is at home, she is able to relax and be herself.

Mei (China, 23, female, 1 year in the U.S.) recalled when she first arrived at her apartment after many days of travel: "The first day, I came there and I just felt, I need a bed, I need a room, and I'm so happy that I have a bed and I can sleep tonight." Since then, she attributed the qualities of comfort and rest to her apartment, and every time she comes home at the end of the day, she experiences relaxation and comfort. Similarly, Rajesh's (Bangladesh, 31, male, 5 years in the U.S.) home is the place where he feels restful and hopeful. He reported finding solace at home, where "I feel like as long as that place is here, there's some place where I have to go. When I go to sleep, okay, at least at this moment, I've finished what I should have done." Although Rajesh reported an overall disappointment with his life in the United States, he was able to find hope and solace whenever he spent time at home. Moreover, Svitlana (Latvia, 21, female, 2 years in the U.S.) reported feeling renewed by spending time in her room because it is one of the few places she can be alone. She described,

> I like that I have my own space, my own room. I can just, you know, close the door and have my own time because it's very hard, because I'm a very social person, so I just, sometimes, I forget myself. So that's a place I can isolate myself. […] That place makes me happy.

Although Svitlana reported enjoyment from social interaction, her room afforded her time for reflection and relaxation.

Su (China, 25, female, 2 years in the U.S.) referred to her apartment as a place conducive to reflection about her life. She reported,

> I have more time to think about myself [in my apartment] instead of think[ing] about my job or my stud[ies]. I have more time to think about life, […] what is the kind of thing [I] really want to do, and, uh, why [I] came here. And, uh, what [I] want to do in the future. […] I think reflection helps me a lot, like, sometimes if I have some problem, yeah, and I go back home, and I can really think about it."

Su's apartment is a place that also promotes a shift in her state of mind, a place where she can relax and rest but also where she can "cook my favorite food, and, watch TV or movie and Skype with my parents. […] I think most of the time I relax, it's just […] eating food and not focus[ing] on study[ing]." In Su's case, her room is a place that brings about awareness of herself and her goals for the future. Overall, international students expressed their places of residence were havens of restoration, where they found relaxation and peace and were able to feel grounded and safe.

Work places. Many international students hold graduate research or teaching assistantships, and many also hold on-campus jobs. For many of the students in this study, their workplace was a powerful place to promote and restore concentration, focus, and drive to accomplish the tasks they are assigned. For example, Cheng (China, 24, male, 2 years in the U.S.) reported,

> [Having an office in my department building] gives me confidence. […] Every day when I come here, I am full of energy, and I have lots of things to do, like,

yeah, so it makes me feel good. Yeah, [it is a] caring and welcoming [place]; [it] make[s] my boring life more colorful.

Similarly, John (Italy, 32, male, 3 years in the U.S.) also referred to his office on campus as a place that promotes concentration and reported,

I feel very concentrated when I'm here [in my office] or in general when I'm on campus in this building or other buildings of the campus. I'm, I'm totally concentrated on what I'm doing, um, so I tend to exclude everything else. And I'm completely absorbed in, in [my work]. […] And, um… it's something that I do not get […] when I am traveling or, or not even when I'm home.

Manu (India, 28, male, 2 years in the U.S.) reported having an office in his academic department building and described his office as a place that fostered concentration on his academic and research work. He specifically referred to the machines in his lab by describing,

"Whenever I see machines, I'm interested in them, so my brain starts working a bit more when I'm there, so […] I would say I reach a different kind of mental level when I'm there, not physically, but mentally, I am […] changed a bit.

Moreover, Su (China, 25, female, 2 years in the U.S.) said her apartment complex on campus has a study hall and described it as a place that restores her ability to focus and study. She reported,

I study there, and, it's quiet, so I can focus on my study. And, um, most of the time, I study by myself. […] I don't like to study at home. But if I'm in this room, I definitely can focus on my study. I think more about my classes, my courses, and do assignments.

In general, international students' experiences indicate workplaces allow them to restore their focus and motivation about the academic research and jobs they have to perform.

Places related to leisure activities. Participants in this study noted that places where they engaged in recreational activities had a restorative impact on their life. For instance, Ajay (India, 26, male, 2 years in the U.S.) expressed a feeling of satisfaction whenever he enjoyed a meal at his favorite restaurant and stated, "I like the ambiance, [and I feel] satisfaction." He referred to his feeling as relaxed after eating out and enjoyed a break from his weekly routine by going to this restaurant. Similarly, Eduard (Netherlands, 29, male, 1 year in the U.S.) described being able to reframe his perspective on problems while riding his motorcycle. Eduard described his experience by stating,

> You kind of zone out when you're on the road. [You think about] projects; especially when you're coding or something, you need some time off. And that's the time where you go […] through your code and find new solutions for stuff you're stuck on.

Although many roads are new and unknown for Eduard, he experiences a restorative effect of calmness and clarity while driving around the countryside.

On the other hand, Juan reported regularly working out and said that the gym is a place that promotes restorative feelings because

> when I go to the gym, […] I don't need to be thinking about something as specific, or I don't need to be with anyone at that time. […] When I have that space, um, it's kind of easing myself, […] kind of bring [back] my strength, renew my patience […] to go throughout the day.

Juan's narrative referred to his need to leave negative emotions accumulated throughout the day in this place so he could experience relaxation at the end of the day.

Lucia (Colombia, 24, female, 2 years in U.S.) reported a sense of enjoyment when observing students milling around on campus. Lucia reported feeling relaxed when visiting the student services building on campus, having coffee, and taking a break from studying. She reported,

> I just liked to go there, just like, get my computer, sit there, see people walking around, get a coffee because that was one of my favorite things to do [back home], just go get a coffee and sit. […] Because actually, whenever I want, if I'm stressed out, I just want to like […] get away for a few minutes, I go there. […] It helps me […] relax.

Similarly, Svitlana (Latvia, 21, female, 2 years in the U.S.) reported feeling reenergized when she was in an area across the university campus, where there are many stores, restaurants, coffee houses, and bars. Svitlana described the line dividing the university from this area as "a boundary, where [it] is not school anymore." Svitlana added,

> So that kind of gives me […] stress relief, you know. Yeah. It's, it's great. I don't know how your state of mind changes. It just like, something psychological inside my mind that just like, it's chill, you know, don't think about class, […] just sit down, you know, enjoy.

It is noteworthy that Juan, Lucia, and Svitlana valued different aspects of the places where they spent their free time: Whereas Juan valued privacy and Lucia valued being around people, Svitlana valued spending time away from school as a way to relax.

Furthermore, Lan (China, 29, female, 6 years in the U.S.) reported facing many difficulties understanding American culture and even reported experiencing depression. However, Lan referred to her decision to attend a dance school as important for her state of mind because she found solace, peace, and safety. She described her experience,

> I stopped feeling so bad about myself. For a little while, it's sort of my refuge actually […]. And it's also one place if I have anything frustrating or I was really sad about school, I know once it's 5 o'clock, I go to dance school, and I can just enjoy dancing there. I can forget everything […]. It's just...very happy. So it's mostly positive there.

Lan perceived her dance school as a refuge, a place that brought happiness to her life. In general, places where international students spent their free time served as oases of relaxation and restoration in the midst of busy work and academic lives.

Places of worship. International students expressed feeling at peace and positive when spending time in places of worship. For instance, Juan described the impact of his relationship to God as one that

> colored those places where I can develop that relationship. That, that really gave me new hope and gave me the strength and guidance to do what I wasn't being able to do before. So I think it has been… I think so far, it's been, like, the most important decision and the most, uh, the biggest impact my life has had.

For example, Juan dedicated time in his apartment for devotional activities including reading his Bible and praying for guidance and strength. Juan described his routine, which included

> In the mornings when I'm by myself, I read my Bible or just praying or just

> spending time by myself; I'm with God like that. But because I like it, but it's, but it's like the point when I'm like, "Okay, this is my time with God."

An important aspect of his experience working out at the gym is his focus on God. He said, "When I'm [at the gym], like, like my thoughts and just, you know, I'm not with people, but I'm just like thinking about God. So I think that would be a person who is, you know, more related to that place." Juan also referred to the gym as a place where

> it's like only Him and I. So that's what made me complete. So when I think about [the gym], it's like I come to a place where, you know, it's like when you want to spend time with your girlfriend. And when I think about that, it's like, "Finally, we get to spend time together."

Juan described his workout time as a time when he can solely focus on God and when he tries to leave his emotions and worries in his hands.

Kim (Malaysia, 20, female, 2 years in the U.S.) expressed that going to her Christian church promotes relaxation. Kim reported attending church every Sunday and stated, "I just feel really relaxed when I'm in the church, and I feel welcome, and it's like no matter how my week has been, like, going to church is like a big relief, and, like, I can finally breathe." Kim described her relationship with God by stating,

> But now I know more about God's Grace, and it just, it's not like I'm taking the concept of grace for granted, but it makes me more like relaxed and know, like, no matter what I do, God will still love me anyway. But I still want to do things for the Lord, and I'm really passionate about all that, but it's not coming out of like a forceful way; it's more of like I do this because I love the Lord, that kind of attitude.

Kim also reported experiencing the presence of God when attending church, adding, "It's, it's definitely like a place for me to relax and enjoy the presence of God. Just [focus on] Jesus. Just... Just focusing on God and what he wants to say to me."

Similarly, Priya (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) referred to a Hindu temple as a place where she experiences restoration, positivity, and peace. Priya stated: "I really like the Hindu temple […]; it kind of makes me feel that I'm home. […] It has [the] effect of positivity." Priya found a sense of peace and comfort in a place where she engaged in familiar rituals. She appreciated the spiritual connection with her Gods, which she described by stating, "We Hindus personify everything in a god, you know." Priya also referred to the sense of union with her Gods through chanting in Sanskrit and stated,

> Most of the Hindu culture is in Sanskrit, so we don't understand when we talk, but we feel the good feeling, you know, when everybody is chanting something. The feeling of unity is something we feel, but we don't really understand what he's trying to preach or say.

Priya experienced a restorative spiritual connection not only with her Gods, but also with other Indian people worshipping and chanting in unity with her.

Rajesh (Bangladesh, 31, male, 5 years in the U.S.) found hope and support by visiting a mosque near campus. He explained,

> [The mosque] reliev[es] the stress. I'm Muslim. I go there for prayer. Usually on Friday in the afternoon. […] You know Muslims pray five times a day, right? If I have some time, which is very rare, if I go over there, sometimes I go there as a last hope, thinking that, okay… at least I can ask God for help.

At the mosque, Rajesh leans on elder leaders for encouragement, support, and understanding. Specifically, he said,

> Sometimes, I go and talk with [the prayer leader] and ask him explanations from the Holy Qur'an, relearning the scripture, and he, he actually helps me explaining this. And every time when I leave, he just tells me, "Young man, I have seen a lot of things in my 75 years. You're still young. You haven't seen a lot. And don't worry that much."

In the midst of the challenges he confronts on a daily basis, Rajesh has found hope and support in this place. Rajesh reported that when he prays, he asks God, "Am I destined to carry this load? Whenever I go there, I think it's the last hope for me. I was […] asking God, what's your plan?" Although experiencing distress in his life, visiting his mosque brings hope to Rajesh's life. Overall, participants experienced places of worship as powerful sources of peace and renewal in their life.

Places of remembrance. One international student expressed feeling restoration and respect when admiring the architectural features of a memorial built to remember victims of a domestic terrorist attack. In her narrative, Svitlana (Latvia, 21, female, 2 years in the U.S.) expressed,

> I like the architectural part of the place. It's very impressive, like, there's this water, which is kind of still, and then it's not pouring, and it's like the time has stopped. And there are like numbers, which are, like, when the bombing started.

Svitlana recognized that the architectural details made it even more emotional for her to visit this place. She reflected, "[This place] is very impressive. […] The chairs and setting and the walls from the building still [in] existence, you know. It's impressive,

like how they managed to make that place. Because I feel like it's very beautiful; also, it has meaning." Svitlana referred to the emotions elicited by the physical and architectural features of the memorial, which she appreciated for both its beauty and its meaning.

Based on the narrative of international students in this study, a diverse range of places being restorative experiences to their lives. For instance, places in nature promote relaxation and peace, some places promote concentration and focus, and some places are conducive to reflection and introspection. In general, international students expressed a sense of well-being is related to having these restorative places in their lives.

Places of sociality. An important theme found across the narratives of international students in this study is the importance of places as hubs of social connection. Participants in the study indicated strong bonds to places based on relationships with friends, significant others, spouses, family members, and organizations of people. These relationships were varied and multifaceted but appeared in almost every interviewee's narrative, suggesting their importance in international student adjustment. International students noted that different types of places facilitated forming and sustaining interpersonal relationships: (1) places within the university, (2) places related to leisure activities, (3) places in nature, (4) places of residence, and (5) places of worship.

Places within the university. In general, the university campus provided international students with numerous opportunities to develop social connections. For example, the building housing Eduard's (Netherlands, 29, male, 1 year in the U.S.)

academic department was a place that has facilitated the development of social relationships. Eduard stated,

> [I] hang out a little bit more. [I] talk with people and stuff like that. Well, [it is] basically classes [where I meet people]. I think it's especially classes with my own department. […] Then seeing the same people in the same classes. That helps.

Eduard also recalled student organizations in his department organized events, which also provided opportunities to meet people. He recalled, "The graduate committee, they do organized talks and bowling nights and stuff like that. [So I related to] the people in my classes, I think. Some of the professors and the support staff." Eduard's academic department building was a focal place for developing relationships with other students, faculty, and staff.

In a similar way, John's (Italy, 32, male, 3 years in the U.S.) narrative indicated that the campus office he shared with other graduate research assistants allowed them to socialize while working on their own projects. John reported,

> The good thing is, as you can see, I share [my office] with a lot of other people, and we are all friends, and, and everyone here is busy. […] Every once in a while, around noon, we have a chat. And all the people working here are friends, and I like this about this place.

John reported being able to form relationships with his coworkers and classmates through sharing office space with them. Likewise, Jun (China, 29, female, 2 years in the U.S.) indicated her academic department building was a place that facilitated her communication with colleagues both on a professional and personal level. For example,

Jun said,

> I like the talk that happens in my lab, either with my advisor or […] my lab mate about research. And sometimes, people, they want to talk about, [or] they need some help with, like, their research, and they go to our lab and talk with us. […] I like to communicate with people because […] most of my ideas in my research came from talk[ing] with advisor or lab mates.

On a more personal level, Jun also reflected on the interest her advisors and colleagues took on her well-being and talks they had about life. Specifically, Jun admired her colleagues' willingness to work hard but also have fun, like the time "my advisor brought his puppies to the lab when we have lab meeting. And that was fun." She referred to the relationships she developed with her advisors and labmates, the exchange of ideas for research, and everyone's willingness to help and work together. Jun's lab facilitated personal and professional interactions with other people in her department.

Similarly, places in Lucia's (Colombia, 24, female, 2 years in U.S.) narrative were places that facilitated social interaction. Lucia said, "I […] like hanging with international students. Even though we come from different parts of […] the world, it seems like you fit with each other. Plus, at the [student union building], you see a lot of international students for some reason." The main student center is also a place where international students hold events. For example, Lucia remembered, "I go there and do salsa sometimes. Yeah. They had […] salsa classes, like once each semester, and then they have this big salsa ball every semester as well." In addition, Lucia described a nearby area of shops, boutiques, and restaurants as an important place where international students hold events and functions. She recalled,

> When I first came here, they do a very good job holding, like, international students getting to know each other, parties and events. That orientations and parties, so pretty much they all, they have them […] in some sort of place there. So, yeah, I did meet a lot of people there.

The relationships she developed with both places were important because of the relationships with people that Lucia established there.

Manu (India, 28, male, 2 years in the U.S.) cited the student union building as a place where he met other international students through attending events hosted by student organizations. For example, he reported,

> They have this small party where everyone goes there and a bit of dance, a bit of introduction, and just having food, and, uh, coming back. That's the basic thing. And during that process, you also have some games, so, uh, and, uh, the previous year students, they associate with the current students, all of them.

Manu also remembered celebrating India's day of independence at the student union building:

> [The 15th of August] is India's Independence Day. And on 14th of August, we had a small celebration. […] And that [was] the first time I was able to interact with students from India […]. I got a chance to talk to all of them and celebrate the Independence Day of India in America. […] It's a very beautiful place and a very good center for students to interact socially.

Thus, Manu developed a strong relationship to the student union building because it was where he met other students from India and developed long-lasting friendships.

Overall, international students valued places within the university campus because of

the myriad of opportunities they provided to meet people and establish a social support system.

Places related to leisure activities. Participants in this study indicated places where they spend their free time have facilitated their developing and strengthening of interpersonal relationships. For example, Ajay (India, 26, male, 2 years in the U.S.) mentioned a special relationship with a local restaurant because of the good times he spent with his significant other. He described,

> "We go [to this restaurant] a lot, me and my significant other, so it definitely has a, uh, a warm memory or a good memory to it. Uh, no, every time we go there, we talk, we have discussion, we have memories. We seat [in the same area] a lot and often joke about that. I feel like that's a representation of a happy relationship.

Ajay perceived this restaurant as a place that facilitated developing a deeper connection with the significant other in his life.

In a similar way, Cheng (China, 24, male, 2 years in the U.S.) expressed a connection to the place where he earned his master's degree in a neighboring state largely because his girlfriend still lives there. Cheng refers to this town as his "third hometown," citing Beijing and Shanghai as his first and second hometowns, respectively. Cheng said he drove to visit his girlfriend about once a month and stated,

> When you cross the border, it feels like, "Oh, I'm coming home." And whenever I see the border, that means I still need to drive one more hour to finish this journey. […] My girlfriend is living [there] right now, and she is studying there. Yeah, so more like home, right? It's really good. I can see my girlfriend. I can

see my friends there.

Although he visits this place during his free time, it is important because of the relationship he maintains with his girlfriend. It is noteworthy that in spite of the busy life Cheng has as a doctoral student, he makes it his goal to visit his girlfriend as frequently as he can.

On the other hand, Lan's (China, 29, female, 6 years in the U.S.) ballet school is meaningful because she has built relationships with the people she met in this place. She said, "I got to know a lot of people in my dance class, and they're very nice, they're very helpful. And sometimes after rehearsal, we hang out with each other, go out eat. […] I really like them." Lan also met a professor from a different educational field, and she referred to her as a mentor who has provided advice about difficult situations. Lan said,

> So I would ask her, "so suppose I'm in this situation. What would you suggest?" I sometimes ask her, "How do you balance your life?" Sometimes, we meet outside school and meet for lunch, and we just talk about our lives, science, and dancing or something. It's really helpful. I really like it. Yeah. It's like [having] a mentor outside my department.

Lan had difficulty building relationships in her academic department, but she found a social network outside the department in her dance school. Lan was able to build strong emotional bonds to her dance school in part due to the interpersonal relationships she cultivated in this place.

In a similar way, Priya (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) reported she participated in a program to tutor children at the university library. She described her

participation in this program:

> I worked in Community After School Program for three years. Uh, for CASP, we usually tutor kids after school, and we go there because parents don't pick up their kids until 5:30 or 6:00, so we'd go there from 4:00 to 5:00, help them with their homework, and try to give them a broader perspective about life.

She reported enjoying spending time with kids and referred to her time with them as one of "mutual learning." Priya said, "I have always found the innocence of kids very amazing. Children are so innocent, and they bring you down to earth, and […] they make you smile." Priya referred to helping children broaden their cultural horizons, and in turn, these kids taught her about American traditions. In addition, Priya expressed children inspire her to

> keep learning, just like them. And sometimes the questions are so amazing. So the curiosity or the boldness, the innocence is something about this place. […] And with children, the innocence always makes me want to be like them, so it helped me keep my, uh, personality, you see?

The university library facilitated Priya's interaction with the children she tutored, which in turn provided inspiration and motivation to move forward with her life. In general, international students in this study indicated that places where they spend their leisure time are important in facilitating their developing friendships and social support networks.

Places in nature. Participants in this study indicated places in nature served as backdrops to their meeting new people and strengthening social relationships. For instance, a lake has become a place where Cheng (China, 24, male, 2 years in the U.S.)

was able to reaffirm the relationships he had with other students from his department. Cheng described his interactions by stating,

> Every time I go [to the lake], I go with some of my friends in the [academic] department. And we'll go there together, so that's a really good way to make a good relationship with them. Nothing special, just is a good way to communicate with your friends because when we are in our department, most of the time we only talk about our research. So we go [to the lake], and it's a totally different environment. We can talk about something else. Yeah. We talk about life, you know, we talk about, about their girlfriends and my girlfriend.

Based on Cheng's narrative, spending time at the lake lets him and his friends share their experiences and plans for the future, which facilitates building deeper relationships.

In a similar way, Maria (Philippines, 18, female, 5 years in the U.S.) expressed having many fun memories from visiting a lake located two hours away from her home. She recounted, "We camp most of the time, but sometimes, we just go there for the day and, like, swim and lay in the sun. I guess […] it's fun and it's something to do in the summer when it's hot. [It is] fun." Maria specifically recalled one incident:

> Like one time, we brought our dog with us, and she wasn't trained. She was like a few months old at that time, and she wasn't trained yet, so she was swimming with us in the lake, and she had a little accident, and she pooped in the water, and so everybody was like, "Oh, my god, whose dog is that?" And we were, like, so embarrassed. My dad's just like, "Leave her alone," because she's still doing her deed, and so my dad got, like, a bag. And every […] mom in that

> area, the kids were swimming, they're like, "Let's just get out of here," and so we basically cleared the entire lake because of our dog.

In addition, visiting the lake also facilitated interaction with other Filipino families, as Maria reported,

> I mean, yeah, it's like since we [didn't] know that [many] people yet at that time, […] it's kind of a like a form to invite more people because like, even in Filipino families […], it's hard to, like, branch out if you're new. In the form of, like, let's invite them here, so we can, like, bond.

Maria recognized her home as a place where she felt a part of her family and the lake they visited as a place to have fun with her family while also socializing with other Filipino families. Therefore, the interpersonal relationships she developed in those places significantly influenced the bonds Maria built with them.

Manu (India, 28, male, 2 years in the U.S.) recalled meeting good friends when he attended his first party at a local park. He said,

> We have this festival in India, which is known as Diwali, and it's a festival of colors; it's a harvest festival mostly. […] So we had the celebration here, at [the] park. So […] many people came there, all of us played with colors, powdered colors. Uh, so we started playing, and then when the colors got exhausted, the previous night we had a lot of rain, and there was hail and all those, so we, we started throwing each, all of us in mud puddles. So, so that was a very nice experience. That gave me an opportunity to interact with more with, uh, some international crowd.

In general, Manu had strong bonds to the place that fostered development of meaningful interpersonal relationships in his life. Overall, whether natural places were the backdrop for a party, a family vacation, or simply a way to relax, they offered space for international students to take a break from their academic and work lives to enjoy themselves and meeting people, ultimately leading to forming long-lasting friendships.

Places of residence. In general, the kinds of relationships international students developed and strengthened in their places of residence tended to be more intimate in nature. Whether they shared their home with their significant other or roommates, many international students in this study described that places where they lived played a significant role in facilitating these relationships. For example, Anastasiya (Bulgaria, 27, female, 8 years in the U.S.) mentioned two places where she cultivated important relationships with people in her life: her boyfriend's mother's home and the apartment that she shared with her boyfriend. She reported being very close to her boyfriend's mom and stated that they spent a lot of time at her home. Anastasiya described their relationship by stating,

> We help her with things around the house. […] I think we always come up with some little fun things to do on occasions like this, but especially Christmas. Just the whole atmosphere is really nice. I felt like I have a second family here.

She referred to the fun, happy memories she had of Christmas the previous year and recalled,

> I didn't even have such a wonderful Christmas back home with my parents. We had really good food. And, I mean, in the evening, we went, and there's a nearby park, and we slid down the hill with whatever we could find, like sleighs, and

plastic bags.

Anastasiya summed up her experience at her boyfriend's mother's home this way: "I'm definitely happier [there]." The second place she mentioned was the apartment she shared with her boyfriend, which she believed contributed to strengthening her relationship with him. Anastasiya stated, "[My boyfriend] and I have lived together and strengthened our relationship [in this apartment], so… I guess […] every day feels special." In general, Anastasiya's experience indicates she built strong bonds to both her boyfriend's mother's home and the apartment she shares with her boyfriend because of the strengthening of relationships that occurred in both places.

Similarly, a strong emotional connection to her apartment on campus was evident in Hui's (China, 29, female, 2 years in the U.S.) narrative. Specifically, Hui referred to the importance of sharing her apartment with her husband. She indicated,

> I live with my […] husband. We are new family. Yeah, I perceive the love. I perceive the warmth from that place. […] I told my husband that even though this apartment is not very beautiful, it's small, not like what we expected before, but both of us think that it […] will be the best place in our lives.

Even though Hui expressed awareness of her apartment being small, she valued this place because it was the first home she shared with her husband. She felt a strong connection to her apartment because it facilitated the strengthening of her marriage. Similarly, Maria's (Philippines, 18, female, 5 years in the U.S.) home was a very important place in her life and deeply connected with her family. Maria stated she attended the local university but continued to live with her family in the same home they bought upon arriving in the U.S. Maria talked about her home and her family and

stated,

> [When I think about home, I] just [think about] my family in general. [I moved to California], and I didn't like it, so I came back and just, like, lived at home. Like, I don't even dorm right now, I, like, live with my family. So… My family [is very important].

It is evident Maria's family played a significant role in her strong attachment to the home where she has lived since arriving in the U.S.

Mei (China, 23, female, 1 year in the U.S.) developed social relationships with her roommates and neighbors in the apartment complex where she lives. She said, "All of us know it's hard for us to live in a foreign country, so we needed to […] forgive each other more, so now the relationship in our apartment is okay now." Mei added she was thankful for the kindness of her neighbors and shared, "When I was first here, I know nobody here. I don't have a car; it's hard for me to go to Walmart. Our neighbors are really good to us. They supply rides to us to buy things […] in Walmart." Mei expressed feeling strong bonds to her apartment largely because of the relationships she has developed with her roommates and her neighbors.

In a similar way, Svitlana (Latvia, 21, female, 2 years in the U.S.) said many of her friends live in the same apartment complex and stated,

> There have been many parties, like, very social events, like quality time. Like, it's not like watching, nothing like watching movies, I wouldn't say that. It's more about, like, getting together, playing games, you know, Uno game, for instance, it's, it's so much fun, just like talking about life with other people, you know, sharing experiences, um, which is great. […] Sometimes, my apartment's

> very social, so people just come, and they bring their friends, so that's also the point where I meet other people.

Svitlana also referred to the diversity of friendships she cultivates, including many international students from other countries and Americans. Thus, Svitlana has developed strong bonds to places where she has social support and where she interacts and develops interpersonal relationships.

Places of worship. International students' narratives described the importance of places of worship in facilitating development of social connections. For instance, being a member of a local Christian church allowed Kim (Malaysia, 20, female, 2 years in the U.S.) to form a social network in the local community. She recalled,

> The first few weeks when I got here, my brother had to go to some conference or camp, I don't remember, but he had to leave for, like, the weekend. So, like, I was staying with people, like, some elders from the church, so I lived at their house for the weekend. It was fun. They're really nice.

Kim also said she was confident her church family would always be there for her: "I feel welcome, and it's like no matter how my week has been, […] but going into this church, I know that no matter what happens, like, they're there for me." Although Kim had her brother already established in the community, she was also appreciative of her church because the people in the church have become her social network.

Relatedly, Priya (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) referred to the Hindu temple as a place that allowed her to interact with other people from India. She reported,

> Indian people come there, and then we, like, meet and socialize. […]Oh, it's just

> Indian people. [We talk about], "What's happening in your life? What's your visa status? What's your study status? What are you going to do next?" […] And it has effect of being together, because, uh, right now, I'm living with three roommates from three different countries.

She reported enjoying the sense of familiarity and socializing in her native language. Priya also valued the relationships she established with other people because she learned from their challenges and became inspired by their successes. She expressed,

> So that's one of the good things that we look forward: Food and free food. […] Like, older people, they come to us, and they ask like, "Hey, how are you doing?" Like, you know, you seen somebody, or they give you advice. You know, because they want you to be in the same culture and everything, yes.

Priya has established strong bonds to the Hindu temple because she has developed meaningful and positive social interactions that enriched her life as an international student.

In the same way, Sakura (Japan, 27, female, 8 years in the U.S.) developed good relationships with the members of a Buddhist temple in the community. She said, "They used to come to pick me up every [week]; it took like 2 hours one way. And then, uh, they took me for the meetings and activities." Sakura also recalled she became more familiar with the American culture because some members of the Buddhist temple were American. She recalled, "But, you know, even in the Buddhist, uh, group, there are Americans as well. […] Then I think I started learning how real Americans are. I have some Buddhist members here, and they always support me." Sakura reported she began feeling connected to the local community when she started forming strong relationships

with other Buddhists from her temple. She said, "So we have stronger connections. […] But after I went to [this city] and experienced more in relationships with people, I felt living [here] is comfortable." Sakura also shared,

> And then there is a married older couple, uh, wife is Japanese, and the husband is American, and they treat me like their daughter. So… Yes, so it's not hard for me to live here compared with other international students because I don't think I am alone, so I think I'm fortunate that I have a family here.

Based on her narrative, Sakura felt connected to the Buddhist temple, where she developed positive, long-lasting relationships with people. The meaningful interpersonal interaction she experienced served as the catalyst to develop strong emotional attachments to the places where those interactions took place.

International students in this study benefited from having places where they could develop meaningful social relationships. Whether they became close with advisors, other international students, their academic peers, individuals sharing their faith, or their significant others, these places provided fertile ground for them to derive a sense of belonging and satisfaction. Therefore, these places are pivotal in facilitating the adjustment of international students to life in a foreign country, as international students benefit significantly from establishing a social support base in the foreign country (Chow & Healy, 1997).

Places of safety. The international students in this study referred to specific places that made them feel grounded and purposeful while providing a sense of safety and comfort. Specific types of places identified in their narrative included (1) places of residence and (2) places within the university.

Places of residence. Many of the international students interviewed regarded their homes as havens of privacy and safety. For instance, Eduard (Netherlands, 29, male, 1 year in the U.S.) cited his house as a place that feels as a part of him. He reflected,

> I sleep and work on my homework and, uh, have my stuff [at my house]. And it's home. Um, and basically, everything I own that is in the States is there, so… It's, it's become, it was a house, and it's a home, so it's part of, part of me, I guess, or us, [me and my fiancée].

Eduard referred to the features distinguishing his home from just a house:

> You buy stuff that it's yours or yours and your partner['s] and put in the house instead of it being full of stuff that is not… yours, especially with paintings and pictures and stuff like that. I think that changed it a lot. Yeah. But also the feeling you have with the house, I guess. You know, it's, the blanket you bought because you liked it, the picture you're in, um, with Christmas or whatever.

Eduard referred to his home as a safe haven, a home base he can always return to whenever he explores other places.

In Juan's narrative, he referred to his room as being a place is a part of him, and described the feelings he experiences in his room as

> knowing there is something that makes me complete. Um… fullness, you know, uh… Be whatever is going on. So it's really, um… like, I really feel like the place is somehow part of me, so I take care of it, kind of the place is a reflection, I think it's a reflection of how I'm doing sometimes.

He talked about how much his room reflected his own mood because "if things are going good, like, the place looks very nice. But if I'm busy or if I have no time, then it looks kind of, you know, like it's not taken care of." Juan also talked about appreciating having a room of his own, which he was not able to have back in Colombia. Regarding the features that he likes about his room, he said, "I like to see my bed. It's like, 'Ah, finally, my own bed.' […] I think in some sense, and it's not totally, but in some sense, it makes me feel like I have a home." Juan perceived his room as a part of him, a place that reflects him, that contains everything he owns and finds important in his daily living.

Maria (Philippines, 18, female, 5 years in the U.S.) experienced the family home as a part of herself. Maria said,

> My house? […]. It's home. So at the end of the day, it's like that's where you want to be. And it's like the first thing that we, it's like our own. You know? Um, it's, it's our house and […] a lot of things about living in that house too, so it's like, I guess it would be part, like, [a] significant part of my life, too.

Maria referred to her home as a source of stability and normalcy to her life. She reported,

> It's like [having a house was] the first thing that's, like, kind of went back to normal [when we moved to the U.S.]. But when, when we got a house, it's like everything's going back to normal, you know? […] It's like, yeah, it's like the first, like, normal thing after all, like, the changes.

Maria's home is a part of her sense of self but also a source of stability and strength. Her home was the place where she was able to feel grounded after the changes resulting

from moving her family of five from the Philippines to the United States.

Places within the university. Some of the students interviewed experienced a sense of safety and belonging at the university campus. For example, Manu (India, 28, male, 2 years in the U.S.) expressed having a special bond to his academic department building and to the university in general. He expressed, "[This building] is a second home, actually, to me. So, uh, that's why I define myself with this place more. […]. I associate myself a lot with these buildings, these labs." Manu planned to graduate the next year and recalled, "I was walking this morning, so it's, uh, for me a nostalgic feeling to leave [the university]." Manu expressed the feeling that the university was a part of him and stated, "I would say, uh, since most of my life has been at [my academic department building] while I've been at [the university], so, uh, my experience[s] at [this place] are always the ones that I [will] carry […] whenever I go." Although Manu was aware of his impending relocation upon graduation, he reflected on his carrying this place and its experiences with him wherever he goes.

Similarly, Priya (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) emphasized the university was a part of herself, a special place that has special meaning for her. She said,

> This place has special meaning for me for many reasons. [It] is very versatile. And tolerant, the policies about [the university], like, especially about LGBT, [and] sexual harassment policies. They talk so openly about it, and it makes me feel like, uh, equality and justice and tolerance.

The university was where Priya learned about tolerance, choices, and the idea of valuing and protecting vulnerable populations, and these ideas will stay with her long

after she has left the university. Overall, participants indicated deriving a sense of safety and security from certain places in their lives.

Places of exclusion. International students' narratives suggest the existence of places where they do not belong socially, emotionally, or culturally. Although each participant defined different events within a place as the sources of unpleasant emotions, it was relatively more salient for students who were currently experiencing conflict, distress, or changes in these places. The types of places where international students in this study experienced exclusion included (1) places within the university, (2) places related to leisure activities, and (3) places of residence.

Places within the university. International students expressed that different situations and places led to a feeling of not belonging or exclusion. For example, Juan experienced his office in the academic department as a place of exclusion because he interacted with people who did not respect his boundaries. He reported,

> I get to interact with a lot of people during the day. So you can accumulate things, you can accumulate like, "Oh, I'm tired, or it's frustrating, or it's irritating." […] If I'm interacting with people, I don't want to be, like, rude, or I don't want to […] show my impatience sometimes.

Juan reported a sense of alienation in this place due to his inability to express and reaffirm his boundaries. Similarly, Priya (India, 26, female, 5 years in the U.S.) experienced certain places within the university campus as disrespectful of her cultural heritage. She reported,

> I put a dot on my head, you see, and I have done that 25 years of my life. So if somebody says, "Don't do it tomorrow morning," I cannot because if I go out, I

> feel like I'm incomplete. […] You know, and somebody on campus was like, "You should not do that. It's against Christianity […]." And I felt offended. […] Yeah, that's the only [negative] thing […] I have experienced […], like people straight away say, "Oh, you're not Christian. You're going to Hell."

Priya remembered feeling offended, hurt, and disappointed by some people's intolerance as displayed within the university campus.

On the other hand, Rajesh's (Bangladesh, 31, male, 5 years in the U.S.) negative experiences have rendered the university as a place of exclusion due to difficulties with his research, academic mentors, and international student services. He described his family background by stating,

> My family is a very well established family in Bangladesh. My uncle's a reputed businessman. My mom and dad, they own millions and millions of dollars of properties. […] They don't even know what kind of life I'm living here. If I tell them, they'll say, "Drop your PhD. Come back to our country."

Because he has broken the family tradition, Rajesh has not shared with them the challenges and setbacks he confronted at the university, which caused much guilt and anguish for him. Rajesh referred to the building where his academic department is located as a place that makes him think of perceived failures; for example, he lost his advisor after the first year of his doctoral studies and then failed at installing equipment to conduct research experiments. He reported that because of this failure, the university discontinued use of this machine, and he found himself without an advisor and without data to complete his research. He stated, "[In this place, I feel] unsuccessfulness. Loss

of dreams. Yeah." For Rajesh, the building housing his academic department is intimately linked to his lack of success and feelings of failure.

Places related to leisure activities. International students also experienced exclusion in places where they spend their free time. For instance, Kim (Malaysia, 20, female, 2 years in the U.S.) felt excluded by the local mall because American retailers do not carry clothes that fit her style. Kim reported feeling disappointed with the poor selection of clothing at the mall and lamented,

> It's really hard for me to get stuff here. I feel like clothes here, everything, it's not me. I, usually, my style can be found in, like, boutiques and [shops near campus] and stuff like that but not in, like, the mall. I don't know, their clothing style is just not me. So it's really, really different. And it's more expensive if you want to get like pretty stuff here, I guess.

Kim compared the local mall to the shopping malls back in Malaysia and appeared unimpressed with the poor selections and availability of clothing that fits her style.

Places of residence. Some participants felt excluded from fulfilling expected roles at home or from social interactions with roommates. For example, Rajesh's (Bangladesh, 31, male, 5 years in the U.S.) experience is one marked by challenges, failures, unmet expectations, and loss of hope. As an international student, Rajesh only has a modest stipend as a graduate assistant, which does not afford him many things. Rajesh's experience at home is one that serves as a reminder of his responsibilities as a husband and provider. He reported,

> I see my home as a place [of] responsibility because I'm not in the age of having some romance or something like that all the time. I'm married for the last 6

> years, still don't have any kids. I don't have any kids just because I don't have any money and I cannot run a family like this. [My wife] wanted to have a baby; I said no. I don't have money. I cannot raise a baby now. [My wife is] more than 31 now. And she has failed [in her duty].

Rajesh's home brings to his mind the frustration of not having the economic resources necessary to fulfill the role of provider. Likewise, Lan's (China, 29, female, 6 years in the U.S.) apartment was a place where she felt excluded by her roommates. Lan reported,

> I was using my office for everything. I only went home to sleep. And did everything else in my office. […] I really think where you live is a really important place. Um, anyways, I didn't have very much luck with my roommates so far. […] I want to move out. But sometimes, it depends on my financial [situation] because it's really cheap to live there with other people. And I don't have a car, so I would want to live close to the campus.

Lan referred to the negative interactions with her roommates being the cause of her experiencing frustration.

The negative case. Discussion of negative cases within qualitative research elucidates instances where certain findings do not fit with the general thematic experiences described by participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The lived experiences narrated by one of the participants in this study did not identify many relationships to places compared with the narratives of the other participants. Rajesh's narrative described few relationships to places, and he described these relationships as tenuous sources of relief from the intense anxiety and stress he

experienced. For example, Rajesh referred to his home as the only place where he finds "hope;" however, his home was also the place that reminded him that he had not fulfilled the expectations he had for his role as the main provider of the family. Rajesh referred to a mosque as a place where he found solace by seeking spiritual guidance, yet after speaking to an elder in the mosque, he reported,

> He's saying that God said in the Qur'an that I never gave any kind of lord, which is more than what my creation can be. So I was thinking that, that am I destined to carry this load? Whenever I go there, I think it's the last hope for me. I try, I try to believe on God and, and karma, and something like that. I was thinking, asking to God, what's your plan? You said committing suicide is bad. What else is in my life? All I can [do is] just pray for us.

Although he denied active thoughts or plans for committing suicide, that Rajesh mentioned it in his statement was indicative of the level of distress he experienced. Moreover, he described mainly negative relationships with places within the university, including his academic department and his office as a graduate assistant. The lack of relationships to places within the university suggests that he is unhappy with being at the university, which, based on his narrative, is true, as his advisor left and took with him the knowledge and expertise he had hoped to get at the university. In addition, his scores on the Scales of Psychological Well-Being were the lowest of all participants in this study, suggesting that he was in fact experiencing psychological distress. Rajesh's narrative indicated a sense of alienation from places within the university, which is likely to have a detrimental impact on his well-being since graduate students spend much time at the university attending classes or working on research projects. In other

words, Rajesh is likely to experience alienation every day he is at the university. Previous research found a similar negative case where students with a lack of relationships and attachments to places within the university also experienced psychological distress (Terrazas-Carrillo, Hong, & Pace, in press).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Results from exploration of international students' lived experiences indicated places fulfilled a crucial role in the process of adjustment to living in another country. International students' narratives referred to the importance of having different types of places that met a variety of needs in their lives. The findings from this study fit with the philosophical ideas proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), as international students derived satisfaction from having a combination of "smooth" and "striated" places. In other words, they perceived themselves as more adjusted when they had a combination of places where they felt secure, where structures and routines provided a predictable experience, but also had places that were fluid, where new experiences and challenges could lead to identity development and establishing connections.

The phenomenological thematic analysis of the international students' lived experiences revealed these students benefited from having places of opportunity, places of restoration, places of sociality, and places of safety but also encountered negative experiences within places of exclusion. The themes from this phenomenological study were congruent with the framework developed by Sampson and Gifford (2010) and denoted the role of places satisfying basic human needs that become even more salient and crucial in the context of resettlement to another country. Although Sampson and Gifford developed their framework to understand the role of places among refugees (permanent immigrants, often involuntarily relocated), their model is useful in conceptualizing the role of places among international students (temporary immigrants, voluntarily relocated) because it points out the significance of having a variety of places to fulfill basic human needs. Results from this study also indicate potentially

unexplored roles of places in the adjustment process, as the students in this study referred to the negative impact of places of exclusion on their lives. Findings from this study suggest that international students who were able to meet their needs for growth, affirmation, restoration, and security through the places that they inhabit perceived themselves as less stressed by the acculturation process and reported higher levels of well-being, as shown by their answers to the Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory and the Scales of Psychological Well-Being. Results from this study also indicate that the process of adjusting to new places involves a careful balance of places that challenge the individual and safe places to renew, make friends, and feel safe from conflict.

International students' experiences indicated that places where challenges are confronted are also opportunities to learn and develop new skills. International students referred to places where they had to adapt, try out new identities, new roles, and new ideas. Their learning experiences were varied, as were the skills developed, and they took place in many types of places, including the university, places where they engaged in leisure activities, their work places, and even their places of residence. This finding is congruent with research on adjustment to college among international and domestic students (e.g., Braxton et al., 2000; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Evans et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2000; McClure, 2007; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), as the literature emphasized the importance of flexibility and adaptation in the process of growth and development. Moreover, having places of opportunity also facilitated developing a sense of mastery and self-efficacy, which is a crucial factor in facilitating international students' adjustment to university (Moores & Papadiuk, 2011). In addition, once the students

develop these skills and acquire a sense of mastery, these places serve as a reminder of their ability to adapt, learn, and use the same skill set to solve other problems or overcome other challenges. Thus, places of opportunity are crucial in facilitating growth, adaptability, and confidence among international students. This finding is noteworthy in the context of research indicating that international students who are able to learn from challenges are more likely to remain enrolled in college (Greer & Hinchcliff-Pelias, 2004; Ozturgut, 2013)

International students in this study also indicated the importance of having places of restoration in their life. The students described experiencing peace, renewal, energy, and pleasure in a variety of places, including natural landscapes, places of leisure activities, places within the university, or places of worship. A major aspect of life for international students in higher education is confronting challenges related to acculturation, academics, research, work, and relationships. However, results from this research indicate that an important part of adjustment to a new place is finding places to replenish their ability to cope with everyday demands and challenges. The act of visiting restorative places promotes health and well-being and enhances an individual's ability to engage in problem-solving and meet everyday demands. In fact, researchers have found evidence that natural places promote restoration by allowing individuals to reduce attentional and control needs (Kaplan, 1995). Whether international students delighted in the beauty of nature, a sunset, privacy in their home, admiring architectural features, performing a favorite activity, or visiting their place of worship, these students derived significant well-being from restorative places. This finding is congruent with the available literature regarding the positive impact of restorative places on individual

well-being (Abraham & Sommerhalder, 2010; Gessler, 1996; Gifford, 2014; Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Korpela & Ylen, 2007; Korpela et al., 2008).

Findings from this study also suggest that international students benefit from having places of sociality where they can cultivate and nurture social relationships. In the context of challenges and opportunities, international students need the stress-buffering effect of social interaction. Belonging is a basic human need, and these students indicated that a sense of belonging in certain places significantly enhanced their well-being. This finding is consistent with research on retention of both domestic and international students, as it is documented that development of social networks and engagement in interpersonal relationships is a predictor of adjustment and well-being (Arkoudis et al., 2012; Chow & Healy, 2008; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Ozturgut, 2013). Many places within the university were conducive to social interactions, including their academic departments, their work places, and common student areas like the student center. In addition, places where international students engaged in leisure activities based on personal interests and hobbies played an important role in fostering social interactions outside the university. Places of worship were also prominent places of sociality for international students because they allowed the students to meet people of similar religious, spiritual, and cultural backgrounds while also nurturing their spiritual needs. In the context of a predominantly Christian American Midwestern community, students professing diverse religious preferences (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) significantly benefited from social interaction with people who shared their faith and culture. This research is also congruent with previous findings on the literature documenting the positive impact of places conducive to social interactions on

overall well-being (Abraham & Sommerhalder, 2010; Cicognani et al., 2008; Evans, 2003; Frumkin, 2003; Gifford, 2014; McCoy, 2002; Milligan & Wiles, 2010; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010; Warner et al., 2013).

Results from this research indicate that international students need places where they can experience safety and protection from the outside world. These places of safety provided both physical and emotional boundaries for international students and fostered a sense of security and privacy. The two types of places that fulfilled this function for international students in this study were their homes and the university. When they were at home, these students were able to be themselves, in a place where objects have personal meaning, a base to anchor their search for growth and opportunity. For some students, being at home meant being safe with their family; for others, it represented a time to be by themselves. The literature has documented the importance of having places of safety and security on overall well-being (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Dovey, 1985; Kron, 1983) as well as the negative impact of invasions to this personal space (Writz & Harrell, 1987). Places of safety provide a sense of affirmation and continuity, which creates a balance in the context of the intense challenges and changes international students experience in many areas of their life while adjusting to life in a foreign country.

However, students also experienced places in a negative light, as at times they felt excluded from social interaction, in violation of accepted cultural and social practices, and unable to participate in the professional and personal development that other international students derived from places of opportunity. Places of exclusion

have potentially harmful effects on international students' well-being, and their existence and impact should be assessed and remedied. Sampson and Gifford (2010) found that some refugee youth perceived certain places as exclusionary or conducive to conflict. The international students experiencing certain places as exclusionary reported lower well-being and higher acculturation stress based on responses to the SPWB and RASI. Therefore, when international students experience a particular environment as a place of exclusion, they are potentially less likely to feel they belong, thus increasing their acculturative stress levels and decreasing the chances that they will persist in their education.

The results from this study suggest that international students derive significant benefits from establishing relationships to places in the community. This process is referred to in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1987):

> What interests us in striation and smoothing are precisely the passages and combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. […] But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries (p. 500).

Most of the international students in this study formed relationships with places that fulfilled a specific purpose in their life, including places where they attended to their academic studies, places where they worked, places where they engaged in leisure activities, places in nature, and places of worship. For most students, relationships to places encompassed overlapping functions; for instance, their place of worship was a

source of restoration through engaging in spiritual experiences but also provided opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships. Thus, it is likely that students with strong relationships to different places in the host country are better adjusted to life. Research on person-place relationships has shown that individuals with strong relationships to places and communities are more likely to experience greater psychological well-being and access to greater social capital (Lewicka, 2011; Theodori, 2001).

Moreover, almost every international student who was interviewed mentioned a strong relationship with a place within the university campus. They developed strong bonds to their academic department and their campus workplaces and appreciated the architecture and natural spaces within the campus as well as the relationships they developed within the places at the university. The university campus is at the core of international students' lives in the foreign country. The lived experiences of international students in this study indicated that the university was one of the most important places in their life. In addition, the lived experiences of international students in this study indicated that they gravitated towards forming relationships with places that fulfill the needs of the whole person, including their academic, work, and leisure activities, as well as their places of residence and places within nature. It was apparent from the students' narratives that the more places with which they had connections, the more the students felt that they fit with their host country's environment.

On the other hand, based on the negative case finding, feeling excluded from places within the university campus on a physical or emotional level may be linked to

intense psychological distress. The participant who did not indicate relationships to places within the university revealed that he was frustrated and alienated by the academic department and the lack of support that he perceived. In addition, this participant did not report having relationships to any other places in the community besides his home and his place of worship. However, he found little solace and support in those places, for he was reminded of his perceived failure as a head of the family because he did not provide enough money and was unwilling to have children due to the poor financial situation. Moreover, this participant found some support in his place of worship, but he ultimately questioned his beliefs and God's plan for him, which he also perceived as a failure. This participant's experience is indicative of the potential consequences of the lack of person-place relationships among international students. Other research has supported this finding, as individuals without bonds to places in the community where they live are more likely to experience lower levels of well-being and psychological distress (Lewicka, 2011a, 2011b; Terrazas-Carrillo et al., in press)

The results of this study suggest that universities would enhance retention of international students using a holistic approach that cares for the whole person and not just their academic achievement. Universities can enhance international student persistence by providing spaces where students can develop the kinds of person-place relationships described by the students in this study. As a first step, universities should familiarize international students with the campus and everything it has to offer. For instance, a university in Australia developed activities designed to promote first year students' familiarity with the campus and places within it through campus tours and treasure hunt activities (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001). This type of activities could be

incorporated into international student orientation events with the goal of familiarizing students with all the places and services the campus has to offer. In addition, universities should consider providing spaces conducive to social contact and development of social networks. Most of the international students in this study developed relationships with the people with whom they shared offices or with their roommates. However, some students discussed the importance of visiting places where other international students spend time, as these spaces were conducive to meeting other students, both domestic and international. Ozturgut (2013) mentioned that universities providing shared kitchen space and a lounge area in the international students' office facilitated their development of social connections. Terrazas-Carrillo and colleagues (in press) reported that international students seek places where they can reaffirm their identity within the university campus, with students reporting that they valued reflection rooms located in a university library where students of different religious faiths could engage in prayer and meditation.

Based on the results of this research, international students were able to fulfill specific needs through places outside the university, including places where they engaged in leisure activities and could be in touch with nature. Universities could coordinate outings and tours of the local community in order to provide knowledge of the local natural and leisure attractions and to foster social connections. Since most newly arrived international students do not own cars, it would be appropriate to organize outings that provide transportation for students. Moreover, universities should also consider providing information regarding places of worship for different faiths within the community and even consider providing transportation to these places of

worship for students who do not have a car. It is likely that once students develop relationships with members of their religious faith, they can make their own arrangements to visit these places of worship. In addition, universities should provide information about campus and community resources that could help international students experiencing alienation or culture shock, including the counseling center.

Chapter 6: Trustworthiness, Limitations, and Future Directions

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study was tested through establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to establish credibility, this study used member checking. Following guidelines from Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking involved contacting participants where the data were originally obtained and asked feedback about the conclusions and interpretations derived from the data. Member checking was used as a verification method for this study in which respondents were given the chance to assess adequacy of the data and the preliminary results to ensure trustworthiness. Participants were asked during the initial interview whether they would like to be contacted by the researcher in the future with the purpose of verifying interpretation of results. All 19 students agreed to being contacted by the researcher. Nineteen participants were contacted, and six responded they were willing to provide verification. A summary of the thematic analysis and interpretation of their interview were provided, and they were asked to provide feedback and return it to the researcher. Five participants returned the summaries with comments and feedback for the researcher. All the participants agreed with the researcher's interpretation of the data and results, and some participants added comments to the data emphasizing or deemphasizing certain conclusions and interpretations.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended thick description as a method of establishing transferability. Specifically, thick description is described as a way to promote transferability by describing the phenomenon in sufficient detail so that the researcher can evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to

other settings, groups of people, or situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to provide detailed information on each of the participants' lived experiences, textural and structural descriptions for each participant are included in Appendix D. In addition, recruiting international students from different nationalities increased transferability of the study, as a phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experience of a group of individuals. Nineteen international students from 11 countries (India, China, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Italy, Colombia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Japan, and Latvia) were recruited and interviewed. Therefore, better understanding of being an international student and forming new relationships to places was gained by including international students of different cultures.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended the use of an external auditor in order to assess dependability and enhance trustworthiness. This study established inter-coding agreement by asking three faculty members of the dissertation committee to review the study's transcripts, codes, and themes. A discussion with each one of the faculty members followed, and feedback was sought regarding the structural and textural description as well as their combination to create an invariant description. As a result, important feedback was gathered to develop methodologically sound findings. Confirmability was established by analyzing the negative or deviant cases (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2001). This method involved searching for elements of the data that did not support or contradicted patterns or explanations that appeared during the data analysis phase. A thorough refinement of the analysis can be achieved when a study accounts for the negative cases. A discussion of the negative case was included in this research in order to enhance confirmability. In addition, using

scaled measures of well-being and acculturative stress provided further information regarding the participants' overall sense of adjustment and well-being. The information gathered through their profiles of well-being and acculturative stress provided a context in which to interpret and validate international students' narratives, thus enhancing overall trustworthiness and confirmability.

Limitations of the Present Study

One of the main limitations of the study is that it assessed international students' relationships to places using a cross-sectional approach. This study assessed international students' perceptions at only a given point in time. Therefore, it is possible that students' perceptions and interpretations of relationships to places adapt and change over time. In addition, the study's results were predicated on the assumption that international students of all nationalities were a group of people with unique shared experiences. It is possible that international students' experiences as a group may not necessarily represent the experiences of students of specific nationalities. On the other hand, while these common lived experiences may be a part of the life of all international students, students from specific nationalities may have additional experiences not shared with all international students. Although every effort was made to enhance transferability of results, it is possible that the results of this research do not represent the whole spectrum of international students' relationships to places. Despite these limitations, this research enhances understanding of international students' experiences in the U.S. as well as how developing relationships to places affects adjustment to the host country.

Conclusions and Future Directions

In general, results from this study suggested that relationships to places matter for international students. The lived experiences of international students in this study indicated that they derived significant benefits from establishing relationships to places, including a sense of belonging, reaffirmation of their identity and values, and a sense of connectedness with the host country. Establishing these connections to places likely results in more international students persisting in their education abroad, thereby reducing dropout rates. As the university campus is one of the most important places in international students' lives, universities should make efforts to provide spaces conducive to forming connections to the campus. Although most students in this study indicated experiencing at least one challenge within the university, they were able to gain perspective and learn from these experiences. Therefore, they saw these places as a reminder of their ability to confront and overcome challenges.

In addition, relationships to different types of places matter for international students. Results from this study indicate that they seek out places that meet the needs of the whole person, not just academic or work-related places. International students' lived experiences showed they sought out places in nature, places for leisure activities, and places of worship in addition to places where they received academic and research training. Therefore, universities should consider providing international students with information, tours, and activities in the community surrounding the campus in order to foster connections with all types of places. It is likely that the more places to which an international student is connected, the more likely he or she will be to remain in college.

Future directions for this research should explore the stability of international students' connections to places over time. Perhaps using a longitudinal approach will yield more knowledge about the nature of developing connections to places in a foreign country. In addition, future research could involve exploring whether international students from specific nationalities identify the same types of places and relationships found in this study. It is possible that restricting the group of participants to one nationality will provide specific information about the process of adjusting and connecting with new places. Future studies of international students' relationships to places should also consider the impact of the international student's culture of origin, as it is possible that students from collectivistic and individualistic societies may derive different meanings from place-person connections. Other factors that could further enlighten international students' connections to places are the role of personality, personal and aesthetic values, and spiritual or religious values. Moreover, future research on international students' relationships to places would benefit from developing quantitative measures to test hypotheses based on the qualitative data obtained from students' lived experiences. Therefore, specific relationships and potential mediators and moderators of these relationships can be tested and validated.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for time and willingness to participate. As you know, I am interested in understanding the role of physical spaces and their meanings in the process of adapting to a new culture. Particularly, I am trying to explore whether certain types of relationships to places could be protective factors against issues of adjustment among international students. The questions are general and abstract; you may volunteer any detail you wish. Also, depending on your answer, I may ask probing questions. You also have the option of declining to answer – passing on – any of the questions. Do you have any questions before we start?

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Country of origin/nationality_____
2. Native Language_____
3. Years attending the University of Oklahoma_____
4. Current classification: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Master's Doctoral Other_____
5. Years living in the US_____
6. What was your most recent TOEFL score? _____
7. Can you rate your English proficiency?

   Poor Average Advanced

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Interview Questions

- Can you name 3 places in the state of Oklahoma that you best identify with or feel more linked to?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- Let's talk about (Place #1).
  - Can you describe your relationship to this place?
  - What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with this place stand out for you?
  - How did this place affect you? What changes do you associate with this place?
  - What feelings were generated by the experience of this place?
  - What thoughts stood out for you?
  - What bodily changes or states were you aware of while in this place?
  - Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your experience of this place?
  - If this place was a person, what would this person look like?
  - What impact has had on your adjustment to life in Oklahoma?

- Let's talk about (Place #2). Can you describe your relationship to this place? What impact has it had on your adjustment to life in Oklahoma?
  - Can you describe your relationship to this place?
  - What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with this place stand out for you?
  - How did this place affect you? What changes do you associate with this place?
  - What feelings were generated by the experience of this place?
  - What thoughts stood out for you?
  - What bodily changes or states were you aware of while in this place?
  - Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your experience of this place?
  - If this place was a person, what would this person look like?
  - What impact has had on your adjustment to life in Oklahoma?

- Let's talk about (Place #3). Can you describe your relationship to this place? What impact has had on your adjustment to life in Oklahoma?

- Can you describe your relationship to this place?
- What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with this place stand out for you?
- How did this place affect you? What changes do you associate with this place?
- What feelings were generated by the experience of this place?
- What thoughts stood out for you?
- What bodily changes or states were you aware of while in this place?
- Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your experience of this place?
- If this place was a person, what would this person look like?
- What impact has had on your adjustment to life in Oklahoma?

Closing

Now that we are done, do you have any questions you'd like to ask me about this research project? If you want to contact me later, here is my contact information (Will provide follow-up contact information sheet). Also, I may need to contact you later for additional questions or clarification. Can I also have your follow-up contact information?

Appendix B: Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory

Sometimes negotiating more than one cultural orientation or identity can be difficult. How is it for you? Below are some statements that may or may not describe your own experience. Please, for each statement circle the appropriate number. You may fill in the blank spaces with your nationality.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Not sure	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. Because of my _____background, I have to work harder than most Americans.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel the pressure that what "I" do will be seen as representative of _____people's abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
3. In looking for a job, I sometimes feel that my _____ background is a limitation.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It's hard for me to perform well at work because of my English skills.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I often feel misunderstood or limited in daily situations because of my English skills.	1	2	3	4	5
6. It bothers me that I have an accent (in English).	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have had disagreements with other _____(e.g., friends or family) for liking American customs or ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have had disagreements with Americans for liking _____customs or ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel that my particular cultural practices (_____ or American) have caused conflict in my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have been treated rudely or unfairly because of my _____ background.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I have felt discriminated against by Americans because of my _____background.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel that people very often interpret my behavior based on their stereotypes of what _____ are like.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C: Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB)

	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
1. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. The demands of everyday life often get me down.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing and growth.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. I like most aspects of my personality.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.	1	2	3	4	5	6

14. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. I gave up trying to make a big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix D: Structural and Textural Descriptions

Ajay

Structural Description

The structures underlying Ajay's relationships to places in the community where he attends college are expressed in the thoughts and feelings regarding Ajay's observation of differences between his home country's natural environment and the environment in the community where he now lives. Ajay's relationships to new places in the foreign country where he lives are also linked to his feelings of strengthening the relationship with his significant other, places that fit with his perception of a preferred lifestyle, the feelings of familiarity and convenience of places around him, the history and tradition of the building that houses his academic department, as well as his perception of places where he encountered academic and personal challenges. Ajay also expresses his appreciation for having a place to recharge and regroup from the stress that is generated by attending graduate school in a foreign country.

For Ajay, realizing the difference between rural Midwestern U.S. and his hometown in densely populated India provides a refreshing view of nature and the environment that was not available before. Ajay's experience of having "a lot of space" seems juxtaposed to his experience of having very little personal space back home in India. He also admires the cleanliness and serenity of observing nature on his way to work or class. Ajay's appreciation of the clean, open space is perhaps a result of his life in a crowded, polluted city.

Ajay mentioned a special relationship with a local restaurant and referred to this place as being a representation of his lifestyle in the U.S. Although his lifestyle is different in the US –back in India he was a working professional – Ajay expresses his happiness and enjoyment of life as a student and what he can afford on a student's budget. He referred to this restaurant as a fine dining experience yet still affordable for a graduate student. This place seems to represent Ajay's ability to adjust his lifestyle in the U.S., where he may be less affluent but still able to enjoy dining out and making memories that will last a lifetime.

All the places mentioned by Ajay shared in common their feeling of familiarity, or being a part of his everyday life. For instance, the duck pond is a feature of campus that is on his everyday walk or bus ride to school. The restaurant him and his girlfriend enjoy going to is so familiar that he feels confident of ordering anything on the menu and still be satisfied with his meal. This restaurant is such an integral part of Ajay's life in this community that he referred to his probably feeling nostalgic when he leaves town.

Ajay's narrative also referred to the building that houses his academic department and to the pride he feels in honoring tradition. He recounted a story passed down by other students in these departments regarding an organization that had an

intense rivalry with the law students in the university. Ajay proudly relayed his department's honoring of this tradition every year with the symbolic firing of a cannon.

Ajay referred to the challenges he encountered as a first year graduate student in the U.S. He did not feel connected to the department because he did not have an office there. Similarly, Ajay expressed his feeling lost about finding an advisor and finding the area of research he would pursue during his graduate studies. There is a sense of insecurity and uncertainty about his academic and professional development triggered by his thinking about the building housing his academic department.

In spite of encountering challenges in his academic development, Ajay also recalled his ability to connect with the department once he had an office in the building housing his department. He referred to his developing more confidence and even becoming involved in positions of leadership representing the graduate students of his department. Ajay also experienced more focus and more concentration when he is in this building, alluding to his office presenting less distractions compared to his apartment.

Two places Ajay mentioned also allow him to relax, recharge, and regroup. For instance, he described "feeling goose bumps" whenever he is at the duck pond. His experience of this place is welcoming, and leading to serenity, peace, calmness, and happiness through solitude in this place. In fact, he likened this place to the image of Galadriel, the mythical elf in the Lord of the Rings books. Additionally, Ajay expressed a feeling of satisfaction whenever he enjoys a meal at his favorite restaurant. He referred to his feeling relaxed after eating out, and enjoying a break from his weekly routine by going to this restaurant.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Place different from home environment helps appreciate qualities of the new environment.

"I feel [the duck pond] is a very defining feature of the campus. Um, I um, I used to walk a lot. I currently commute to the campus on a bike, but before that I used to either walk or I used to take the bus. So it's always um, good to go through there, see the ducks. I felt closer and closer to nature. There are places similar to that probably outside the city [back home in India]. I find this a welcome change and I really enjoy it here. The population is pretty high [back home] um, but in a public setting, um, because the nature of the country you have a lot of people, so in terms of personal space, it's definitely less back home and I really like the fact that, the fact that compared to the place that I come from is much cleaner […]. Um, because the country is so clean and I can definitely see that you get to enjoy nature andd um, there's a lot of space. And um, that pond is an embodiment of that fact because it is very clean and um, cleaner than back where I come from. It definitely makes me […] have a feeling of appreciation of all that is, um, there on offer here. I would say that, you know, that, that is a change. Um, so certainly, it has definitely has an effect or impact on me. It's just that you react differently to different situations and in a different location you have a

different outlook."

Theme 2: Strengthening relationship with significant other

"We go [to this restaurant] a lot me and my significant other. So when I went there um, I think it was with my girlfriend. There have been a couple of occasions where I've gone with a close friend or my significant other to this place and enjoyed the experience together, probably because some of the very first times we went out together. Um, so, um, so it definitely has a, uh a warm memory or a good memory to it. Uh, no, every time we go there we talk, we have discussion, we have memories. We seat [in the same area] a lot and often joke about that. I feel like that's a representation of a happy relationship or a happy lifestyle or… so. It represents [a] change [because] I didn't have the same girl, I mean I didn't have a girl back home, so that way things are different."

Theme 3: Place fits with lifestyle

"Um, I think this is more of a personal thing, […] it's just that it is, it's a representation of my lifestyle here [in the U.S.]. I mean, I would say that I have healthy lifestyle here, and a happy one, and um, and then that whenever we want to go out, whenever we go there,
I feel [going to this restaurant] is a representation of a happy lifestyle. My lifestyle is definitely different than what it was back home because back home I was a professional, whereas now I am a student here. Um, and I really enjoy the life of the student and that's why I came back to college. Um, so the, I mean it's different. But I think it's also the same, I'm the same person. [Going to this restaurant] has definitely become a part of my lifestyle here in [this town]. Yes, I would say it definitely fits into [my lifestyle]. [This restaurant] is the kind of place that is not too expensive, um, and at the same time it is slightly fine dining, um, so…Um, I think that yeah, it definitely helped me just adjust to lifestyle here."

Theme 4: Places are familiar, convenient, part of my everyday life

"[Whether I walk or take the bus] my path would take me either along the duck pond or through the duck pond, across the duck pond. I see that it is such a regular [aspect of] every day or almost every day. I would say that um, it definitely feels like a part of my life."

"[Me and my girlfriend] go [to this restaurant] there quite often. So, that we go there often and um, and then I'm confident of what they have to eat there, so I know that even if I order something I know that I am going to like it. So, and familiarity, I mean like you know, you are confident about the place. Certainly I've grown more familiar with that place, grown more familiar with [this town]. So when I, probably when I move somewhere else, then when I think about [this town] then I will think, oh, all those times when we went to [this restaurant]."

"[My office is] probably my second home if you go by the number of hours that I spend there. And um, um, in that sense I really… because I spend a lot of time there too, so I

maybe like, um, maybe get a snack from the vending machine or get a drink of water, like I spend a lot of time there, go to classes, do a lot of different things there. I mean it's good that I like it since I spend a lot of time there."

Theme 5: Proud of history and tradition of this place

"One thing is the character of the [academic department] building, it's old and it has a lot of character to it; it has a story to tell. It has housed a lot of various things, a lot of different organizations um, because I know this place is really old, this building. And [there are] a lot of stories to tell about that building. For instance, um, there's this organization called LKOD, which was the first chapter it was usually housed in the building. [One famous story] basically I think, the law students and the mechanical engineering students had a fall out and they also started this rivalry between the college of engineering and the college of law and what have you. And the students in the college of engineering, um, one night decided to go to the college of law and they stole a cannon. They stole a cannon and so every year they symbolically fire a cannon some time during February um, as a representation, as symbolic of these feat. So, I mean this thing is so ancient, so tradition, and like, there's a lot of character to it, I think. Um, and, I don't know, it could be that I am biased because I belong to the department but I do like the, the feeling that I have in the department. Um, I could say that I feel, I feel a lot of pride."

Theme 6: Place reminds me of challenges I encountered when I first arrived in the U.S.

"Um, the first, probably the first 7 to 8 months, um, I did not have an office there. I was new, and I was still searching for my advisor. I mean, I hadn't decided on an advisor and um, uh, so even though I belonged to the department I didn't feel a part of it. Um, I spent a lot of time there but I don't know, I didn't have an office, um, I didn't have an advisor there, I didn't know exactly what research I was going to be doing, um, so, so definitely wasn't sure. [Now] I um, I serve in a leadership capacity in one of the organizations for graduate students in the department."

Theme 7: In this place I grew academically and professionally

"My department [is] probably my second home, um, I have an office there as a graduate student and I spend a lot of time there doing research. Um, I got funding as a research assistant um, I'm also a teaching assistant. Once I had an office I felt more connected to the place, more in tune with it, and um, and definitely contributed to my research because once I had the office space I could spend like, I would say spending more time with the department, more engaged in getting things done. Um, it has helped me grow; it's also helped me contribute a lot to the department.

It definitely gave me more confidence, um, whenever I go to the department I feel like work, feel like working more, which is not the case when I go home; there are more distractions. So it definitely has significant impact on me. Yeah, it feels like, you know, there's a lot of… it's a place of scholarly um, knowledge, so… So when I go to the

department I feel like I want to do something I can actually do it. Um, like I said, um, when I, when I reach the department I feel more like doing work than I would say in my apartment or anywhere else, so, it feels more scholarly and academic, when I am in the department."

Theme 8: This is a place that lets me recharge and regroup

"I really like the duck pond, and you know, really listen to peaceful feeling uh, so I really enjoyed that time. I find this a welcome change and I really enjoy it here. I mean it's a lot of solitude for me; I seldom walk with anyone or um, um, go with anyone to the duck pond. I guess it's more of a personal feeling, an expression of my own interest of my own, um, feelings. [There is] serenity, um, a peaceful feeling, a calmness, happiness, warmth, if you want some solitude, you get that as well. I guess unless it's raining, but it's nice. Um, I know there is some extreme happiness or, or, yeah, or energy, or the happiness, I get goose bumps when I go there. [I feel] probably like calm and serene."

"I thought that it was a restaurant that just, it was very unique to this place, um, but it is [a franchise]. I eat the food there I like the ambiance, [and I feel] probably, like, satisfaction. I mean, I don't know. Because you know that you are going to have your stomach full or something. Uhh, probably I'm more relaxed, um… I mean generally you are relaxed when you are eating I guess, I mean especially if you are going out to eat. Uh, certainly I enjoy going there, I mean, you know."

Anastasiya

Structural Description

Anastasiya's relationships to places have a definite connection with people and interpersonal relationships. A major theme on her narrative refers to her relationship with her significant other and the roles and responsibilities she has assumed when she decided to live with him. She also describes the importance of feeling like she has a second home and a second family through her boyfriend's mother and his siblings, while also admiring the grace and kindness her boyfriend's mother shows to others. For Anastasiya, visiting the nearby Wichita Mountains is both a way to relax and release stress, and a link to her native country which is surrounded by mountains.

Anastasiya was able to observe the grace and kindness her boyfriend's mother displays towards others in her life, even towards those who may not deserve such nice treatment. In this place, Anastasiya is able to observe this woman keeping her composure and never being mean or scream at others. She admires her boyfriend's mother's tolerance and understanding towards others.

Anastasiya expressed his assuming of new life roles when moving in with her boyfriend. She relayed her enjoyment of performing quotidian tasks because in her

view these house chores like cooking and cleaning are a way to convey her love for her boyfriend. Anastasiya also referred to her becoming more responsible once they moved into this apartment, as she is in charge of paying bills and going to the store to get groceries. She also indicated this tiny apartment she shares with her boyfriend is more meaningful than any other place she has lived in.

For Anastasiya, visiting nearby Wichita Mountains is a way to de-stress and relax. She describes her experience of hiking these mountains as a way of breaking with her weekly routine and also be in touch with nature, as most of her days are spent indoors in fairly developed environments. Anastasiya finds nature to be relaxing and calming to her senses and her thoughts. She referred to the feelings of positivity and energy she experiences upon coming back after a weekend at the Mountains. Anastasiya stated she even sleeps better and is able to concentrate on her homework and assignments better after taking a break in this natural environment.

Anastasiya identified two places she feels connected to in the U.S. that bring fond memories of her growing up in her native country. For instance, she referred to her native country as being surrounded by mountains and relays her identifying with the particular area surrounding the community where he attends college as important because they remind her of home. Another element of nostalgia came up when she talked about visiting her boyfriend's home and spending time with his mother. She recalled Christmas time at his boyfriend's home, when they listened to Christmas carols and decorated a tree just like she did with her parents back home.

Textural Description

Theme 1: In this place I observe people who are my role models

"And, uh, [my boyfriend's mother] is very, um, very good. So yeah. Um, and [being at my boyfriend's home] has definitely changed me, because especially [my boyfriend's] mother, she's really giving and she's very good in, in forgiving. And a really nice person and I've never seen her scream at anyone ever. Or be mean or anything. Not to ever be, get mad at people or scream or be negative. [My boyfriend's mother is] kind, yes and, and tolerant and she always, uh, you know, tries to understand the other person and never gets mad."

Theme 2: In this place I embraced new lifestyle roles

"I have become, so to speak, a housewife, in this place. Because I love cleaning it, uh, and I love cooking in it. I never really liked doing that before, but I know it's like I'm in charge of my house. Because before I lived in a dorm or with many other people, so I never felt like, this is, you know, my place. But now I love doing, cleaning for Luke. Yes, because especially this past year, I had to, I guess, I became more responsible and more, um, responsible in the sense that in the sense that I'm trying to always meet deadlines, So I have to pay the rent, all the bills, so I'm always like trying to do this on time. And I'm, you know, going to the store and stuff. I feel like yeah, it had made me a

little bit more responsible, even though it sounds a little strange. But it has. I think because it's like, you know, I really like the place and, yeah, I really just my, even though I've lived in like 10 places so far since undergrad. And even as a grad first year of grad school, um, this place I identify with the most.

Theme 3: This place lets me physically and mentally relax and recharge

"Yeah, I like to go [to the Wichita Mountains], um, when I'm stressed. I go [to the Wichita Mountains] with friends or just to relax, to hike. My boyfriend, um, him and I go there really often. I need to be amongst nature. I feel good there; it affects me in a very positive way. I can go there. And be somewhere where it's a place that with no development. I'm just calmer. I like, I mean, just [have] calmer thoughts, you know, I'll kind of get rid of my stress. Yes. Usually when I come back home, I can, I sleep better […] because you know, because of exercise and good air. Um I guess I, yeah, I guess I become, um, more actually I become more able to study. It kind of clears my mind, you know, so it's... [It] positively [impacts me] just because you're, um, in a natural place. I just like the fact that you can just hike [at the Wichita Mountains]. Uh, that, um...how has it impacted my life? Hm, I know that, um, except when it's really hot I can always go there, and we like camping. Just, just, maybe you're doing something different."

Theme 4: This place makes me feel nostalgic about my home (country)

"[The Wichita Mountains] remind me of the mountains back home […] because back home, that's how the mountains are. So definitely I love [this state] for these places."

"At [boyfriend's mother's home] there's Christmas music, I don't know, there's a huge tree that we decorate. So back home we also had a decorated tree, it's so important."

Theme 5: This place is mine, a part of me

"And I love like organizing [my apartment], the stuff. I'm usually studying and I can sit down and do my work, which is right now writing my thesis. Yeah, it's just, it focuses me, really, I like it. I can make myself tea and coffee at any time. Yeah, yeah, just basically the couch in the living room's where I do my work. Well, yeah. It's, um...I mean, actually, I know I can just relax because it's home."

Theme 6: The physical features of this place are attractive to me

"Um, it's such a, such a small [apartment], it's like all wood and there's a huge deck and such a nice kind of tucked away [place]. I really like this place […]and I'm very sorry that we're, we have to leave at the end of May."

Theme 7: In this place I found a second family (home away from home)

"So this is, you know, we live [in our apartment] and [my boyfriend's mother's house]. And we help her with things around the house. Um, but that wasn't the main thing. I

think, it was just a, um, we were all together, and that's what, I mean, we always come up with some little fun things to do on occasions like this, but especially Christmas. Just the whole atmosphere is really nice.
Hm, I felt like I have a second family here. Actually [feel like we have] family values. [My boyfriend's mother] cooks, you know, for us, and with us. Yeah, for instance, this Christmas and Christmas two years ago, it was really, it was some of the most Christmas I've had, I didn't even have such a wonderful Christmas back home with my parents. We had really good food. And I mean, in the evening, we went and, um, there's a nearby park and we slid down the hill with whatever we could find, like, sleighs, and plastic bags. Hm...I'm definitely happier [at my boyfriend's mother's house].
Sometimes, uh, on Sunday, we drink a little too much wine. I mean, we had parties with our friends. For instance last year for my birthday, 25th of April we had such a wonderful party. Everyone had so much fun. Again, I haven't had such a fun great day, for instance."

Theme 8: In this place I strengthened my relationship with my significant other

"This [apartment] is where we've been living for the last two years, two academic years. And that's where, you know, [my boyfriend] and I have lived together and strengthened our relationship, so...I guess just [my boyfriend] and just every day feels special. I was, I was not going to stay, uh, before I met [him]. But I wasn't sure if I really wanted to do it. I could have refused it, because on the first semester date couldn't provide funding. So I decided to [stay in the U.S] just because of [him]."

"At my boyfriend's house, that's where his mother is, lives [I understood why] her sons are so nice, especially my boyfriend, who is not his son, he's the son of some other person who left her.
But, you know, he, I'm understanding him more when I look at her and you know, how the family relations works."

Cheng

Structural Description

Cheng's narrative regarding relationships to places were mostly related to the challenges he overcame and the personal growth he achieved in these places. His experience of places is also intimately related to people in his life, including his girlfriend and friends, as well as the role of places in providing peace and relaxation from his busy graduate student life. For Cheng there is a special place for enjoying clean natural environments in the United States, as he grew up in a densely populated, extremely polluted metropolis in China.

Cheng expressed his feeling of belonging to his department at his university by describing his colleagues' friendly attitude towards him. He also expressed a connection to the place where he earned his master's degree in Texas. Cheng refers to this town in Texas as his "third hometown," citing Beijing and Shanghai as his first and second hometowns respectively.

Cheng was unsure of whether he would be admitted to a doctoral program in the US. However, he was interviewed by the doctoral program in business at the university and granted admission. Cheng refers to his admission to this program as life changing and describes it was like joining a family. Although he was unsure of his language skills and his ability to connect with American students, Cheng was able to make friends with non-international students and learn from those experiences. He observed closely their relational style as well as the skills they used to conduct research.

Lake Thunderbird has become a place where Cheng is able to reaffirm the relationships he has with other students from his department. While they interact at the department and their offices, Cheng describes relaxing at the Lake as a way to have a more personal interaction and not just talk about their research. Spending time at the Lake lets them share their own personal lives including significant others and their own plans for the future. Another place where Cheng feels connected to is Texas because his girlfriend lives there and he visits as frequently as he can.

Cheng specifically connected with the metropolitan area of Dallas/Forth Worth Texas while he was earning his master's degree because of the abundance of places to go and activities to do. Cheng referred to his being unable to find authentic Chinese food in Oklahoma, but stated he is able to find fine Chinese restaurants in this metropolitan area in Texas. He also referred to his enjoyment of nightlife activities, including going to bars and good restaurants, which for Cheng are a quotidian aspect of life in Beijing and Shanghai where he lived almost all his life. Cheng referred to visiting karaoke bars, bars where they play board games, and being able to find good food at any time of the day, even the wee hours of the morning. He complained about restaurants and bars closing too early in Texas and Oklahoma, but also talked about his enjoyment of night life when he visits his hometown in China.

The life of the graduate student is stressful and full of obligations and deadlines. However, Cheng has found an oasis from everyday stresses by going to the Lake Thunderbird on the weekends and spending time at his office on campus. He refers to his feeling comfortable and peacefully relaxed at the Lake, even experiencing happiness and ease while he is there. In his office, Cheng becomes hyperfocused and full of energy. He experiences his workplace as a warm, caring environment that inspires confidence in his ability to complete tasks and research projects.

Cheng values the nature and wildlife in America because it is unlike the landscape he experienced back home in China. Cheng lived in two densely populated cities in China: Beijing and Shanghai. These metropolises provided limited access to nature and vegetation. Moreover, Cheng referred to the effect of pollution on nature in his country. He described the stark contrast between his country and the U.S. in terms of cleanliness by referring to his seeing truly blue skies for the first time upon arriving to the US. Cheng finds joy in absorbing nature, especially when he goes to Thunderbird Lake and described the happiness experienced when the wind touches his face and he is able to take in the sunshine.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Feeling of belonging

"Yeah, because they make me feel, in the department, that that's where I belong."

"Uh, it's because I lived in Texas for 2 years, and that's my, it's the… mmm when I came to the States for the first time I went to Texas. Um, Texas is like my third hometown because my first hometown is my real hometown in Beijing and I lived in Beijing for 18 years. Yeah. I went to Shanghai for my undergraduate study and I stayed in Shanghai for 4 years so that's my second hometown and then I went to Texas. So I stayed there and it is like my hometown in the United States. So, you know, when you cross the border it feels like 'Oh, I'm coming home.' And whenever I see the border that means I still need to drive one more hour to finish this journey."

Theme 2: Place facilitated personal growth through confronting challenges

"Um, [this university] changed my life. [This university] accepted me and [gave] me [an] onsite interview opportunity. Yeah, so it changed me. Because when I applied for PhD student, at the time I was also looking for jobs, yeah. Uh, everyone I met, 12 professors and 3 PhD students there and they were really nice and just make me feel like they are big family, and they would take care of each other. […] In the last one year any time when I [had] met any problems I could just go and ask either professor or students there. They [were] glad to help me, yeah. Because they are in the department. And […] I [could] get into the program because of them, because of their help. Yeah, it changed my life."

"Um, it makes me um… can't say that… It teaches me how to communicate with Americans because you know, our finance department all our professors are Americans. In the one year [my office mates], we understand each other and we talk a lot with each other. Yeah, it's really cool too. Um, it's really good, and really easy to make [friends] with some Americans. Yeah, I belong here, this is the right place I should come. Yeah. Um, they changed my way to get along with Americans. It teaches me how to, mmm, lots of aspects, it teaches me how to do my research, it teaches me how to do relationships with friends, so."

"And um, at the time [I graduated with my master's] I was interested in doing research but I'm like my uh, my GRE, or GMAT… GRE score was really low. It was not, I'm not it would be possible to get into PhD program, but I applied. Or I'd be… maybe I'd gone to the job market then, to try to find a job. […] But for a master student with a major in finance would be difficult. Especially because I am a foreigner. It's extremely difficult to find a job. Yeah, so, maybe if I can't find a job maybe I have to go back home."

"At the beginning [of my doctoral program] I was afraid that maybe I could not um,

keep a good relationship with [my office mate]. Afraid that because my English skills, I cannot express myself well. Oh, no, I mean, before um, I uh in my first couple of years one or two years in America I feel that because I just, um, because my English was very poor at the time and um, it's hard um, to express yourself and it's hard to make a conversation with American guys. So in this situation they would not continue the conversations and they'd go away. Because of that I didn't make really good friends with them. But now it's better. I feel that, um, um, if there's nothing to do in your life you feel uncomfortable."

Theme 3: Place facilitates social interactions

"Because every time I go [to Lake Thunderbird] I will go with some of my friends in the finance department. And we'll go there together, so that's a really good way to make a good relationship with them. Nothing special just is a good way to communicate with your friends, because, um, when we are in our department, most of the time we only talk about our research. So we go [to the lake] and it's a totally different environment we can talk about something else. Yeah. We talk about life, you know, we talk about, about their girlfriends and my girlfriend."

"My friends […] and my professors [in Texas]. And also because my girlfriend is living in Texas right now. And she is studying there. Yeah, so, more like home, right? Whoa, mmm it's really good. I can see my girlfriend, I can see my friends there."

Theme 4: Place fits with my lifestyle

"So, I really like this kind of life you know, the sky is blue."

"Texas is really interesting, has more, has more, um, how do you say? Oklahoma is kind of boring. [In]Texas there are a lot of fun places to go. Um, lots of good places. For instance, bars, and then ummm restaurants. Here [in Oklahoma] we don't have Chinese restaurants. […] Like maybe I stay here for one month but if I want […] Chinese food I can't find a place to go. In Texas, they have […] lots of good restaurants. Good Chinese restaurants, Mexican, and um, American restaurants. Oh yeah! Bars, yeah. And um, night life. Actually in Texas there's not a lot of night life. Yeah, you know, because [there's a] big difference between [night life in] China and America. I love night life. Well, um, in China, uh, life is good at night. It… like after 10 or 11 o'clock people go to sleep here. In China this is my life: I go to have dinner with my friends at like 6,7, or 8 o'clock. You have dinner and then after dinner we can go skating or we can go to the um, karaoke, um, yeah. I like karaoke. Yeah! [karaoke is] really, really fancy [in China]. And um, also we have board game bar [and] it's very popular in China, yeah, you can ask lots of good friends to go there. And we play into midnight; you can play until like 6 o'clock in the morning. And also [at] midnight or 2 or 3 o'clock you feel hungry just go out. All the restaurants are open and they have very, very delicious snacks. Here [in Oklahoma] is totally impossible. People go back home after 8 o'clock! And after 9 or 10 all the restaurants are closed. […] Every

summer and winter during the summer and winter break I'll come back home and enjoy that life."

Theme 5: Being in this place generates positive feelings and positive state of mind

"[Going to Thunderbird Lake] is a really good way for, um, relaxing. You know, as a PhD student study pressure is really, we are really under pressure so it's a really good way to relax myself. [This place] just make[s] me feel comfortable. Yeah, it's really relaxing, […] Comfortable. Yeah. Like it makes me feel happy. Yeah, happy. Makes my life easier. […] Mm, as I said, there's a time in my life, I can't study everything, right? So, in the weekend if the weather is good I go there. So that's kind of how it helps. [After I go to the lake] I feel better, I feel much better."

"[Having an office in my department building] gives me confidence. But here, you know, every day when I come here I am full of energy and I have lots of things to do, like, yeah. So it makes me feel good. Yeah, [it is a] caring and welcoming [place]; [it] make[s] my boring life more colorful."

Theme 6: Being in this place lets me appreciate nature

"Yeah, [being able to go to a lake], that's really special in America, because in China we don't have a lot of opportunities to get in touch with the nature. I live in Beijing and it's my hometown so you know, there's really more of a city. And um, we are having heavy air pollution there. So, I really like this kind of life [in the U.S.] you know, the sky is blue. Before I came to the States I never thought the sky was blue. It should be blue but I never saw this before. Because you know, [in this Midwestern town] it is totally different. I like going, I like going to Thunderbird Lake for fishing, or maybe in the future for hunting. That way we can, you can feel the nature, and the environment is really, really good, it's so much different here than my hometown. Because you just seat on the bank of the lake and you can spend, you can spend a whole afternoon there and there's some wind in your face and you feel really good.
There's sunshine, yeah. It's like my um, future life. In the future I want this kind of life. I want to be a professor and um, I have my spare time in the, like in the summer, in the weekend or every day after I finish my class I can come. I hope I have a house outside the Lake. I would like to stay in America when I graduate."

Eduard

Structural Description

Eduard's narrative of relationships to places seems to be one related to both having an established and safe home base, but also having the freedom to explore and become a part of the new place of residence. Eduard seemed attracted by the differences between his native country and the local community both in terms of the landscape and the people. However, he seems to enjoy the process of learning about

another place as long as he is able to have a sense of freedom to wander and a place to call home. Eduard's narrative of relationships to places have the following underlying thematic structures: places aesthetically pleasing, place that allows freedom, place that allows social interaction, place that allows him to acquire perspective about problems, the satisfaction of knowing multiple ways to get to a place, the comparison to people and places back home, the strong opinions people from this place hold, the different geographical features of the place compared to his home country, places similar to those of his home country, places that feel like a part of him, places that presented challenges, and places that feel familiar and are part of his routine.

Eduard considered the university campus an aesthetically pleasing structure. He referred to the smart layout that allows people to walk around and he even reported enjoying seeing the "busyness" of people walking through campus. Eduard also appreciated the modern classrooms, which are equipped with state-of-the-art technology.

One of Eduard's hobbies is to drive and ride his motorcycle. He referred to feeling free every time he drives around and cherishes that freedom and versatility. The academic department building where Eduard takes classes is a place that allows him to engage in social interaction. He reported he started to see the same people in his classes and found himself staying around this building more often, getting involved with graduate student organization events and even attending "bowling nights" to interact with other graduate students and professors. Eduard also talked about the home he shares with his fiancée and his enjoying meeting his neighbors because he believes local residents really know the best places to eat and shop.

One of Eduard's favorite places are the roads in Oklahoma. Not only does he feel free while driving around the countryside, but also he reported being able to "zone out" and being able to reframe his approach to current projects or even find new solutions to projects he is "stuck on." Eduard also said he values the time alone with his thoughts while he drives his car or rides his motorcycle.

Eduard believes that one way to make a place your home is to know multiple ways to get places. He observed the state had many roads and often more than 20 ways to arrive at a place. In his view, knowing the roads, knowing the towns and the names of the streets is a way to feel at home in this country. Reflecting on his experiences living in the Netherlands, Eduard stated people are always rushed and trying to get to places fast. He compared this to his observations of people in Oklahoma: people take their time to get places.

Eduard also reflected on the strong attitudes of the people in the state, openly acknowledging Dutch culture is more liberal than Oklahomans. He seemed surprised that people in the state had such strong opinions about issues that to him seem outdated or unimportant. Eduard also compared and contrasted the geographical features of the Oklahoma community with those of his native country, the Netherlands. The differences are that the local landscape has more grass, with huge cattle ranches and

farms. These features are in stark comparison to the forests and mountains of his native country, alluding to the small size of his country compared to the state of Oklahoma.

However, in spite of the differences, Eduard also noted certain similarities between his home country and the local community surrounding the university. Eduard acknowledged that there were many farms in the Netherlands, along with many roads and places that give it a feeling of freedom. Eduard cited his house as a place that feels it is a part of him. He reflected on his house being his "home," a place he shares with his fiancée and a place that both have made their own through decorating it with paintings, pictures, and memories that reflect their life and experience. Eduard referred to his home as a safe haven, a home base he can always return to whenever he explores the neighborhood or even neighboring towns and places.

Eduard referred to the department building as a place where he had to adjust to being a student. He reported he had worked for several years for a Norwegian company, and coming back to school presented a challenge. Eduard referred to the academic program as challenging, but positive experience. He referred to the experience of entering the building and immediately switching his state of mind to one of learning, going to classes, and being on time.

Two places felt familiar and part of Eduard's routine: his home and his academic department building. He reported spending many hours of his day in this building going to class, completing homework assignments, and meeting with his team if there are teamwork assignments. He also reported completing homework at home, and spending most of his time commuting between the university and his home.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Aesthetic appreciation

"It's all about learning [when I am in my academic department building]. I like the layout [of campus], I like the busyness with people around. Like it's now, the weather and all the seating areas outside. I like the buildings. Um, it's all modern. And...Yeah. Yeah. And, and, uh, um, the classrooms. […]In Devon and in the Sarkeys they have good classrooms."

Theme 2: Place allows me to feel free

"[Driving] makes you feel free, I guess. I think it's freedom. That's the most important, feel free to go wherever you want and see things and […] that also helps make it more new and versatile."

Theme 3: Place allows social interaction

"Now it's more like kind of more people [I know] […] And […] hang out a little bit more. [I] do some more, talk with people and stuff like that. Well, [it is] basically

classes [where I meet people]. I think it's, especially classes with my own department, not so much other departments.
But, and then seeing the same people in the same, same classes. That helps. And, um, stuff like, uh, the, the graduate committee, they do organized talks. And bowling nights and stuff like that.
It's the people in my classes, I think. Some of the professors and the support staff."

"I, uh, I met a girl, uh, online. And, um, for a couple of years back and, um, at the same time, I've been investigating going back to school in Norway. [She is] my fiancée."

"[I like] meeting different people that are local, which I wouldn't do so much when I'm at home. […] And, uh, the people surrounding.. It's people, local people that know the local stuff, the local, maybe customs is not the right word, but like the...restaurants, shops."

Theme 4: I am able to reframe and get perspective in this place

"You kind of zone out when you're on the road. [You think about] projects, especially when you're coding or something, you need some time off. And that's the time where you go through your, through your code and find new solutions for stuff you're stuck on. [But I do] not always [think about coding]. Sometimes it's nice when you're not doing it to not think about it."

Theme 5: Knowing multiple ways to places makes it home

"Yeah, there's a lot of roads [in this state]. You [feel you] can go wherever you want. And there's plenty of ways to get to places. You get to know those ways. Yeah. Because there's 20 ways to go one place. […] But it's all feeling free, I think. It's not the roads itself, but getting to know the roads. I think it's when you know more ways to go, it makes you feel more at home, that you're, you have some more knowledge about the layout. Yeah. And also like knowing the street names, how are the towns and you hear everybody's always talking take this street north, and I still don't know where north is, even, even now we're here."

Theme 6: People back home do not take time to get places

"Um, in the Netherlands people are always very, um, rushed and, um, here, especially when it gets warmer, people take their time to get to places. […] Especially with the heat and, um, the way people are and I don't know, Oklahoma I see as, it's a cowboy, walk slowly, not to get too hot, and wearing your hat."

Theme 7: People in this place have strong opinions

"The Dutch are more liberal, I think, than Oklahomans are. And, um, [Oklahomans have] very, very strong opinions about politics and religion. And stuff like that. And I don't see how you can so strong opinions about something that's so old or so

unimportant to me. And, um...I think that's, yeah, must be the strong Republican thinking."

Theme 8: Place has different geographical features than my home country

"[Oklahoma] is more grassy and clay-ey. And in Holland, it's more, uh, more forests, I think. Where I'm from at least, forests […]. Just here they are huge. And it's all cattle. Maybe in Norway there's not so many roads, everything is far away. So here's it's much more compacted and closer and easier to get to. Yeah, when I worked I traveled a lot for work, going to different places, so it's, but it's much harder to go there, I think. There's a lot of mountains and fjords and lakes in Norway, which is [why it is] not so easy to build roads. And it's big. Norway is very big. And in the Netherlands, it's small. It's very, I think it's smaller than Oklahoma so everything is close and you can go by bike or bicycle, which I did back then."

Theme 11: Places similar to my home country

"Where I'm from at least, forests, but there's also a lot of farms and that's kind of similar. Just here they are huge. And it's all cattle. But home in the Netherlands, it's, it's kind of similar.
And it's kind of the same in Holland. It's much more free."

Theme 9: This place is a part of me

"I sleep and work on my homework and, uh, have my stuff [at my house]. And it's, it's home. Um, and basically everything, or not everything, everything I own that is in the States is there, so... It's, it's become, it was a house and it's a home, so it's part of, part of me, I guess, or us, [me and my fiancée]. It's, I think...Um, I think mainly when you buy stuff that it's yours or yours and your partner and put in the house instead of it being full of stuff that is not…Yours. Especially with paintings and pictures and stuff like that. I think that changed, changed it a lot. Yeah. But also the feeling you have with the house. I guess. You know, it's, the blanket you bought because you liked it, the picture you're in, um, with Christmas or whatever, yeah.Um...it feels safe to have your own place and, um, it's a happy place. So...Yeah, it's been a place to go back to when you're out and getting to know the neighborhood."

Theme 10: Place presented challenges

"You know, [my academic department's building] was a place where you go and have classes and then go home. Um, I think, um, the whole coming back to school experience… I'd been working for a couple of years and then came back, so it think changed, you know, being more open for learning and stuff. I worked as an engineer for a boiler company in Norway. And, um, so I started translating my transcripts and getting, um, writing an essay. [Getting] financial documents and saving money, of course. Um, I think the campus [is] positive. [The program is], um, challenging. But in a good way. Um, it's busy. There's a lot to do. Maybe state of mind, uh, you know, going to classes and learning, make sure you're everywhere on time."

Theme 12: Place is familiar, part of my routine

"I spend most of my time [in my academic department's building]. I […] spend a lot of time traveling […] you know, especially not living on campus. […] I'm more familiar with the building and where the stuff is at. [At the end of the day] it's travel again, because it's, uh, 35 mile drive one way every day. Yes, mainly because I spend more of my time [on the road]."

"I also spend a lot of time [at home]. I sleep and work on my homework and, uh, have my stuff there. It's just, you spend most of, not the most, but a lot of time traveling between, basically the two between OU and home."

Hui

Structural Description

The structures underlying Hui's relationships to places in the community are: a strong emotional connection to a place, the challenges confronted in the department upon her arrival to the US, the ensuing growth and development that happened in the wake of her adjustment, the opportunity to learn from mentors and role models, and the opportunities provided by the department to become involved and give back to the college.

A strong emotional connection to her apartment on campus was evident in Hui's narrative. Even though Hui was aware of the apartment being small, she values this place as it is the first home she shares with her husband. Hui expressed her delight in making this place a reflection of herself by decorating it to her own taste. Even though the campus apartment was not at all what Hui expected upon arrival to the U.S., she became connected to this place to the extent she believes this small apartment will be the best home her and her husband have shared. Additionally, Hui also expressed the sense of safety she derives from knowing that the apartment's management has always ensured every appliance and safety feature are working properly.

Hui cited the building that houses her academic department as a place where she faced challenges related to her international student status. Hui referred to only apply to this university because her husband was pursuing a doctoral degree in physics. She referred to the massive challenges she faced mainly due to the differences between the American and Chinese college education systems. For instance, Hui talked about being a master's student in China and never really having to read or critically analyze the material presented in class. She described her experience as a master's student as one of going to class and listening to lectures. Hui expressed her lacking knowledge of research and the process it entailed. Moreover, Hui also referred to cultural differences between her Chinese upbringing and the Midwestern American community where she attended school. Specifically, Hui pointed out the challenges she confronted in regards to speaking and understanding English. She recalled only understanding half of the

lecture during her first class in the department building. Hui also recalled not being able to speak up in class and overall experiencing intense anxiety about the newness of attending graduate school in America.

However, Hui's narrative also included a theme of growth and development in the same department building. She referred to her ability to learn critical thinking skills and also having practical working experience with research. Hui reflected on her desire to read and learn without feeling pushed any more. She also referred to her becoming an independent, autonomous scholar and researcher thanks to her experience at the university. Hui expressed that the building housing her academic department changed her significantly. She even referred to this place as a place that "changed my life." Hui also reflected on her improved English skills and her determination to become more actively involved in class by commenting on the material and also responding to other students' comments. Hui's narrative of growth in this place had a sense of satisfaction and mastery. She reflected on her ability to work in a research environment and take leadership roles in supporting the research team with data entry, analysis, and presentation.

In addition, Hui acknowledged the role of mentors and role models in the department that have impacted her significantly. All the professors she mentioned are housed in the same building and she talked about both their academic mentorship but also the model they provide about being able to balance family and work life. Specifically, she talked about mentors who offered her opportunities to conduct research and learn practical research skills. Hui also named instructors truly respected by their colleagues and students, as well as their academic accomplishments and research. But Hui also appreciated the strong female mentorship offered by her department.

As a result from these experiences, Hui reported feeling a need to give back and contribute to the department that had taught her so much. She voiced a desire to enjoy the life of the campus through joining cultural committees and also a graduate student organization representing her graduate department in the larger campus community. Hui also referred to the example provided by faculty sponsoring these organizations and highlighted her desire to contribute to the place that has given her many valued experiences.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Emotional Connection to place

"Yeah. And I very like [my apartment], even though it is not very, uh, looks beaut[iful] or it is not what I expected before, but it is my first apartment. It is, uh, I think it is, uh, how do you say, I don't know how to express? Warm. Yeah, uh, and, um, and I think it's beautiful. Um, and, uh, love, yeah. And because I live with my, living there with my husband. We are new family. Yeah, yeah, I perceive the love, yeah. Um...because I perceive the warmth from that place, so it's like my mom or grandma. Yeah. m...Uh, I told my, I'm remembering that I told my husband that even though this apartment is not very beautiful, it's not, it's small, uh, not like what I, what we expected before, but we,

both of, both of us think that it is the, that it will be the best place in our lives. Yeah."

"[My apartment is safe] because each, I think, each season, they will, they will come to my apartment to, uh, I don't know to check the smoke alarm and check my, check everything, if it is good and they will email me, uh, if, uh, if there is any problem in my apartment."

Theme 2: Place presented challenges

"I am [a] Master's student of this university. I only applied for this university, because my husband is the, is [a] Doctoral student in this university. That [was] our plan. So […] OU is the only university that I applied for and the only university that I get an offer, you know. So yeah. It's good, um, actually OU changed me, changes me a lot, because the American University is totally different from the Chinese University [in] China, […] because I have the, I had the opportunity to do […] real research and I have the opportunity to work [on] campus, that's the […] big difference. For example, […] when I was in China, uh, I was [a] Master's student. But I don't know anything about research. I just know, okay, research is, is kind of writing of something, just refer, refer to something, uh, that is the whole research. And all across my study, uh, learning strategies also changed a lot. […] Before I […] came to, uh, America, […] I just go to classroom and listen to the lecture. And […] I didn't read a lot. You know, I didn't read a lot, even though I was a Master's student. But here, at the beginning of my Master's program, I felt that I was pushed to read. But now, I think I automatically, I want to read. And, uh, I get totally different learning experience from […] learning in China. Yeah, because I had a Master's degree in China. It's totally different from there, from here, yeah."

"Oklahoma is different, because [of] my cultural background and my speaking, yeah, I'm not sure...I think my English speaking is not very, very good. But my speaking, you know, sometimes you can't completely, uh, speak how, what you want to say, just because of a cultural block mainly. Yeah, the culture[al] difference. And, um, I remember that […] when I took the first, first class, maybe two years ago, yeah, almost two years ago, […] I was very nervous. […] I worr[ed] about that I can't understand what the professor talked about. And I was very nervous and my husband sen[t] me to that classroom. And [he told] me okay, it is your first time. But you need to be brave. Yeah. I [was] very nervous. And then my speaking English is poorer than now, my writing, reading, speaking, all of these things are poorer than now. Yeah. And very nervous. I remember that and that it is Dr. [B's class and I] understand 50% [of the] content. Because even though, uh, before I came to this university, […] I had one year […] teaching experience in, uh, at a college. Yeah, at a college. But at, but I just work[ed] two days per week. […] Yeah, uh, just […] I didn't get a lot of, uh, working experience then. Uh, because the learning experience is different from China."

Theme 3: Place allowed personal growth and development

"Because I [have not] just […] stud[ied] abstract […] knowledge, I have […] working

experience. I have the, I think [a] fantastic learning experience […]. Okay, in, I think the big change is that […] my work experience at this university, uh, improved my working skills, especially, because I, I like research, so I want to be a Doctoral student. And because, […] I study in this university, I have the opportunity to improve my, uh, because I have worked now, uh, improve, especially [my] research skills, I changed here a lot. And all across my study, [my] learning strategies also changed a lot. […] Before I came to […] America, I just, uh, go to the classroom, I just go to classroom and listen to the lecture. But here, at the beginning of my Master's program, I felt that I was pushed to read. But now, I think I automatically, I want to read. I want to read to enrich my knowledge, yeah, because I want to be a researcher. I needed to do that. Now I am driven by myself, yeah, by my [own] goal. And by [my] future plan. Yeah, more independent. Yeah. autonomous. Yeah. I think […] it totally depends on yourself. Not the university. If you can, frankly, I can say that [this university] changed me a lot. In my heart it is the top university. Yeah, so […] it's [a] good university. And, um, it is the place that changed me a lot, really, really. Yeah."

"Sometimes I can feel some pressure, uh, from the work and from the learning, but I think the pressure is, is good for my life. Yeah. And sometimes, and I can, I think I can communicate with the native English speaker. I can understand […] what they are talking about. I can understand that. I can read without any difficult[y]. And, um, and I haven't participated [in] oral English speaking class. But I plan to [do that] this summer, yeah. Yeah. But now, now I change[d] a lot. I can understand 100%. Yeah. […] I pushed myself to speak at class. I pushed myself […] at least one time. I can […] talk with the professor after class and communicate with other students and ask questions and reply to other [students'] questions. And, uh, I think my speaking, at least my speaking improved a lot, compared to the first class. Um, at the beginning of my Master's program, I tried my best to adjust my learning habit or learning strategy to here. Um, for example, […] before each class, I needed to read a lot. Um, for example, uh, each, uh, before each class, I needed to read a lot. And, uh, I needed to ask the class, I needed to communicate with the professor or the students, uh, using the critical thinking, yeah. And, uh, I [didn't] perceive that [before], but now I perceive that. It is very hard; it is very difficult to balance your life."

"Yeah. And, um, and […] the working experience is totally new for me. […] for example, it is my first, uh, first experience to work in [center for research] office, you know. [I] give [a] hand to other people. Yeah, it is my first place [of work]. I, uh, at the beginning of my, this work, I also […] tried [to] adjust to this kind of work environment, because it is, it was new for me. But now I think I'm good at it. Yeah. I study [in this building] and I work [in this building]. And I have worked here, uh, and I like the work. And you know, at [research center], yeah. [Confronted] a lot of challenge[s], actually, yeah, that I didn't [encounter] before, yeah, and at this kind of challenge, um, learning and work[ing] improve[d] my knowledge and skills a lot. Yeah. Changed me a lot. Um, because […] learning, change me, [and] changed my learning strategies a lot. Yeah. […] Here, I […] worked for [research center] and I work for Dr. Z and I conducted the real research project. And I assisted [research center] staff to do some, uh, to, uh, input some data. And analy[ze] data and interpret data and do […] transcription[s], I did [a] transcription, yeah. It, all of the things improved my, changed

my, frankly changed my life. Because, because, because of, I studied, I study in this place, uh, this place teaches me a lot. And it gives, provides me a lot of opportunities. Um, of course why I said it is my teacher, because I learn a lot from this place. Yeah."

Theme 4: Place allowed learning from mentors and role models

"Dr. Z […] is the first person who offered the job opportunity to me. And, uh, uh, relieved my financial pressure a lot. So I very appreciate her. Because I, when I worked for, when I worked for Dr. Z, she taught me a lot about this and extend[ed] my view on the research. And even from the last semester. I have the opportunity to manage research, real research, a project, um, so I learned a lot from that. And other professors very, I think, [are] very patient and care about my study. And […] even care about my life. So I think, uh, this part, I think the, uh, so it is like female."

"The professor, uh, Dr. Z and my adviser Dr. Y, yeah, […] they taught me a lot, especially yeah, I, Dr. Z. They care about my learning and work. And, uh, even though sometimes she push[es] me a little bit, but I understand that, because yeah. But I think it has encouraged, encouraged me a little bit and now I'm different. Now I think I'm a novice researcher. Yeah, I changed from a student who just, uh, uh, giving something, get, uh, who just get something from this place, to the novice researcher. Um, of course why I said it is my teacher, because I learn a lot from this place. Yeah. Yeah. I can perceive, because I worked for, I work for Dr. Z I can, I can perceive that, she is the, how do you say? She is the strong woman. Not just physically, yeah. And Dr. X, even though I didn't take, I didn't take her class, but I heard of, uh, her a lot. Yeah. She is, uh, strict [with] everybody. Of course she is feared [by] everybody. And publish[es] a lot, yeah. And, uh, Dr. uh, like Dr. Y, is good at the, uh, quantitative research and I learned a lot from him. […] He always, […] is busy [with] research and […] I can, I feel that he balanced his life, uh, with a lot of effort."

Theme 5: Place provided involvement opportunities, chance to give back

"I have got a Master's degree in linguistics, but, um, actually I'm not, uh, I don't like that experience very much, because I just, uh, I just, uh, study at campus just, uh, […] just to participate as some, uh, not participate in many, uh, parties, or many activities held by that university. So I didn't feel that I was involved in that Chinese university."""

"I am, um, generally speaking, I've enjoy[ed] the life at this campus. I think my work[…], is especially significant to my life and, […] this semester, I participate one, uh, community, uh, sorry, I can't remember the name, a long name of this community. It's like the, […] Cultural Committee. Yeah, Dr. X is the head of that committee, I think, because every meeting, she, uh, she spoke a lot, so I think she is the head of the committee. Yeah, and, uh, I think […] I didn't contribute a lot for that community, it is a kind of service, service experience, but I didn't contribute a lot. So I decided […] to participate in another community, to, uh, have the experience that I can contribute more.

So, I, uh, I want to participate in the [graduate student organization] community. And [...] but when I work here, I think this place is like young people. Because I can perceive the energy from other people. And I can perceive the energy from them, and I can perceive that, their energy."

John

Structural Description

John's narrative of relationships to places is multifaceted and complex. These places are intricately related to his lifestyle, relationships, interests, research, and work as a graduate research assistant for the Biology department on campus. As a biologist, he enjoys places that let him connect with nature and wildlife. They seem to bring him a sense of peace and relaxation, but also remind him of the kind of life he would like to have in the future. His narrative also refers to the challenges of conducting research and the perseverance that is necessary to achieve his goal of earning a doctoral degree. At the same time, John struggles with balancing the physical and mental stress of being a graduate student but also learning to be a leader to others in his field of work.

For John, visiting places with a landscape rich in nature and wildlife is a reminder of the kind of place he wants to settle down in the future. He believes that a beautiful place is one where he can connect with nature and enjoy clear skies. John values contact with nature and expects to settle down in a place away from the city where he can ride his bike and focus on his well-being. John's favorite place is Lake Thunderbird because it represents an opportunity to disconnect from everyday life. For him, living surrounded by concrete, roads, and buildings is stressful. Thus, in order to get away from everything he rides his bike to the lake and actively attempts to connect with nature in order to let go of negative social interactions. John is working on earning a doctoral degree in biology, and the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is closely connected to the birds he studies. However, even more than his work, this place lets John enjoy what he values the most: vegetation, wildlife, and clear skies. His love of nature is such that he prefers to ride a bicycle rather than own a car so he can breathe in the sounds and sights of nature and in the process also let go of the heaviness of his day. John's connection with the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is intimately related to his research and his work as a Biology Graduate Research Assistant. During the summer time, he and a team of researchers and field assistants travel and spend many days and weeks tracking migratory birds in the heat of the summer. For John, being in this place is reminiscent of the birds he studies, but also the physical exertion that results from hauling around equipment in backpacks.

Graduate school requires hard work, and John has a strong motivation to do his work. He refers to the need to be organized and follow a schedule that includes his teaching seminars and also setting time aside to work on his dissertation research. John has an office on campus and he finds the focus and concentration he needs in this place. Although he dislikes spending too much time in concrete buildings and surrounded by cars and manmade landscapes, John is able to instantly focus whenever he sees campus

buildings or spends time in his office. He even referred to a time when he tried to get some work done while attending a conference in Los Angeles and thinking about his needing to get back to his office in order to be able to concentrate.

For John, two of the places he felt connected to were also intimately connected to people and interpersonal relationships. For instance, the Wichita Mountains bring back memories of taking a trip with his now advisor at a time when he was uncertain whether he would get his job as Graduate Research Assistant. John also referred to his office as being a place he shares with many other graduate students and that allows for them to know each other and socialize while working on their own projects. His office is also a strategic place in terms of access to his advisor, as John's advisor has an office on the first floor of the building that houses his office. Overall, John reported being able to form relationships with his American coworkers and classmates. But he is explicit in specifying most of these friendships involve people sharing the same academic interests in a university environment. John is cognizant that it would be a challenge to connect with people with whom he has nothing in common, such as the "guy" driving a truck and not willing to share the road with him and his bike.

John associates the Wichita Mountains with the challenges he encountered last summer, when he realized there was a problem with his experimental design. Due to this "glitch" in the design, basically all data collected that summer were invalid. John describes the heaviness and sadness he experienced in this place, as well as his realization that science does not always work the first time and it requires time and effort. John excitedly talked about overcoming the challenges he had encountered in conducting his research with migratory bird species at the Wichita Mountains. He was able to fix the problems with his experimental design and procedures, and acknowledge that in science it is rare to get the best results the first time. John described a feeling of accomplishment and happiness when he was able to successfully complete his experiment. For John, the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is special because he was reminded of the importance of perseverance and persistence in the face of challenges.

John's life as a graduate student is grueling physically and mentally. He describes the physical exertion he endures during summers at the Wichita Mountains that results in his losing weight not only due to the physical challenges but also managing the stress of working long hour days without many breaks. But he also refers to his state of mind as stressful and to the visible tiredness he has noticed on his face. John explicates the effects of juggling classes, research, and meetings by alluding to the difference he sees on pictures taken 3-4 years ago. He believes part of the effect on his physical appearance is also due to his lifestyle and the lack of self-care through healthy eating and regular exercise.

The places John felt connected to are also part of his everyday life. For instance, he spends almost every day during the long semesters in his office and the lab right next to it. Once or twice a month he takes a customary trip to Lake Thunderbird, and spends every summer at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. John's narrative

of places he feels connected to are also intricately related to his work ethic and what he describes as "the process" of working hard and getting positive results from his hard work. It is as if the Wichita Mountains remind him of his self-efficacy, his ability to achieve good outcomes if he dedicates himself to the task at hand. Moreover, in these places John has found a sense of belonging and where his work ethic is valued. He even considers the U.S. his home because unlike his experiences in Europe, it fits with his lifestyle more than every other place he has lived in, including his own country.

An important aspect of his experience conducting research at the Wichita Mountains is the sense of leadership he has developed. John is a senior researcher and is in charge of managing field assistants who help him with the measurements required for tracking migratory bird species. For him, learning to be a fair and balanced leader is an important task because he relies on his field assistants to gather precise, accurate data. However, John is also mindful of the way he treats his field assistants because he remembers his days as a field assistant and does not want to alienate or discourage them.

The juxtaposition between his connection to places and his dislike of their physical features is a striking theme in John's narrative. While he is able to focus, socialize, and connect with people in his office and other campus buildings, he also dislikes the architectural design of the buildings and the poor distribution of space he observes on campus. John dislikes the fact that cars can be driven across campus and would prefer for cars to be diverted to the outskirts of campus, and letting people walk or ride the bicycle. He also dislikes the setup of his office, which consists of cubicles lined up in a room without a window.

Textural Description

Theme 1: This place reminds me of the kind of environment I desire for my future

"So I was there, and I spent this, this nice day with my, my future adviser [at the Wichita Mountains] back then, so I, I, this kind of memory of it […] because, um, you know, it's, it's an experience related to that place. Yes. Um, I definitely start thinking where I want to live in the future. And I, it's, it's very clear to me that [I want] uh, a nice beautiful place where I can connect with nature. It's, it's becoming a real priority for me, so I think next time I need a place where I can ride my bicycle and have a lake or, um, you know, a place away from the city. Every time I go [to the Wichita Mountains], I think that's something important that I cannot underestimate anymore."

Theme 2: This place lets me relax and find peace

"This place is a…represents an escape opportunity for me. So when I'm not at the refuge and I'm not traveling and when I had enough of the roads and buildings, I take my bicycle and I go to Lake Thunderbird. And [I like] going away from everything. […] I kind of try to forget all the people that I don't like when I get there, so I think, okay, more than a connection is a disconnection. Because, uh, it's pretty much the only place

that I have where I can go and, uh, just be away from everything around here, so it's important, that's why I mentioned it."

"So I go [to the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge]. It's nice. Well just, this, this place is really special for me, because, um, my research, for my research, I go there for my research, so I work. […] But it's also a place that I use for, you know, relaxing a little bit. And I try to come up with, with a reasonable plan for the rest of the week and month."

"It's good that I can have that in [Lake Thunderbird], a place that I really like, so the fact that I can have that time for myself, get lost in a place that I can enjoy. But it's, um, in a different way. […] I have much more freedom, I'm in charge. I decide where to go, when to go, and what to do. Um, so it's, um, it's a place that offers peace. So when I get there, I think even more, I finally found peace. Um, just gives me some peace, um, relax, um... Uh, just general feeling good.
Feeling, you know, get there with a bicycle, so I'm all sweat and, uh, but I feel active. So I feel good. Any, it has some, it has like a positive effect for the next two or three days, but then that factor's gone. It feels good when I go there physically, but I haven't any more comments for that, because it's so, it doesn't happen too often."

Theme 3: This place lets me enjoy nature and wildlife

"Well, one [place I feel connected to] would be the Wichita Refuge, Wichita Mountains Refuge. And I really enjoy that refuge. I, I watch everything and, uh, so the birds that I'm studying are certainly, um, connected to that place for me. I like vegetation and trees and blue skies. So it gets really hot [and] I go hiking all day. [Another place is] um, oh Lake Thunderbird. I, I usually take a, a ride with my bicycle, well not usually, but I do that quite often. And, uh, my, my day length is, my day length is like 5 minutes. I wake up the morning, I take a shower, drink a coffee, I take my bike, and, you know, outside it's sunny and blue sky. Because as I said, I'm, I'm a biologist, I don't like cars and, you know, buildings and concrete."

Theme 4: This place is related to my research

"Because I worked [at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge] during the summer doing fieldwork. […] Well just, this, this place is really special for me, because, um, my research, for my research, I go there for my research, so I work. And, uh, I get, I get my samples. Probably I haven't told you this, but I, I work with birds, migratory species. So I go, I go down and, uh, we do some blood marking operations. So we take some blood samples. But then, uh, I, I can get like an hour or two that's free time. So it's related with my work, […]yeah, well, you know, I'm a biologist, so I go there, I, I watch everything and, uh, so the birds that I'm studying are certainly, um, connected to that place for me […] and, uh, so it's, it's strongly related with my work. And I try to, at the end of the day, I try to analyze everything, go back in my mind and see if I did everything right. And, um, covered in equipment, uh, well not covered, but I have backpacks and, uh, equipment and so that is, uh...um, yes, it's physically challenging.

Well again, it's strongly related with my work and my job. Um, I guess that's what I'm saying and, um, so this place is strongly related with my job, but I'm very limited, um, by several things."

Theme 5: I have never felt like I fit in other places I have lived

"Yeah, um, I did my Master's in England, and, uh, and I liked the campus much better. It was, um, better connected and, uh...the architecture, uh, architecture behind was better. Have you ever been to England? People get drunk like by 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Come on. Anyway, I don't want to talk about England. So I think I had, I have, I had way more problems in getting adjusted in Italy or in Europe than here. Um, so...I...yeah, definitely. I had more problems in Europe than here. I think, uh, I'm, I think that I'm getting integrated in the way that I always wanted in Europe, but I couldn't. Uh, well it's a series of things. It's, it's, it's a series of things, not just work. Um, you know, I, I never really felt a part, I never felt Italian to begin with, um, I never felt European. Um, yet Europe is all these different states, talking different languages and fighting each other and it's just a mess."

Theme 6: In this place I am focused and concentrated

"Because, um, I work hard, there is no doubt about it, but I also have a strong motivation for working hard. I try to be rational, I try to, I try to organize things. I'm teaching seminars, uh, so I need to be organized with a schedule. I, I feel very concentrated when I, when I'm here [in my office] or in general when I'm on campus in this building or other buildings of the campus. I'm, I'm totally concentrated on the, what I'm doing, um, so I tend to exclude everything else. And I'm completely absorbed in, in [my work]. Like so I go around with my laptop, right? A conference in Los Angeles, I have my laptop at my hotel and I think, I really need to get, get back to my office, you know, on campus, because that's where I can concentrate and work really well. So...Um, but the state of mind, definitely, it's a very high concentration state, it's very high focus. And, um...it's something that I do not get it when I am traveling or, or not even when I'm home. Um, so very deep concentration of, I feel motivated."

Theme 7: In this place people are friendly

"And, uh, and [the Wichita Mountains are] definitely special, because when I, when I came here for the first time with, so when I came here just for the job interview, um, so I wasn't really sure if I was going to get the position, um, with my adviser, we drove down to the refuge."

"And, uh, um, the good thing is as you can see, I share [my office] with a lot of other people and we are all friends and, and everyone here is busy. So it's kind of, there are a lot of people, but everyone is working. So, and, you know, every once in a while, around noon, we, we have a chat. Um, and all the people working here are friends and I like this about this place. You know, I come here and downstairs I have my adviser, here I have two more advisers, you know, when I go drinking some water supply I say hi. You know, everyone here is really friendly. And, you know, colleagues and so... Yeah, the, yeah I like that, yeah, yeah, definitely. This building in particular. I would expand this to campus, there are other buildings that I feel very, you know, welcome. That's

how I say. I go to my other lab and same, same story, you know, there are people there, so that's, that's good."

"I guess generally, you know, we have the west coast, the east coast an then the south, so you know, but...so I've never really had problems in integrating with people. It's the saying, saying how do you feel about your, you know, life in the U.S.? It's a very, it's too broad, at least for me. I, um, I'm, I'm never, I've never really had problems. Well I guess, um, I found here, people were really friendly. And, uh, and I don't know if it's because I'm working so much and all the people that I meet, most of the people that I deal with are people from other universities or within the university. So I don't know, um, it would be actually for sure probably would be very different if I could deal with, uh, people doing different jobs or, you know, that guy with a huge truck and a blasting stereo that tries to kill me when I ride my bicycle. But overall, I would say that it was very easy to get along with people, with all different cultures. But with people, I connect that with the people that I met between my house and that place."

Theme 8: Place facilitated growth and learning

"I was trying to set up an experiment and I'd been working really hard on this experiment [at the Wichita Mountains]. But then, you know, the, the next, the next year, the next summer, I fixed together with my advisor, we fixed that problem and we actually got very good results. You never get things right the first time. So, so the second year, we kind of got the revenge. And after a lot of things that we did the previous year actually helped us. But then when things went right, I was very happy. I mean, that's why I say it's special. Um, well it just, there was a, a strong reminder that, you know, sometimes things are difficult to achieve, but you, you need to be persistent, and so, you know, that's my short answer."

Theme 9: Place reminds me that graduate student life is stressful physically and mentally

"[When I work at the Wichita Mountains] I get tired too. Um, physically and mentally. So I, the thing that I think often is try to manage all the stress that I have. And, um...Yes. I, I lose weight, because it's, it's, as I said, physically challenging. [At the end of the day] I have [only] enough energy to, you know, make a sandwich. So I kind of, I get really tired."

"I mean, probably you can tell, I'm very tired by just looking at me. I, I can tell, because I, you know, I have pictures of myself from three or four years ago, I, I wasn't looking that tired. Yeah, I mean, physically I can see myself just looking tired. My state of mind is, it's just very stressful, I'm very stressed. [Now] it's different, because I'm, you know, there are seminars, and I'm a PhD candidate, but when I was a PhD student, I also had to take classes, so, um, I'm much more limited here. Um, well as I said, my life is very busy and, uh, you know, the lifestyle, I'm, I'm forced to change my lifestyle, because, uh, you know, there are every day meetings, classes. That, that changes your life a lot. Um, so it's a positive thing. Um, you know, the, you know, the body, I'm not

really taking good care of myself, in terms of you know, healthy lifestyle, I'd like to, but... But I mean, that's something that you need to adjust constantly in every place."

Theme 10: In this place I encountered challenges

"[At the Wichita Mountains] after a few weeks I realized that the experiment was not going to work, because a glitch in what I was trying to do. And after several days, I, uh, just, uh, realized I, I couldn't do it. And that meant, basically all summer lost. And I remember I was driving back from the field site to a little house that we have in that place, and I just stopped the car and I was very down. I mean, that's like how science works. So when things went wrong, it was, it was a big problem. There's an overflow of thoughts, because, um...I just don't know where to begin. Okay. Um...Because, so I spent a lot of time, almost the whole summer and every day something happens, right? So I mean, so this is not, I think this is a mental process that goes on a lot in my mind during the summer because we need to be precise and scientific and everything."

Theme 11: This place feels familiar

"I mean, when I'm back here, I'm back in this office and in the lab and in the other lab, I have my grad student life. But at the same time, it's, it, this place is very familiar for me."

"Well, you know, it's, you know, Sunday morning trip [to Lake Thunderbird] that, by Sunday afternoon it's over and you know, sporadically it's not… so I don't see any physical changes with that. Uh, yeah, I would say yes [this place is a part of me], but really marginally, really, really. But probably because I go there like once every two months."

Theme 12: This place fits me, feels right

"Yeah, [I feel connected] with the process, and absolutely with the [Wichita Mountains]. Yeah, I guess when you, when you work hard and, uh, after a while you get good results, you kind of try to assimilate that into your personality too."

"I mean, right now I feel like I'm home. And I, and I see [the U.S.] as a, yeah, home. Sure [culture] is, it's important, and it wasn't a shock. I think it, it's, it was more shocking for me to go to England. Or, you know, in other places in Europe or even in Italy, than coming here. Well, as you probably got it by now, I'm a very hardcore worker. And here I, I, I found a tremendous support for that. And, and that was, um, still it was a, a great thing for me. And here everything is, it's more, uh, connected and, uh, you know, if you want to work hard, you can. And, uh...Yeah.
It's different, but it's better. Yeah, that's probably a good way to say, it really fits me better than anything else I experienced before"

Theme 13: In this place I have become a better leader

"I'm the crew leader for this [experiment at the Wichita Mountains], so I have to deal with people who are working under my supervision. And, um, so I guess that, that's, that's difficult task. And field assistants, they, they also have motivations, but, um, might be a little bit less, so after a while, you have to deal with the situations where, you know, people working with you are tired, physically, and mentally. Because you have to tell them what to do, how to do it, when to do it all the time. So I guess that this is, I think this is a big thing for me and, every time I work under this situation, I have to think very carefully on how to deal with my assistants. Um, so you know, it's very, it's a challenge, it's very difficult, so I kind of, I try to picture this in my, in my mind and I, I really often found myself thinking when I was a field assistant. So I also used to work as a field assistant and I didn't like when people were coming to me, telling me do this, do that. So I, I try to, I try to see how these people can, uh, receive my invitations and you know, my orders in a way that is not, you know what, it's not going to upset them, or, so in a way it is very, uh, productive for both. So this is something that I, I think a lot about this during the summers when I, you know. Did I get lost in that? Yeah, so that comes in my mind a lot, trying to deal with people in the right way, in a way that is balanced, in a way that they can do their work precisely but in also a way that it's not me being a, you know, a, a boss that kind of person, you know. Um, the short answer would be dealing with people in the right way."

Theme 14: There are physical aspects of places here that do not fit with my preferred lifestyle

"I'm, I'm a biologist, I don't like cars and, you know, buildings and concrete. […] When I come back [to my office], I have no connection. Um, this room [in my office] that I hate very much, because it has no windows. And, uh, I, I really hate this room. Because I spend a lot of time here, I come here in the morning and I work over the weekend. I come here and it's just so depressing. So I really hate it. Or...So it, I hate physically this room, because it, it's just wrong, working in a room with no windows is just wrong. I hate the buildings, I'm sorry, but...I mean, I hate the buildings, it's too much concrete and, uh, um, it's, it's a wrong setup we have this, so I like to go with a bicycle around and, uh, right in the middle of the campus, we have all these buses going up and down, and cars. And I don't understand why the cars cannot go around and you leave the core of the campus for people walking or using a bicycle. So I, I like physically, I don't like the way this like campus is set up, I don't, I don't understand why we cannot have better facilities for the office space and this and that."
"It is, I, I don't think it would be too hard to improve, you know, the quality of life for grad students. Uh, so I think if I had a better, better facilities, you know, better buildings, or the campus was set up in a better way, um, I would take care of myself physically. But it's just really hard doing it here, because you want to take a lunch break, well what do you do? I mean, I don't have an hour, or you know an hour and a half to go to campus corner a crowded place for a nice sandwich, so you know, a bag of chips. And I don't have a car, but I don't really, I don't want it. [When I ride my bike to Lake Thunderbird] truck drivers are not really friendly, so, so it takes me about, I don't

know, 45 minutes to get there and it's like 45 minutes of pain, because I have to deal with all these cars and people who, who are not really friendly. And I see all these people, you know, country drivers get real upset. I don't know why."

Juan

Structural Description

Juan's narrative had several underlying thematic structures regarding his perceived relationships to places. His stories about places are strongly influenced by his spirituality and places that facilitate his cultivating a relationship with God. Juan displays all the characteristics of an introvert, specifically referring to his accumulating emotions and feelings following social interaction, and his need to have alone time to recharge and engage in new interactions. The places he cited close relationships to were those that allowed him to recharge and transform frustration into peace. The following structures describe Juan's narrative: The idea that dealing with people in his office and classes is tiresome, also his acknowledgment that living in the US was challenging, as well as with markedly different from his hometown, having a place where he can reflect on his identity as an international student, having a place for exercise, energy, and excitement, a home that feels like a part of him, a place that lets him enjoy the local landscape, a place that allows him to find peace and renewal, and a place where he nurtures his relationship with God.

As a doctoral student, Juan has interaction with many people throughout the day, including other graduate students with whom he shares an office and many faculty members from his program. Juan revealed his feeling worn out and tired after a day of dealing with people in his department. Despite his frustration, Juan does not act rudely or impatiently with people, which means he keeps his feelings inside all day. Thus, although he expressed liking to interact with people, he seems to become overwhelmed after a whole day of social interaction in his office.

A native of Colombia, Juan acknowledged he never really had much personal space back home, as he lived in a densely populated city. Juan reported always sharing a room with his siblings, and also sharing his home with his father's business. He reflected on his looking out the window to see only buildings and houses, as dwellings are built close together to maximize space available. In that sense, Juan acknowledged having the ample apartments and spaces of Oklahoma was a privilege he did not enjoy before coming to the US.

Given his status as an international student, Juan struggled with his financial and academic responsibilities. He described going through a period of desperation where he associated the university with frustration and uncertainty about his future. Juan recalled thinking seriously about leaving everything and going back to Colombia. He reflected on his room being the only place where he could express his frustration and desperation by crying without being seen by other people. Juan's room is also the place where he realized that initially being an international student was exciting and new, especially

because so many people want to come and live in the U.S. However, he described his realization that he feels like a visitor when he goes home while also knowing he is in fact a visitor to the U.S. Juan expressed a feeling of perceived homelessness in his narrative.

Juan reported his apartment complex has a gym where he regularly works out. He reflected on bringing many feelings to his gym workouts, both positive and negative. Juan reported he sometimes capitalizes on positive emotions to feel energized and ready to tackle the challenges of the day. In Juan's narrative, he referred to his apartment and specifically his room as being a part of him, a place that completes him and makes him full. He talked about how much his room reflected his own mood, as when he was doing well the apartment was clean and organized, but when he was not doing well it is unkempt and disorganized. He talked about appreciating having a room of his own, a place he can call home while he lives in the US.

Juan described his office in his academic department as a peaceful, quiet place. Located on the 12th floor of one of the biggest buildings in the city, this place allowed Juan to see the beauty of the natural landscape of the Great Plains. He described seeing many sunrises and sundowns from this vantage, and almost poetically described the changes he can see throughout the seasons; green and alive in the summer, and desolate in the winter time. Another aspect of his experience of going to the gym is one of renewal and peace. Juan described his going to the gym as a time for solace, a time where he is not surrounded by people and can be himself. Juan reflected on going to the gym as being a place that lets him calm and ease into himself after accumulating many feelings throughout the day or the week. He describes this place as one where he leaves everything in order to move on to the next interactions in his day. In other words, the gym is a place to release negative emotions that he accumulates throughout his day, specifically as they relate to social interaction. He sees this place as a transformative one, where he brings in heavy, negative feelings but is able to transform them in peace and quiet ones.

An important aspect of his experience working out at the gym is his focus on God. Juan sees his workout time as a time when he can solely focus on God and when he tries to leave his emotions and worries in his hands. He compared his desire to spend time at the gym with the time a person would long to spend with a girlfriend. Juan expressed the intense strength he derives from his workouts not only in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual one. Moreover, Juan's experience of his room is one of devotional time, of time when he can receive guidance and pray to God for strength throughout the day. He has a habit of reading his Bible in the room and thus feels intensely connected to his spirituality while he is at home.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Dealing with people is tiresome

"Um, I think, um...I get to interact with a lot of people during the day. So you can

accumulate things, you can accumulate like, oh I'm tired, or it's frustrating, or it's irritating. That's where, that's where all the feelings like, because when I'm going throughout my day, um, I guess, if I'm, you know, if I'm interacting with people, I don't want to be like rude, or I don't want to be like show my impatience sometimes, or I don't want to show all those things. So like when I come into this place, I come with all these feelings. It's like, okay, because right now my office is on the first floor next to the lab, so there is always people walking by, people coming in your office, people are...And as I mentioned before […] I like to hang out with people, but at some point you have to get your stuff done."

Theme 2: Places are different back home

"Yeah. When I was back in Colombia, um, I always shared room with my, with my siblings, so I never had a, like a room for myself. So I guess back then, in some sense, I didn't have like my personal space. Um, like back home, my dad has his, like his business, he has it in our home, so he has, he always had some, there is like, like all this stuff he works, it's kind of mixed with our living. So there is not kind of the differentiation between the, like, okay, this is the work place, the work space, and this is the living space. And so it's kind of all mixed together, I mean, still we had, we had a place to live. Because back, back, back in my house in Colombia, the window for, like from the window for our room, you could just see like other buildings, like not even buildings, like the houses around, because in Colombia, like all the houses are touching each other. It's not here, like there is space between houses. So, so like you look through the window and you see the house in front, or the buildings, because it's still different, like a big city."

Theme 3: Place presented challenges

"So I was going through a lot of desperation when I first came. And now you're not exchange student, you have more responsibilities, more financially, and, you know, the work that you have to do. And things were not going that well, and I didn't know what to do, or, um, whether just leave everything and go back to Colombia. And I was just like very desperate. As for me, yeah. If I think for example, my room, that's the place where I came and cried when I was frustrated, like, like before knowing God."

Theme 4: In this place I reflect on my experience of being an international student

"I mean, when I came as an exchange student, it was okay, because it was exciting, it was the first time I went out of the country. And it's everybody's dream to come to the U.S., it was pretty exciting. And to come and show them, oh, look how nice it is, like, you, you not believe it. You would love it. I look at it and it's like, thinking about the next place that I want to have. Although at times I feel like I don't have a home. Because I feel like when I go back home, I'm a visitor, and here I'm a visitor too."

Theme 5: Place for exercise, energy, and excitement

"Um, um, sometimes, sometimes I can come in [to the gym] with feelings of excitement or something that happened or with thankfulness, um, and then, um, just generally, not all the time. Um...But I think also, like, part of the exercise makes me feel energized deep in like my body,
even though you're tired, but it's, it's kind of I don't understand why, but you go work out, but after that, you feel like all energetic. Um...I think that impacted me in the way, like, I'm very blessed because of being able to have that, um...So I think that's an impact that that place had on me. But also sometimes at the same time, like, I feel lucky to have this place. Hm...I think back in that time, because it was at the beginning, so I think I was, I was, hm...I don't know, it made me happy to be there."

Theme 6: Place is a part of me

"Yeah, it's, I think it's, um, just the feeling of knowing there is something that makes me complete. Um...fullness, you know, uh... Be whatever is going on. So it's really, um...like I, like I really feel like the place is somehow part of me, so I take care of it, kind of the place is a reflection, I think it's a reflection of how I'm doing sometimes. So if things are going good, like the place looks very nice. But if I'm busy or if I have no time, then it looks kind of, you know, like it's not taken care of. But I think that's, I think there is a special meaning, because it's the first place where I had...and I've lived in the same apartment since I got my own room, so, so it's been...Yeah, I think it's like 3 years. Almost three years, so I think it's...I really like the place.
So I like to see my bed, it's like, ah, finally. My own bed. So it's, yeah. Hm. I think having, like being able to have my own room and, um, it's a very nice place. And just come in here and being able to have such nice place. Um... I think in some sense, and it's not totally, but in some sense, it makes me feel like I have a home. So, so I think both the place and the people who is there kind of makes, makes you feel like, like being home."

Theme 7: Place lets me enjoy view of the landscape

"And my office was on the 12th floor. Which makes it, you have to travel quite often, but, but whenever I get up there, it's like always quiet. You can see the sun dawning, dawning, is that how you say it? Like when the sun rises? Yeah. It's nice to see from my window. So, so that makes it special too. So here like being able to see like the trees and the sunrise and the sunset, it's... Um, and I really liked it because of the sunsets and the view, because it's from the, like the tallest building on campus. So I think there was, I mean, the incident could be used to watch the view and kind of see how it changes with season, with the seasons. Like winter, it's like all desolate. And summer like all dry and green. So I think that was cool, like to be able to, to watch the city and to watch the sun, the sunrise and the sunset, because as I mentioned, I didn't get to watch those things back in Colombia."

Theme 8: This is a place of peace and renewal

"Um... I think like most of the time I am with people, uh, and when I go to the gym, it's kind of, I'm not thinking about, like, um, I don't need to be thinking about something as specific, or I don't need to be with anyone at that time. So it's just kind of time for myself. So that's why I like that. Um, I think it's just the fact that I'm not thinking about anything. I guess those two places [my apartment and the gym] are kind of related in that sense: That it's a time of the day where, where I don't have to be, not that I don't like to be around people. Hm. I think there are like small things every day, but all those things kind of add up to, to a more, um, to a bigger thing. Um, and then what, what this, like the, the way that this place affects me is, um, when I have that space, um, it's kind of easing myself, um, like coming down and just, uh, kind of bring you my strength or renew my patience or renew my, just whatever it is that, that we need to go throughout the day. So...So I think, I guess it's more, um, not as much as related to a place as such. But more, I think it's both the, the space, but also like the time. You know what I mean? But generally, like you don't transform, kind of, incoming peace at the end of the time that I spend in that place. By having peace that, uh, I was able to bring all this here and it has been taken care of. So, so that I can move on, continue, to an extent."

"So it's kind of coming, coming in with some feelings and, you know, dealing with those things. And, and just trying to, uh, to have peace at the end. The end, sometimes you come with trouble and you want to get an answer, but probably I don't get the answer, but at least I have peace, like, okay, now God is going to come through, I don't know how sometimes, but just kind of having that renewing of my mind and my spirit and everything, so...Yeah, I guess so. So, so those are the changes to my body and then to my mind, I think it's kind of that, um, release of all the thoughts that I came in with. So... [my apartment is] um, the place where I come to rest, not my spirit, but also my body. Hm...I think, I think it's very similar to the gym. Um, you know, that, that light coming in those thoughts or, um...like kind of emotions from the day, it is the place where I can release all those. Yeah. Like, like I'm getting physical, mental and spiritual rest. So that's, that's how I see it. And, and because of that, I, I don't like to take any work to my room. Like even, sometimes I have to, but, but I try to keep it like all in school. So that it doesn't become, like, oh, I come home, and I have to keep working. So because it's the place that when I get there, it's like, everything in me, kind of changes to this is the place to rest. So when I get there, I'm not, not willing to work. Um, sometimes I have to, but I try [not to]. That was kind of my place, um, like to leave everything go, because, yeah, because I, I guess, like I didn't have a, like a plan, like I didn't have like a person to go and talk to, or...So that was, that was the place for that. And still sometimes, I mean, now I have, you know, like more people that, that I can talk to about it, but still sometimes this is the place where I come and be."

Theme 9: Place reminds me of relationship with God

"Hm...I guess God. When I'm [at the gym], like, like my thoughts and just, you know, I'm not with people, but I'm just like thinking about God. So I think that would be a

person who is, you know, more related to that place. Um, like, like the next, the second place, [which is my apartment] is kind of similar to that, because it's, um, you know, like in the mornings when I'm by myself, I read my Bible or just praying or just spending time by myself, I'm with God like that. But, because I like it, but it's, but it's like the point when I'm like, okay this is my time with God, so that's why, that's why those two things are...Yeah. [I think] like, okay, now God is going to come through, I don't know how sometimes, but just kind of having that renewing of my mind and my spirit and everything, so... Hm. I think that it's, it's, just God, because it's a place where I, where I have my, the devotional time."

"But which is the relationship, uh, so, even though it is present throughout the day, in different places, when I come to [the gym], it's, it's like only him and I. So that's what made me complete.
So when I think about [the gym], it's like I come to a place where, you know, it's like when you want to spend time with your girlfriend. And when I think about that, it's like, finally, we get to spend time together. So it's something like that. It has had a big impact. Because, um, before, before coming to the U.S., um, I didn't know any, like, I didn't know about God, I didn't, um, have that relationship that I have with Him right now. So I encountered that relationship with God, you know, and, and like colored, colored those places where I can develop that relationship.
That, that really gave me new hope and gave me the strength and guidance to do what I wasn't being able to do before. So I think it has been...I think so far it's been like the most important decision and the most, uh, the biggest impact my life has had."

"So I would talk to [my friend] sometimes in our long frustrations and things like that, so, so she told me, well, why don't you come, uh, you know, and, you know, like be small groups we meet and talk about God, maybe that's something that you want? So I started to go. And that's how, I went there over a year and learned more about God and, um, and then at the end, like, um like that moment when, when that change was kind of in me seeking for God and asking God, okay, God, is this real? Or, you know, what is all these things? Because they see, all these people, sounds kind of crazy, you know, like, oh God, you know like, God does this, and God, and God, and God, and God, and God and on like...Okay, is this like? Is this craziness or what is this? And just kind of in a personal moment with God and hearing from him is when I realized, like I kind of have that revelation, God is real. So, so it was, the turning point for me in that moment. There's this calm, like with all my frustration, and it's like, why God? You know, like why did this happen?"

Jun

Structural Description

Jun's narrative is one deeply influenced by her identity as a doctoral student. The places she identified having relationships with are places related to her work, the challenges encountered as a doctoral student, as well as the acquisition of knowledge that will allow her to become an independent researcher in the future. Similarly, Jun

identified places that fit with her student lifestyle as important in her life, specifically going to the Student Union and the recreation center, and also the affordable prices and convenience of a multinational superstore. Jun's narrative of relationships to places has several underlying thematic structures: places aesthetically appealing, places that allow comparison with hometown, places that presented challenges and allowed growth, places that facilitated communication with colleagues, places that feel comfortable, places that are part of daily routine, places where academic knowledge is acquired, places that fit with lifestyle, places that give perspective on the future, and places that are convenient and affordable.

Jun reflected on the beauty of campus buildings and the friendliness of the people in this part of the country. She appreciated the quietness of the place and the clean air, which is different from her hometown in China. Jun also appreciated the open spaces surrounding the campus and the view she has from her lab, which provides her with a break when she is tired of working on her experiments. As a native of China, Jun reflected on the resources her department dedicated to the professional development of their graduate students. For example, she was appreciative of the speakers coming to talk at her seminar courses. She also referred to her trusting American products more than Chinese products, stating that in her country it is necessary to ascertain whether a product is of good quality and unexpired.

Jun reflected on the challenges she encountered in her department building as a doctoral student. She talked about her realization that only hard work would lead to accomplishments. She also reflected on experiments that were long and frustrating but taught her a lot about conducting research. Jun also talked about the positive growth that stemmed from these challenges, as she credited this building as the place where she learned a lot and developed her academic research agenda. Jun's academic department building was also a place that facilitated her communication with colleagues both on a professional and personal level. She referred to the relationships she developed with her advisors and labmates, the exchange of ideas for research and everyone's willingness to help and work together. On a more personal level, Jun also reflected on the interest her advisors and colleagues took on her well-being and referred to the many talks they had about life and their willingness to work hard but also have fun, even if having fun means bringing a new litter of puppies to the weekly lab meeting.

Jun cited the campus as a place that will serve as the standard of comparison for every other place she visits in the United States. She reflected on her feeling relaxed and at home when she is on campus, alluding to the campus being a part of her life where she feels comfortable and accepted. Jun's lab is a place where she spends many hours both conducting research and also taking classes. As a doctoral student, she spends many hours conducting experiments and searching for data online to complete her literature reviews. Another place that is part of her routine is Walmart, as she reflected this is the second place where she spends the most of her time, as she goes grocery shopping there regularly and she is also able to buy everything else she may need.

The lab where she spends most of her time is also a place where she developed her identity as a scholar in her field, crediting this place with her acquisition of the knowledge base necessary for a career in academic research. Jun also cited specific buildings within the campus as places that fit with her lifestyle. Specifically, she referred to the Student Union building where she goes to meet friends and also eat or get a snack. She talked about the recreation center where she played badminton with friends and also attended a Zumba class. Jun's lifestyle seems to revolve around the university campus, both for academic, work, and leisure activities.

Although Jun appreciates the convenience of stores like Walmart, she also realized there are other stores that cater to different segments of the population. Jun realized that in the future she wants to be able to afford upscale shopping such as vegetables and fruits from farms or high-end grocery stores like Target. However, she realizes that in order to achieve this goal she must earn more money. Jun listed Walmart as a place that is convenient and she visits at least once a week. She even called it "a magic place" where she can find anything and everything she needs without having to go anywhere else. Whether she needs clothes, food, groceries, or toiletries, Jun can find it at Walmart. Jun valued not only the convenience of having everything in one place, but also the low prices she pays for quality items.

Textural Description

Theme 1: This place is aesthetically appealing

"Also, after I went to some meetings to visit other buildings on campus I thought campus is very beautiful and people here are very friendly. So I like the feeling of the campus. Also like the Union, or you just walk around in the Oval, including the bus. Um, [I like] the grass, the plants, […] the quietness, [and] I feel the air is clear, not only in OU campus, but the whole US compared to my home country. So I got, um, healthy, I should be healthy. No. Uh, if I didn't come here I would not, I wouldn't realize that. It's so different, and uh, it is so spacious, the campus is very big, I feel like relaxed, I feel like there are a lot of places I can go and so… Uh, yes, I feel, I feel good and there is a big window in my lab so it's a big, it's a good view I can, when I'm tired I can look out the window."

Theme 2: Place allowed comparison with hometown

"Because I couldn't think about that where I was… In China people do not spend that much money or time to hear people from different places every week, yeah, to my department. When I came here, I have a comparison between the two places. But it's different because most students in China are um, biking, have bicycle. In China, people will honk if you are walking in front of their vehicle."

"But in China I think people don't trust the quality of the food in the stores, […]uh hm, like when, when we do shop in China we would all consider ok, this, even though they are in the shop you need to think about it, is it safe, is it clean, is it expired."

Theme 6: Place presented challenges and allowed growth

"Um, like when I took my general exam for my phd degree I read a lot of books and spent most of my time in the library to read the books. I realized it is very hard to get a Ph.D. degree even though I haven't gotten it yet, but I know it's hard, and now I think I am feeling more confident, much more confident than when I get here for the first time. So at the beginning yeah, I feel frustrated. Uh, I need to work hard in order to get accomplishments."

"And also it's a place where I can do experiments, some of them worked, some didn't, so it's pretty long and so frustrating. Uh, I feel it's like a place I experience a lot of good things, bad things, and learned a lot. Ummm, that place leaves a big impression in my whole life because Ph.D. is a long um, time period compared to, even longer compared to undergraduate studies."

Theme 3: Place facilitated communication with colleagues

"Also, after I went to some meetings to visit other buildings on campus I thought campus is very beautiful and people here are very friendly. Sometimes when I talk to people here, I feel people are more friendly. Or people… I would say… people, I came to the campus mainly for my class, when I take class. Or for department seminars. So people here are the professors, like instructors for my classes. Professors in my committee. I'm happy and I like people with different backgrounds to give talk here in the campus, yeah. […] Even though it is a hassle to come from my lab to the campus I would like to either take the bus or drive."

"Uh hm. Incidents, I like the talk that happens in my lab, either with my advisor or my um, and I talk to my advisor and my lab mate about research, [and my] lab mates and people my advisor knows. And sometimes people they want to talk about, they need some help with like their research, and they go to our lab and talk with us."

"And then I feel like ok, it's getting better. I would like to communicate with people because most of, some of, most of my ideas are like in my research came from talk with advisor or lab mates. . And with the help of my advisor and lab mates I think I can do that someday. So communication allowed me to do that. And when like people are around and graduate students, I can talk to them like what happened, besides the research sometimes. Like what happened to your dogs, something like that. [It is] a lot of fun. Sometimes my advisor brought his puppies to the lab when we have lab meeting. And that was fun."

Theme 4: Place is comfortable, feels like home

"I think um, when I first um, came to the States, here, I was in a tour of the campus and actually I liked it very much, or because, I didn't spend much time in other areas of campus, the university, but I feel relaxed here and I feel it is like a home in the States

for me. And I feel safe there. It's my hometown in the States. I feel like relaxed, I feel like there are a lot of places I can go and so… Uh, no, I think everything is good for me, I like the campus very much. Yeah. I think so. Yeah. Um, I think so because OU is the first place I came to in the States and definitely I think I will, if I move to other places in the States, I will compare the other places with OU. Basically I like that place, I feel (laughs), I feel very comfortable, and the building[s], the color of the building[s]. So, and I um, phd is important like, degree in terms of knowledge and experience in academy so I will definitely remember that place for the rest of my life."

Theme 5: Place is part of daily routine

"Yes. Um, I spend most of the time [in my lab on campus]. And I spent a lot of time in the campus. Yeah, um, my lab is definitely the, um, except for my apartment and OU campus I think my lab I spend a lot of time in my lab. I do my experiment there, um, I do research by searching for data online so I spend in my lab, many hours. Several hours, eight, or at least 4-5 hours a day in my lab."

"Second would be mostly related to my life, I would say Wal Mart because I do a lot of grocery shopping there. Um, I think Wal-Mart is maybe the second place where I spend most of my time, except my home, except my apartment and school. Um, I go there to do grocery shopping, uh, once a week, and I can get most of what I need there."

Theme 7: Place where knowledge of academic field acquired

"Um, well, I would say I got improvement in my academic field [in my lab]. [I study the] evolution of the relationship between different fish species. Um, it affected me a lot, it [taught] me a lot, in terms of academic study. Um, like my, like my knowledge base, I learned a lot in knowledge base."

Theme 8: This place fits with my lifestyle

"Yeah. Um, the union provides food and activities and free movies during weekend, but I like to study in that building. Ummm, or my friends, we can go to have dinner together, something like that. Um, [I also like] football game[s]. Events? Mmm yeah, football games. Oh, I also like the recreation center, the gym, on campus, yeah, I was there a lot. I, before I played badminton with friends and later I go to the group fitness, I go to yoga class and zumba class. I like that a lot."

Theme 9: Place gives me perspective on goals for my future

"If you have higher requirement you can go to like better grocery shopping store. But, I still like Wal-Mart. Um, impact? I think if I move on I would like to find some place that is a little bit better than Wal-Mart to do grocery shopping. Like fresh farm or

something like that. If I get a job, I will go somewhere better. But I need more money."

Theme 10: This place is convenient

"Um, I go there to do grocery shopping, uh, once a week, and I can get most of what I need there. So it's a magic place, no need to go anywhere else. Not very many people, but I like the clothes there, it's fairly good quality and low price. When I first came here I could always, everything I need I can get at a lower price and later when I go to other, like grocery places, like Target or like the newly opened Sprouts I feel oh, Wal-Mart is not that…. It's a good place mainly for students or for like normal people. Um, about Wal-Mart…? I think… It's not like um, like a place that can get my everyday need for. Meaning the food, what I eat, clothes, and things like that. Not too much about clothes, I think more about food. Grocery shopping. Mmmm, uh, one thing I can think about is um, I'm not sure if it is appropriate answer to this question but I feel like um, Wal-Mart is a place to provide food like, good quality food at a lower price for most of the people living in the States. Um, I paid um, reasonable money to buy the food, I know the quality is good there, so the feeling I'm going to Wal-Mart to buy food is like, ok, I pay this amount of money and I get some food and I know this food is good quality so, um, it will benefit me, like it's safe and cheap. Something like that, but I feel much better here doing grocery shopping. But I'm happy when I am a student, I go to Wal-Mart a lot."

Kim

Structural Description

Kim's narrative reflects the different facets of her relationships to places. The places she mentioned in her interview were places that were meaningful for different reasons, including a bit of nostalgia about her home country but also places where she found encouragement, motivation, and a strong support system. The structural themes underlying Kim's narrative include: A place to relax, a place that is accepting of everyone, a place that serves food reminiscent of her home in Malaysia, her acknowledgment that places are different in the US, a place that fits her lifestyle but sometimes does not truly reflect her style, the place where she created a social network, a place where people are friendlier than back home, a place that has allowed her to help others, a place that helped her realize standards are not the same everywhere, place that reminds her she must make decisions on her own, and a place where she feels the presence of God.

A strong place in Kim's narrative was related to her church. One of the roles of this place of worship in her life is its ability to facilitate relaxation. Kim's attending church every Sunday is a relief, a moment where she can breathe and be herself while enjoying the presence of God and having fun worshipping. Another aspect of Kim's relationship to her church is her belief that her church is accepting of everyone. She recounted previous experiences in other churches where she felt that there were rules

that forced one to have the grace of God. However, attending this church changed her perception of God's grace and though she still prays and reads the Bible to follow God's mandate, she does not do it forcefully. In addition, she cited the church membership had impacted her by accepting single mothers and even throwing them a party, which Kim believes would not have happened in an accepting church. She seems to derive significant peace of mind knowing that both God and the church members will accept her no matter what happens in her life.

Yet another aspect of Kim's relationship to her church is a spiritual one. Kim is able to experience the presence of God when she attends church. In this place, Kim became aware of God's grace and the immense gift that is for her life. She expressed a certainty that God will love her no matter what the circumstances are. Her time at church helps her focus on Jesus, on God, and what they want to tell her. Kim's church also provided a place where she could help others through the international student ministry. They find out when international students are coming and organize church members so they can go pick them up at the airport, buy welcome presents, and also offer transportation to students who do not own a car. Kim cited participation in this ministry as a way to give back in the same way other people helped her and her brother when they first arrived in the US.

Being a member of a church also allowed Kim to form her own social network in the local community. She mentioned a time when her brother had to go to camp and she stayed with a church family for a weekend. Kim also talked about her sense that her church family would always be there for her, as she has seen them help each other. An element of nostalgia about her home country was evident when she talked about a local Mexican restaurant. Even though she reported never eating Mexican food in Malaysia, she found herself "addicted" to this restaurant. Kim reflected on the spices used in the preparation of these Mexican meals that remind her of home. She talked about Asian franchise restaurants in America and how little their food resembles real Asian food. However, Kim reported every time she wants a taste of home she goes to this Mexican restaurant.

Kim also reflected on the differences between shopping malls in Malaysia and America. She referred to shopping malls having everything in Malaysia and these malls are composed of small shops all in one place. She compared these malls back home to Walmart in terms of their having everything, but also referred to the different quality of the clothes she was able to get at the malls back home for a decent price. Since shopping appears to be an important part of Kim's lifestyle, she identified the local mall as a main place she enjoys visiting. She reported feeling excited and happy every time she goes to the mall and gets ready to shop.

However, she also referred that though the mall fits with her love of shopping, it does not necessarily offers clothes that fit her style. She talked about being able to go to Malaysian boutiques and afford pretty clothes, but acknowledged buying the same clothes in a US mall is more expensive. While she reflected on her shopping being a part of her lifestyle, she noted that people in the US in general tend to be friendlier than

people back home. She commented on the friendliness of customer service at the mall, but also to people she meets at the university. Kim reflected that if people smile or make small talk back home they see that person as a "creep" or a "stalker." Although she admitted to being surprised at first, she reported it was nice feeling people were friendly towards her.

A very important aspect of her narrative about places was realizing that the brands she took pride on wearing back home were not necessarily famous or valued in the US. She mentioned a few brands that were expensive and famous in Malaysia but no one had heard of in the US and vice versa. Kim mentioned she realized standards are different when it comes to what people consider valuable and stated she began to realize perhaps being brand conscious is not necessarily a desirable trait. Yet another dimension of Kim's citing the local mall as a place of significance for her was the closeness with her mother and her mother's help in making decisions. Kim talked about her mother helping her decide what looked good on her and what to buy when she lived in Malaysia. However, she reflected that going to the mall alone or with her boyfriend was not the same, as she often found herself questioning whether she should buy an item.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Church is a place to relax

"Well I go to church every Sunday. So is that a relationship? I go, yeah...Yeah. A lot. I mean, I, I use, I mean, I was born in like a Christian family, I go to church and stuff. What feelings? I don't know, I just feel really relaxed when I'm in the church and I feel welcome and it's like no matter how my week has been, like going to church is like a big relief and like, like I can finally breathe, that kind of thing. Um, so yeah, it's, it's definitely like a place for me to relax and enjoy the presence of god, and yeah, and just worship Him at church and have fun."

Theme 2: My church is accepting of everyone

"Like the way I see stuff, the way, um, I live; it's just totally different [since I joined this church]. I feel like I used to live by rules a lot. And those like, legalistic stuff. That kind of concept. Rather than I have to work for it, I have to always read my bible, always pray, always do this for the Lord. Um, like for example, um, in our church, we have like a few girls who are not married., but they got pregnant. And usually what the normal church would do would be like reject them from coming, just because they think like it's not a good thing, like, if we accept them, it's like we are encouraging people to do that, right? But this church is so full of love and just so gracious and they just welcome them and even have like what do you call that? Those party thing, when you have a baby, [a baby shower]. Right and they even have a baby shower for them in the church and say, you know, we're here for you if you need anything. And they give them presents and stuff. And encourage them. God will by their side and stuff. It's just encouraging when you step into this church, you can see different kinds of people. It's

not like those people are, you know, think that they have it all together. But people who really are just there, because they're accepted by this church. And it's just something so important to me, because a lot of times, I feel like when I go to church, like people in the church are condemning me, you know, as if I've done something wrong, not that they know, just that feeling, that heaviness. And they really show the love of God, um...So that's something I just want to add."

Theme 3: Place where I feel the presence of God

"And I have, I have always been attending a denominational church. And now that I'm in a non-denominational church, it really changes my perspective, um, on God and you know, all the teaching and while I'm here, I've learned a lot about Grace, what is Grace? What is God's Grace like? And it just changes everything. But now I know more about God's Grace and it just, it's not like I'm taking the concept of grace for granted but it makes me more like relaxed and know like, no matter what I do, God will still love me anyway. But I still want to do things for the Lord and I'm really passionate about all that, but it's not coming out of like a forceful way, it's more of like I do this, because I love the Lord, that kind of attitude. Um, so yeah, it's, it's definitely like a place for me to relax and enjoy the presence of god, and yeah. [I] just [focus on] Jesus. Just... Just focusing on God and what he wants to say to me."

Theme 4: Because of church ministry I have been able to help others

"I guess like I said earlier, after knowing, um, grace so much, like I can see people there are so really like gracious to not just to me, but anyone who, who wants to go to that church. Um, the, well, I feel I am repeating myself, but, um, I don't know, just, it helps a lot, oh, and they have this thing called like international student ministry kind of in the church, so they will, I don't know how they do it, but they have like contacts for like students, international students who are coming over and they'll have like transportation for them, and pick them up, and make sure they are safe and we'll see they're coming to OU. So make sure that, um, you know, people here in OU, make sure they have everything done and I think it's a really cool thing to do. And I guess, they prepare presents for them, and welcoming presents. And hey, if you need a ride to Walmart, call this number and stuff like that. Really good about it. Yeah, because of that ministry, it really helped me to want to help others, not that I'm here for so long, I know a few American friends who will help me to pick students up."

Theme 9: In this place I created a social network

"Um, the reason why I, I guess I attended that church, or I attend that church is because my brother, he, he was the one that you know, go to this church first and he brought me into this church. And oh, and also the first few weeks when I got here, my brother had to go to some conference or camp, I don't remember, but he had to leave for like the weekend. So like I was staying with people, like some elders from the church, so I lived at their house for the weekend. It was fun. They're really nice. Yeah. And I feel welcome and it's like no matter how my week has been, like going to church is like a big relief and like, but going into this church, I know that no matter what happens, like

they're there for me. [The impact of this church on me is] oh, big, huge, as you can tell."

Theme 5: The food in this place reminds me of home

"I would say I really, really like Chipotle. I don't know why, probably the rice. It's a good place. Um, I go there to eat whenever I don't feel like cooking, because I'm lazy. And I feel like I've spent...a place...I really like the taste of it, because I don't know, I feel like those Chinese food place, like Pei Wei or Panda Express, they don't taste any close to like what I would eat in Malaysia, but Chipotle is more like the flavor I might like. Does this place affect me? Can I say like I'm kind of addicted to Chipotle? It just tastes so good, I'm going to eat that later after this. I'm so hungry. But, yeah, I just...Oh I don't eat a lot of Mexican food in Malaysia; maybe we don't really have Mexican food there, not that I know of... The food is great. Makes me happy. Hm...Oh I really like how they have like different level of spiciness and I guess like the spiciness really kind of tastes almost the same as what I would eat in Malaysia. Because like I got to Pad Thai and I go to other places and their spiciness is just not the same kind of spiciness. I don't know how to explain that. Just different, I don't know, we have a lot of spicy food in Malaysia and I love it. And spiciness is so different than here. Like it tastes so different. Probably. Yeah, but, yeah, I guess the spiciness is really close to what I would, you know, eat back home. So... Yeah, I think like whenever I want to eat rice or anything like Asian-y, I would just think of Chipotle, just because it tastes so, so similar to what I always used to get. Yeah. It's just weird, cause I don't eat Mexican food in Malaysia at all. I think the first Mexican food, when I got here, my brother brought me to Chipotle and I fell in love with it. So what was the question? I guess, oh, maybe that's why, that was the first place that I went when I got here."

Theme 6: Places back home are different from places in the US

"Go going to the mall is, because like back in Malaysia, I shop a lot. So if you need anything at all, anything we just go to the mall. That's like coming here, like, I just tend to want to go to the mall to get anything. But we don't really have, but we have a Walmart, but it's not like Walmart, but usually we just go to like a shopping mall... Walmart is just more like a, it's not called Walmart, but it's just like a grocery store. You know, like we have clothes and stuff, we don't shop for clothes there. But yeah... But in Malaysia you can get like really cheap. They've got a lot of boutiques in the mall, but they don't have boutiques in the mall here."

Theme 7: This place fits my lifestyle

"Hm...How do I describe that? Well I love to shop, I don't know, I love shopping. And I like to shop. I love the mall. I don't know. I just love shopping. [When I am at the mall I feel] excited, happy, I want to shop."

Theme 8: It is hard to find what fits with my style

"I guess, my way of purchasing stuff is through the mall. But they don't have anything here. They usually have everything in Walmart here. [I go to the mall] just because it's close. And I like to shop. Anyway, um, yeah, like I know Forever 21, like, we have Forever 21 in Malaysia and it's really big and it's really big here too. Which I guess, I'm kind of connected to that. Oh, like one thing it's really hard for me to get stuff here, I feel like clothes here just like the fall, everything, it's not me. I usually my style can be found in like boutiques and campus corner and stuff like that. But not in like the mall, I don't know, their clothing style is just not me. So it's really, really different. And it's more expensive, if you want to get like pretty stuff here, I guess.
They've got a lot of boutiques in the mall, but they don't have boutiques in the mall here."

Theme 10: People in this place are friendlier than back home

"Um, I feel like the service here in America is really good. Like...they're really, really friendly. Maybe I didn't notice, but I don't know, I just notice so much like service quality here in America than I used to. I don't know why. It's, it's like they pay more attention to you. I don't know.
But people here are just so friendly all around, like, in Oklahoma? Seriously, in Norman, especially. Like you can just talk to random people, they will say hi to you and smile to you. When I got here, it was just like whoa. That's different. It's weird in a good way. [If you smile] in Malaysia, people think you're creepy and like, why are you smiling at me? Like, why are you saying how are you? I don't even know you."

Theme 11: Place helped me realize standards are not the same everywhere

"Um, I guess it makes me realize that, um, like, like there are a lot of name brands in Malaysia that I think it really famous and popular, but when I got to the States, I just realized they're not famous here at all. Like for example like, hm, I don't know if you have heard of Mango. Mango. It's really, really famous in Malaysia and it's nothing here, nobody ever heard, well kind of, maybe a few, it's not really a big thing here. Um, so yeah, it kind of makes me realize that, I don't know, it kind of humbles me in a way. Because I...I took a lot of pride in having like name brands and stuff in Malaysia and having like Coach and stuff, I'm like, oh it's so cool. But then when I got here it's nothing, Coach is just like whatever, you know, like, people here really like other brands that I have never really heard of. What's the brand? Michael Kors. Like we don't even, maybe we have it in Malaysia, but it's not like a big thing for me at the time. So I don't know, it really humbles me to see like, you know, it doesn't mean the brand is famous it will be famous like all around the world, you know. Well like I said earlier, it, it, it has helped me to realize...that name brands are not the important anyway, you know? Like I think that, oh, I'm having the most expensive thing in the world in Malaysia, but then when I got here it's nothing here. So like it really humbles me and helps me to think like, brand conscious is not a good thing, I guess."

Theme 12: Place reminds me I must make decisions on my own

"Definitely, like, I, I was just so used to listening to my mom. But when I'm here, I'm alone, I mean, I go to shop with my boyfriend, which is not a good idea, cause he doesn't know about fashion. So I'll ask him, like, what do you think? Oh, it looks [fine]. But I'll be like really nervous, like I don't know, should I buy this? Should I not? I really want to buy this, it's my own money, I want to save some money for food, like I don't know. So it's hard, I get really nervous just to buy one [thing]. A pair of shoes, I'll be like, oh my gosh, I don't know if I'm like doing the right thing or not. Like when I was shopping in Malaysia, my mom would be there and she would be like, oh that's nice, that's not nice. Maybe [I miss my mom] a little bit."

Lan

Structural Description

Lan's narrative of relationships to places is one of challenges but also overcoming those challenges. Lan also found places that are affirming of her identity and her abilities. Although she reported feeling depressed for a long time, Lan sought out counseling and joined a dance school, where she found a profound love for ballet and also found inspiration and support to overcome her depression. For Lan, those places are central to her life and serve as a reminder that she has acquired the skills necessary to overcome any future challenges. Overall, the thematic structures underlying Lan's narrative are the following: a place where she encountered challenges, a place where she learned to cope with challenges, a place where she observed other people face challenges, the place where she learned to dance to overcome depression, the place where she became healthier, a place that is safe and a refuge, and a place that is a reminder of her ability to overcome challenges. Other thematic structures include her difficulties with roommates in her apartment, her acknowledgment that places at the university have more resources than her home country, places where she can reaffirm her ethnic identity, but also make her nostalgic about home. The remaining thematic structures focused on the role of places in helping her socialize with people, and the extent to which these places are part of her routine.

Lan referred to her office as being a place where she encountered culture shock. She reported people would not stop and greet her in the morning, and also remembered they did not reply to her greetings either. Lan remembered that for a long time she believed no one in her office liked her. In addition, she encountered language problems, as she had difficulty keeping up with the readings from class to the extent that she fell behind in many classes. She admitted to being depressed for those first 2-3 years and even seeking out counseling. Her counselor recommended that she find a physical activity and she found a dance school where she was also challenged by her lack of knowledge of ballet and where she would try to hide in the corner, watching others practice the steps.

Lan said eventually through her work in counseling she was able to accept that it was not her fault if other people did not talk or greet her in the department. Lan also referred to the progress she made in dance class, where she quickly picked up the steps and begun taking the lead in learning new techniques. Lan also benefitted from observing how other dance students faced challenges. Many of the people in her class are people without any experience dancing. Lan remembered being impressed with young students' determination to master the difficult ballet movements even if that entailed literally falling down while trying. Most of all, Lan was impressed by the students' ability to keep trying even after falling down in front of the class. Learning to dance was also a way for Lan to overcome her depression and finding confidence. She began attending classes for younger students where they learn more complicated ballet movements and even started doing pointe work. Lan commented on having a place where she can leave all her worries and just enjoy herself after a full day of stressful school or work. Lan credited her dancing as the turning point to take care of her health. She experienced a surge of energy every time she danced and this energy in turn gave her more resources to face difficulties.

Textural Description

Theme 1: In this place I encountered many challenges

"Because I used to have an office in another building, across the campus from where her office is, so whenever I need something, it's really hard for me to walk across the campus all the way there. Mm. In the beginning I guess, um, it's sort of, I guess, I had some culture shock. But I noticed in the beginning when I had the door open, I was sitting right there, close to the door, people would just walk by, they wouldn't look in, or they wouldn't stop to say good morning. And sometimes I saw people coming and I would say good morning, but maybe he didn't hear anything, just walked past it, and that would make me feel really bad. So when she came, I always said good morning or good afternoon, but I guess maybe I wasn't loud enough so a lot of times she just walked past and would go into her office and close the door. So for a long time, I believe that people hate me. I've sort of changed a lot over the time, in the beginning, I was mostly really frustrated about schoolwork. I was really slow in reading, and I wasn't very good talking to other people. When I go to lecture, I couldn't follow the lecture, so I mostly read the books on my own. So I feel I was really behind. And also I had a lot of problems just, um, dealing with people. So I was really worried and I think I need to work hard to get better. And sometimes I feel it, my hard work doesn't here. Every time I tell myself, just try one more semester. But I think I was really depressed for the first two or three years. Mm hm. I was, um, depressed, so I went to counseling."

"There are lots of dance schools around. So it's sort of, at the time, I didn't really believe me that I would pick up dance when I was 26 years old. I was 25, I think. I wasn't very good in the beginning, so I was always trying to hide in the corner doing something. And then when we started to do something new, I would stay in the tail and, and last, so I can watch other people do it more times."

Theme 2: In this place I learned to cope with challenges

"I think I just sort of accepted, I noticed that there are people here that are very nice, that they say good, good morning or hi to me all the time, but there's, there's certain people, it's just their way of life. It's not necessarily against you, or, um, so once I have learned that and accepted that, I think I'm mostly, um, become fine with that. But then I just sort of accepted that's the kind of person she is. But I think I got out of that after that. I was doing counseling for a while and it was really helpful. Um...it's also sort of a gradual, um, process. And she said then have in mind an ideal place that whenever you go there, you feel relaxed and happy, and it's all positive. And it doesn't need to be a real place, it can be imaginary. You can make it the way, however the way you like it."

"But I started to notice this change [in dance class] and now my teacher always want[s me] to stand in the front of the line. So the...so we usually in my class, it's a mixed class with more senior group and a more junior group. The senior, we're usually in the front and do it the first time."

Theme 4: In this place I learned from observing other people face challenges

"And I just really like the, what type of person [dance school students] are. They're very positive, very energetic. And very nice, so and also they're younger than I am. So I feel when I'm being with younger people, I feel younger. I like the, the kind of person they are. Um, they're mostly very positive. And I can see the way they deal with challenge. Like sometimes while we're learn[ing] a new step, that's really difficult, I see them, how to learn to do it and practice it, instead of stepping back and worried about that. Um, a lot of them, they were just the step towards the challenge and try to, even if you fall, but they, they're not worried about that. I really like that kind of mentality. And they're mostly really good students at school."

Theme 5: In this place I learned to dance to overcome my depression

"So you can start to try the adult class. So in the beginning I went to dance school, not to learn how to dance, but it's a way to get out of depression. I think it worked really, really well. Um, so I was in adult school for, uh, class for about a year, two years. And I think I got really, really, really much better on my, uh, mental state. But I also got better in my dancing. They, they try to stay safe. But I want to do all those thing[s], so I moved to small kids class and I started dance with 9 years old and...Yeah, yeah, I started to do all that kind of things. So now I think I really got into dance. And I just started to do point work. I know, I know. I love it. And it's also one place, if I have anything frustrating, or I was really sad about at school, I know once it's 5 o'clock, I go to dance school and I can just enjoy dancing there."

Theme 6: Dancing in this place helped me become healthier

"I think it gave me a lot of dopamine in my brain, because when you exercise, it gives you, it just makes you happy. And it makes you feel energetic. And when you're, you feel more energetic, you're better at dealing with things in your life. Yeah, it's

definitely a lot of changes in my body. So...before I started to dance, I would be hunched over, my back spine wasn't very straight. So you sit in front of a computer all day, and I couldn't stretch, I never do that. But now, I feel my posture has changed and you become more flexible, your muscles have been tuned much better, so you're more energetic. I think it really affects every way, because once I start to dance, I was really aware of my body. So I started to watch what I eat. I tried to eat healthier food. I tried to eat at the right time, or...And like just those, um...Yeah. I think once you start to eat more healthier foods, it's also physically gives you better [shape]. You just feel better. But it's also this mental feeling that I am eating healthier. It makes you feel good. So...And then I usually don't drink coffee, like two hours before I go to dance, because otherwise you shake. So it also forced me to change my habit, like I quit drinking so much coffee. And try to drink tea instead."

Theme 7: Place is a refuge, feels safe

"So when I go to that [dance school], I started to have, to become more comfortable and I stopped feeling so bad about myself. For a little while, it's sort of my refuge actually, when I was, it was one apartment I lived, I had a roommate and I didn't like her very much. And it's also one place, if I have anything frustrating, or I was really sad about at school, I know once it's 5 o'clock, I go to dance school and I can just enjoy dancing there. I can forget everything at school. It's just...very happy. So it's mostly positive there."

"Mostly feeling about home [when I go to the Asian market]. It's just a place that, um, I sort of feel in, I don't know how to describe, but when I was there, I could feel, this is my place."

Theme 3: This place reminds me of my ability to overcome challenges

"But I think as time goes on, it started to turn, and now it start[ed] to become good. So [my lab is] a place that reminds me this long way I have walked until this day. So whenever I, I feel bad about myself, or I didn't do really well on a test or something. Um, that place sort of remind me, I have come this far. So I'm sure I can go one more step. I've sort of changed a lot over the time, in the beginning, I was mostly really frustrated about schoolwork. It certainly makes it easier."

Theme 8: I do not like my roommates so I don't like my home

"So I had some memory that's slightly negative there. So I was using my office for everything. I only went home to sleep. And did everything else in my office. So can I add a little bit more? It's not in the question, but I really think where you live is a really important place. Um, anyways, I didn't have very much luck with my roommates so far, which is why I didn't mention that place. But I started to get, um, not so nice when she started to bring her boyfriend home. And they were very...they take the place totally like their home. And that way I can learn the language, I can learn a lot of the cultures. So I moved into a house that's mostly people from my department, they're all Americans.

So I liked it in the beginning. But then most of the people I moved in with graduated and new people came in. They're still all graduate students from my, um department, but I don't really like the way it is there. So it, it's sort of actually gives me a lot of negative impressions about American culture or American people. So... I want to move out. But sometimes, it depends on my financial, because it's really cheap to live there with other people. And I don't have a car, so I would want to live close to the campus."

Theme 9: This place has resources not available back home

"And my, in China, if people walk past the door, it's very normal for people to just stop by and say good morning or how are you?"

"There's beautiful view out of the window, which is something I never get in China. In China, we have a tiny office and 20 people packed in that tiny space. And there are not very many resources available. It's really hard to get online at all. So when I come here, I just feel even a professor in China wouldn't get such good space and everything you need there. So that makes me feel really, really good about it. It's just, um, yeah."

Theme 10: In this place I reaffirm my Chinese identity

"So just seeing all those foods I used to see all the time [at the Asian market]. But you're just so happy knowing you can eat this. I, I doubt if I can survive if there's no Asian stores here. Hm. First that's the place that I feel I'm a Chinese, and this is the place I buy whatever I want, I do, you know, whatever I wanted, my culture is do it my way. And there, I feel, here is my place, I know everything. And, and they ask me what's this? What's that? I explain the things to them. And also you go with the way you do it. So it's very important, just for me to have the food I'm most used to available there. And it's also really important for my mental state. Like...it's, it's the thing here that I feel like home. I said, a kitchen. Because I like cooking and when I am cooking, I'm always really happy."

Theme 11: This place makes me nostalgic about home

"I go buy all the food I love there. Yes. I don't think you can find, except for tofu, but the other stuff? It's, I don't find them here very often. So it's also, it's a chance for us to get all the food we like. Hm. It reminds me of a lot of things back in my own country. You know, that's sentimental sometimes. Like the food my mom made, um, yeah. All that kind of feelings."

Theme 12: In this place I socialize with people

"Uh, my adviser's office is right next door to the lab, so I feel that closeness to my adviser there. Makes me feel better, because if I have a problem with anything I need help, I know I can get there."

"And just in my work part or in my relationship with other people. I got to know a lot of, um, people in my dance class. And they're very nice, they're very helpful. And sometimes after rehearsal, we hang out with each other, go out eat. And they're, I really like them. And I do recitals sometimes. I will invite them to my performance. Hm, I

also want to talk about the people I dance with there. And I just really like the kind of person I am with there. So we started to, um, talk about some school stuff. So I would ask her, so suppose I'm in this situation, what would you suggest? I sometimes ask her, how do you balance your life? Sometimes we meet outside school and meet for lunch and we just talk about our lives, science, and dancing or something. It's really helpful. I really like it. Yeah. It's like a mentor outside my department. I usually go with my friends. We usually, um, carpool on the weekend. It's also a chance that after shopping, we usually go to an Asian restaurant and we eat. And so..."

Theme 13: Place is part of my routine

"I spend most of my time there. I usually do a lot of data analysis, a lot of writing, prepare for teaching there, I have my office hours there. We have meetings there, with my advisers or the lab meetings. I see it more as a place of associated with my work here. Because I mostly do my work there. I feel everything I achieved, almost everything I achieved I did it there. In one way, this office is really nice. And I really love it. There's everything I need there. I like it. I go there really often."

Lucia

Structural Description

The story of Lucia's relationships to places is deeply tied to her intent to feel at home in a different place where people and places are different. The relationships she has built to places reflect past relationships to places in her native country, as well as places where she does not feel she stands out from American students. Lucia was nostalgic about people walking around and even described the awkwardness she feels when walking to classes, wondering where everyone is. The themes underlying Lucia's narrative include: Familiar places, places where feeling content and relaxed, places that remind her of her home, places that facilitate social interaction, places where she is aware she is different from Americans, the fact that people in US do not walk on the streets, her having an advantage in adjusting to the community, and her missing seeing people walking and milling around her.

Lucia recognized the university's student union building as one where she felt comfortable in her own skin, where she did not stand out from other students. She observed that having a place that feels familiar gave her comfort in the beginning and continues to provide comfort even now. Lucia was able to blend in with everyone, doing the same as everyone else in this building. In addition, the student union building is a multipurpose building where students can study, eat, drink coffee, playing, or simply interacting with friends. Lucia felt at ease in this place, observing other students milling around, having coffee, and even taking a break from studying. There were several places in Lucia's narrative that were reminiscent of her home country. The first one was the student union building at the university, which was reminiscent of the student center building back in her home country. Lucia recalled how even the architectural style of the building was similar and it even shocked her at the beginning.

She also recalled having a similar routine at her university back home, where she would also go to the student center to socialize, work on homework, or have lunch. She also cited Campus Corner as a place that is reminiscent of her hometown in Colombia, as she noted that the narrow streets and people walking from restaurant to restaurant or bar reminded her of good times back home.

Places in Lucia's narrative also reflected their purpose as places that facilitated social interaction. Lucia described the student union building as the place where most international students hang out. In addition, she talked about the activities coordinated by international student organizations held in this building. For instance, Lucia mentioned having salsa nights and even a salsa ball at the student union building at least once a year. In addition, Lucia described Campus Corner as an important place where international students hold events and functions. She recalled going to restaurants in this area whenever there were orientations or for meetings of the Colombian Student Association, of which she is a member.

Lucia reported feeling keenly aware that she does not look and dress the same way as American students. She reflected on the similarity in style, manner of speaking, and overall dressing habits of American students and realized she looks different from them. In addition, Lucia observed that in Oklahoma people do not walk on the streets. She shared her surprise when she found out that even people who live on campus do not walk to campus, they would rather take the bus or ride their bikes to class. Lucia also shared the disconcerting feeling she gets whenever she walks down the empty streets, wondering where everyone is. Perhaps this is indeed a reflection of life back home, where people walk everywhere and the capital is such a densely populated area that it is normal to see many people milling around at all times of the day.

Another theme in her narrative referred to her being used to seeing people around her. She reflected on feeling lonely whenever she walked the streets in America. Lucia even shared she felt scared when the streets were lonely, wondering where everybody is. She lamented that most people in American would prefer driving instead of walking, especially in beautiful sunny days. Lucia also reflected that having been an exchange student before coming back for her master's gave her an advantage in terms of adjustment. Lucia said she perfected her English during that year as an exchange student, and in addition she had had a chance to become acquainted with the local culture.

Textural Description

Theme 1: This place was familiar and made me feel I fit in this place

"[This building] has affected me in the way that I, I have a place where if you like, comfortable being within, uh, even though this is not my home country, it's, I mean, I'm still going through this adaptation process, so just like something that is so familiar to me. Like something familiar.
Oh definitely. Definitely. I think if, uh, because I'm sure campus is just huge. Just because it was something familiar, that I was used to. I mean, you just sit there with

your computer and you see people doing the same thing, you sit there and you fit. Because you fit, you, you feel like you fit, because you're doing what people are doing. You're sitting with your computer and eat. Emotions. Uh, I feel content as well. It's just, uh, it, I feel happy, I just, I'm having a hard time, you know, identifying that, because it's not like I'm here and then I go there and all of suddenly I'm happy. Yeah. Actually, yeah. Uh, because actually whenever I want, if I'm stressed out, I just want to like, just like, get away for a few minutes, I go there."

Theme 2: This place makes me feel content, relaxed

"The [student] union has a lot of rooms where you can just go study, or study at a coffee shop and places, so I really like the union to just go hang out and study, read, or something like that. So I just like to be there. Oh maybe like go grab lunch or go have a coffee in our free times with anybody, anybody at that school, even my brother. But before I just liked to go there, just like, get my computer, sit there see people walking around, get a coffee, because that was one of my favourite things to do, just go get a coffee and sit. I just like hang out. Um, so that's what I do. It makes me feel okay. I mean, not very happy, but also not sad. Just okay. I...Yeah, exactly. That's the word you just said, [content]. I mean, even if I'm by myself and I'm just having coffee at Starbucks, I like it. But nothing happened. But, uh, it's just, I feel, I feel, it's not a place that I wouldn't want to be. Yeah. Actually, yeah. Uh, because actually whenever I want, if I'm stressed out, I just want to like, just like, get away for a few minutes, I go there, I have a coffee, that's mainly what I like to do, go have coffee. Just go have coffee and then go back to my homework or my readings. It helps me to relax. That's good."

Theme 3: Places remind me of home

"Well I do like, uh, the entrance of the union, like the back one, it even looks just like the entrance of my school back home. So I do like it a lot. And it reminds me home. Uh, so I do like it a lot. And I also like the union itself because we, at my university back in Colombia, we have like a place that serves the same purpose. Even though I'm here, you see it, and it's just like, but it's not like any special relationship, you get that flashback. Oh, like it's very old. Like it is very old shape and, you know, the wooden work there and then you enter and it's just this huge building. Because my university has a, it's modern, but it has, I mean, it, it has the old structure back in maybe 100 years ago. So like it has very old buildings as well. Yeah, but it was just like the first shock. I, I just getting used to it, so you kind of forget about it. But the first time, it's like, oh, and it was like the third day of, I was here. So I remember that. Oh. I was homesick by then. I remember, so seeing that, it was like, oh, very like oh well, I'm here. But then I was an exchange student, so I knew I was eventually going back within the 5, 6 months. So it was like, I'll be fine. I'll just go back home in 5 months."

"Oh, [the student union is] special just because I kind of do the same routine, like back home. I used to go to class, and in my breaks, I used to just go there, chill there, eat lunch there, uh, and it's kind of serves the same purpose as the building in my university. Just like I used to do back home. So it's just nice. Even though it's different, and it's just like, you know, it has affected me, but it hasn't changed me really."

“Hm. Campus Corner. Because it looks like, um, we do have a campus corner in Bogota, that’s where I’m from. So we go like out, uh, during the weekends, or Friday night and we just go have dinner, go drink something or something like that. I was there and I’m like, oh, that looks just like the door, uh, one of my buildings at my school. So it’s just like, it reminds me home. And since, since everything is kind of new for me here, I actually had a place where I could go and feel comfortable and not feel like foreign. It reminds me...Yeah, it just reminds me. I wish I had pictures. It’s just the same architecture, it’s the same like, yeah... The small streets where you just walk to, from some, from one place to the other place and you just like go eat or have a drink. Or have coffee, or whatever.”

Theme 4: Places facilitated social interaction

“Oh because, uh, I remember when we had the orientation for international students [at the student union]. Not really. No specific thing. Not really. Just like you see a lot of people walking there. So just, if you’re there and you happen to run into somebody just like sit together and chat for a few minutes. It’s a place where, I mean, you can go and do that. Yeah, you don’t have classes there, so people are just very, just there to study or eat. And the social interaction as well. However, when I’m like, uh, hanging with international students, even though we come from different parts of the country, or of the world, it seems like you fit with each other. It’s just like that connection, but not with the Americans. It’s just like, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Plus, at the Union you see a lot of international students for some reason. Yeah. I go there and do salsa sometimes. Yeah. They had, uh, the whole salsa classes, like once each semester and then they have this big salsa ball every semester as well. Oh no, [there are not a lot of salsa clubs here] not a lot. There’s just one, I’ve been few times, but it’s not very good.”

“Uh, [Campus Corner is important] especially when you’re new here and you’re trying to, uh, network with people, meeting people, meeting friends, just like going there it’s like, you actually get to hang out with people. Well, I did meet a lot of people there. When, when I first came here, uh, they do a very good job holding like, uh, international students, uh, getting to know each other, parties and events. That orientations and parties, so pretty much they all, they have them at Campus Corner in some sort of place there. So, yeah, I did meet a lot of people there. And it’s just nice. And also well, I don’t think it matters, but we do have, OU has a big, big, uh, Colombian Student Association. I don’t know if you know about it. It’s called COLSA. And they do a great job, uh, helping international students, uh, and they contact them beforehand, before they come here, before they get here, they pick them up at the airport. Yes, they have a lot of gatherings. Like Colombian, uh, Colombian dinners, uh, Colombian parties, just like getting together so that really helps.”

Theme 5: In this place I am aware I am different from Americans

“And sometimes you need that kind of reminder to, you know, make you aware you’re not there, you’re here, but yet...But it’s different. Uh, yes. Well, it’s just, it might be a

stereotype, but American people they all look the same to me. How girls dress and how guys dress, they're all the same to me. So you feel like these girls, they act the same, and dress the same, and talk the same way. Huh,[I realize] I do look different [from them]."

Theme 6: In the US people do not walk on the streets

"And in the States, as a rule, you don't really see people walking in the streets. But, uh, if you were, you were to walk in a street, you wouldn't see any people walking. But if you were to walk main street or Lindsey or stuff like that, if you don't see people. Even because, you know where Traditions is? That's where I live. Uh, I think I'm, I am one of the few people that walk to campus. Uh, because everybody takes the bus, or everybody has a car, or everybody rides bikes, rides bike, even walking from there to campus, you don't see anybody else walking. I mean, you see people, but it's not like, wow. It's like, where, where is everybody? Like, you know, I'm guessing everybody's like in their offices or in class or just like driving a car. It's just like, it's such a beautiful day, why aren't you walking? Also because of time. But, uh, I'm like, where is everybody?"

Theme 7: I am used to seeing people around me

"Just like, I mean, you see a lot of people around campus, just because they walk to classes. So just like, that people, like entering and exiting the university, allows you to see people around, see people walking around, get a coffee. Yeah, I, I don't, yeah, I do not like to not see people
I don't know, that like loneliness feeling stupid from not feeling anybody around you. Yeah. And just like see people and stuff. So...When I, I don't know, like, I mean, as I told you, like around campus, you always going to see people. For some reason, it scares me to not see anybody. So I do like to be around people. I don't like crowds, but I like to see people walking and just like...
Yeah, you don't see people [here]. Oh, what is it like? Uh, it's just like, it's weird. Itself. I know it's a cultural thing, people just rather drive, instead of walk. That's why I like Campus Corner as well. Especially in the summertime, because you actually do see people around, coming from Starbucks to eat at, I don't know...Pad Thai whatever places are there at Campus Corner you actually see people walking. It's a nice environment."

Theme 8: I had some advantages in adjusting to new place

"When I'm in this place, if I go now, doesn't really make any difference, because I'm, I'm getting adjusted to life here. Well, I think, for me, uh, coming here before, because, uh, when I was an international student before, I lived in Kansas City, me coming here before, actually helped me, you know, adjust easier than somebody that never came to the U.S., would have, so I think that contributed a lot to my adjustment. Because I, I was, I was really like a little bit familiar with the culture. Yeah, you have to pass the TOEFL to be able to get here, yeah. But yeah, so I think that makes it a little bit easier

for me."

Manu

Structural Description

Manu's narrative of relationships to places is one of new experiences, meeting people, growing as a professional, and meeting people from all over the world. In general, Manu seemed to feel the campus and specifically the building where he takes classes and conducts his research are a part of him. He values the people he met in the campus, but above all, he valued learning about himself and about the possibilities of the future. The structural themes underlying Manu's narrative are: places where he experienced new things for the first time, places where he focuses on his future career, places that helped him realize American people are kind, places that foster social interaction, places with pleasing aesthetic and design, places that enhanced academic knowledge and expertise, places that facilitated professional development and interaction, places that help him focus, places that feel part of himself, and places that are part of his everyday routine.

All the places Manu mentioned in his narrative are places that frame his first experiences in America. For example, he mentioned Reeve's Park, which is the first party he attended upon arriving in the US. Another place he mentioned is the student union building, which is the place where he first visited upon arriving at the university. He recalled going to the building to get his student ID and also cited this place as the first one where he interacted with university staff. In addition, he recalled taking pictures of himself with other newly arrived Indian international students inside and outside this building, where he had his first lunch in the US. Many also shared that he attended the first-in-his-life foam dance in this building, which was a completely new experience for him. Manu also talked about the experiences in his academic department building, where he was first trained on his degree requirements, the educational system, research, and just overall became familiar with the workings of the university.

Manu also associated the student union building with his career prospects for the future. For instance, he reported attending several career fairs and on-site interviews held at this building. He also recalled attending an awards ceremony for trailblazers in his engineering field, where he also had the opportunity to network with companies sponsoring cutting edge research in his department. Manu also mentioned having a relationship to oil companies through his research, as they provide funding for his lab. He credits his exposure to the dynamics of working in his lab to gaining understanding about how corporate entities work and what they expect from their engineers.

Manu reported he lives on campus and specifically referred to his surprise at the kindness of American people. He recalled that upon his arrival him and a friend went to Walmart by bus to buy everything they needed to live in their empty apartment. Manu said that on the way back they were carrying many bags and even though the bus

dropped them off close to their apartment they still had a long way to walk in the middle of a burning hot summer day. Many recalled that a lady stopped her car and offered to give them a ride home in view of all the stuff they were carrying. Manu said him and his friend declined, but was forever astounded that a stranger would sincerely offer help without expecting anything in return. He also referred to such a display of kindness being rare in his home country, and added that if a stranger offers help back home it is often an indicator of suspicion. This incident is reflective of Manu's perception of American people through other interactions with staff, students, and faculty in his department.

The places Manu perceived association with were also places that facilitated and fostered social interaction. Through his academic department he met other graduate students from India who immediately became closer upon arrival. He cited the student union building as a place where he met other international students through attending events like a foam dance, tailgating for game day, and also events coordinated by international student organizations including their celebration of Indian Independence organized by the Indian Students Organization. Manu also recalled meeting a lot of good friends when he attended his first party at Reeves Park, which was organized by international student services, specifically mentioning a friend who is still close in spite of having moved out of state. Manu also recalled the opportunity to interact with many international students during their celebration of Diwali at the same park.

Manu referred to his perception of the architecture of the campus as straight out of a Harry Potter movie. He seemed to feel pride in attending a school that has a sense of greatness and tradition. He also recalled other Indian students often take pictures of themselves in this hall to share with family back home and to show them the resemblance of the library to the Great Hall from the Harry Potter series. Another important aspect of Manu's narrative is his relationship to his academic department and the influence it had on his acquisition of in-depth knowledge of his field. Although he was a professional engineer back in India, Manu recalled not knowing many intricate aspects of petroleum engineering. He credits this place with learning more about petrol-physics, the field he hopes to enter as a Ph.D. level engineer.

In addition to knowledge, Manu also referred to his professional development in the academic department building. He reported being a graduate assistant working in a big petroleum lab on the same building, and working with about 12-13 other Gas plus many undergraduate lab assistants and faculty members. Manu acknowledged their work is interrelated and must be synchronized for the lab to produce the outcomes sponsoring companies expect. He reported learning to mentor and interact with undergraduate lab assistants, as well as encouraging them to pursue a graduate degree in engineering. Manu felt pride in the fact that many of his undergraduate lab assistants applied and were accepted to the petroleum engineering program. Manu took even more pride in having mentored American students who went on to graduate school, as he observed most of the faculty and graduate students in his department are international with very few American students pursuing graduate degrees.

Manu observed that being inside his academic department building immediately leads to his focusing on studies, on his work. He especially referred to the machines in his lab, which grab his curiosity and produce excitement about conducting research. Manu shared that his mental state is laser-focused when he is in this building. Manu expressed having a special bond to his academic department building and to the university in general. He plans to graduate next year, and even expressed feeling nostalgic and sad about leaving the campus upon graduation. Manu expressed the feeling that the university is a part of him that will always stay with him no matter where he goes. The academic department building housing Manu's graduate program is also a part of his everyday life, as he reported spending many hours in this building taking classes or in his lab conducting research. Manu even referred to spending more time in this building than in his own apartment.

Textural Description

Theme 1: This place provided first new experiences in the US

"The second thing will be Reeve's Park. The reason is because I had my first year party there, so that was the first get together I had when I came to Norman, so that's why I define myself with the Reeve's Park."

"And the third one is the Memorial Union, because I have been going there since, since a very long time. Because, uh, uh, when I came from India, it was the first place I came to. And, uh, when I came here, uh, I never knew how things are in America, it was my first time here. Okay. So it was 8th of September, 2011, we had our first year party, so the India Student Association, uh, the previous, uh, uh, years, guys whoever they are, they just, uh, whenever new students come in, they want to welcome them. Okay, it started with, uh, when I first went to the union for my ID. I got down at south hall from the Lindsay east bus and I went there to, uh, Oklahoma Union to, for my ID. Uh, so that was the first time I went there, uh, and the first time I interacted with anyone who, who is an OU staff."

"So we have those events as well, uh, that happen there. So, uh, I have been to OMU for a lot of times, I went to that side where they have this, uh, cart, it's the, during the football games. I don't know what they call it. Yes, sooner cart. Because that was the first place I went, so we started taking pictures. No I think I almost talked almost everything. Yes, I had my, the, for initial three days, I had my lunch at OMU. So, so that was...Yes. That was the best one. Um, I mean, it, it has been one of the starting footsteps at OU, where I, uh, came across OMU. So...yes. Yes. I had my first foam dance at OMU."

"So, uh, the experiences at Sarkeys are always the first ones that have trained me in the process, I would say. Uh, the state of mind, yes, because I became much more familiar about how I should be going about things, how things are, because the education system is different and during those interactions, we also came about, uh, they told us how

things are here, how you should be looking at your course work, how many credit hours you should be taking mostly if you have a thesis option or something like that."

Theme 2: Place allows me to focus on future career

"Whenever I, I have interviews, whenever there are some things related to career, they're always there at OMU. So I define myself with that as well. And we have, uh, two consortiums running in our lab, so there are, uh, almost 18 big oil and gas companies who are forming our consortiums. So we are getting our money from that. So, uh, they send us a lot of, uh, data to us. And we need to analyze it. And we are working on rocks, so we need to do a lot of experiments on those rocks. So they send their rocks to us. Because a rock is where petroleum comes from, right? I mean, we don't want this to be done, I mean, they are, they are big companies who are funding us, they don't want their data to be screwed up. So, uh, it is very good. It has been a great interaction with them. [With] undergraduate students, and lab assistants, and the professors, and the company guys. If results are not coming, they can very harsh, especially Dr. X, because he says that the companies are feeding you and if you don't feed you, they will not feed us. So that was, uh, nice, and then I started with the resource fairs and all those things. I always went to OMU for that. And then, uh, when interviews started in fall, I was again at OMU giving my interviews and since fall 2012 through now, I have been there almost 10 times for interviews. So I have had a lot of interviews there, so yes. So, uh, I mean, so I associate this place more with the career sort of, uh, thing. And, uh, whenever there are some social gatherings, like we have this trail blazer or MPG, the School of Petroleum and Geological Engineering, as this trail blazer award for the person that sponsors him the most, things like that. Um, surely it does, because, uh, as I said, I look, uh, I associate more with OMU, in terms of jobs kind of, right? And that's the future. So yes it, it does change me, because that is the place where I have got opportunities to talk to some very good recruiters from top companies. So, uh, yes, that has helped me in a way, because, uh, even though one interview go good, it trains you for the next one. So, uh, it has changed me for sure."

Theme 3: Place helped me realize American people are kind

"So, uh, and when I came here, it was, uh, a very supportive environment. So every place I found, uh, that people were really good. They were, uh, they were accommodating the international students so well. So, uh, and especially the staff at OU. They know that the students come from such great distances, they don't know anything, and they have to be helped. And even the apartments, when I went to search for apartments, the, the people there were very, very helpful. I mean, sometimes I felt like they went out of the way and helped me. Uh, we were, it happened one day, maybe it's out of context, but I would like to mention this. But one day, we were very new, we, never knew about the bus routes here. I and my roommate, we thought that, uh, we had just shipped into our apartment, we don't have curtains, we don't have anything else, so, uh, let's go and buy those things. But not many of our friends were having cars at that time. So and we went to a bus stop and we never knew about car GPS.com. And then we never knew when is the bus going to come. And we were standing, uh, there in August in the month of August, super hot, and it was almost 2 or 3:00 in the afternoon

and, uh, the bus came, that's fine. We went to Walmart, did our shopping. And when we returned, our hands were full, we had this laundry basket, all these things, pillows, etc. It was, uh, totally full and it was very heavy. But then this female, she was just passing by, she had a car, she was in a car actually, so she could have crossed easily, but we saw that she's just standing, uh, there, she has just parked her car and, uh, she's probably looking at us, waiting for us. And then when we lease that that place, she says that are you guys, do you guys live in Kraetli, do you want any help? Should I drop you at any place? This generally does not happen in India, I'm telling you. So we were like, but in India, you, even if someone offers help, you won't take it, because it can be dangerous. That's the same thing that went inside my mind as well. So she went, but that was a really kind gesture. After some time I realized that, no, that's the way people are here. People are always helpful. That was a kind gesture that's still embedded in my mind after two years. I carry that impression of America still. So, uh, those people were very nice, they are still there actually. Because a few days ago I went to get a bus permit, ticket. So those people are still there, all of them."

Theme 4: Places foster social interaction

"Everyone else is international, in Master's and PhDs, I mean, not in the undergrad. Because some of my friends have been to OU for an internship for two or three months before. So I had interaction with them. No I met them before, but, uh, it was only during that time that we, uh, gelled in more, because we...right? So we were more into like no we are a team and all those things. So you there are 5 who came from the same company. So that was very good, that I already had some previous faces to recognize myself with. So that was good."

"So they have this small party, where everyone goes there and a bit of dance, a bit of introduction and just having food and, uh, coming back. That's the basic thing. And during that process, you also have some games, so, uh, and, uh, the previous year students, they associate with the current students, all of them. They mix in the teams, so whenever there are, there are two friends, they will, they will just part them that no, let's mix together. So and then, uh, we'd have some games, team games, mostly. So, uh, that's a very good way to associate with new people, to know them, things like that and you build friends in that process. So, uh, that was the start I had at, uh, Reeve's Park. I, I found a very good friend in Sonya, she's right now in California, but I, I had found her there and she has been a really good friend. I mean, we have, we have almost a group of 15 students. And she's one of them, she has left now, but, uh, I found her there. Yeah. I wouldn't say any specific person as such. One of them, I said, uh, Sonya, there was, I mean, when I, when I, when I came to OU, I started living in Springfield Apartments with some friends, so they were all there."

"So the new student group and, uh, some of the old students, like there was this guy from China Hinhou. I associate myself with him as well, because he was also very supportive to us. So I associate myself with him as well, because he was a very important member during the whole process. And then these guys who I was living with when I first came to Norman, they were all there. So I associate myself. Yes I just came to know, because these students were, uh, uh, when old students already introduced

them, uh, when the new students introduced and the old ones came and then they also said that we are, I'm this, I am that, and then they were telling some, some basic experiences about what they have had in Norman. So, uh, they were, so that helped us to, it was a sort of training for us that when you are here, these are the things that we would recommend you do, that you should be doing those, or you should not be doing those, things like that. So that was a, a helpful experience in those initial days, now it's a part and parcel of everyday life, so I'm trained in that. Uh, the most important feeling was that I'm not alone. I have people here. And they are friends here. I mean, even though, uh, you find a supportive environment in OU, which is always a good part, but when you find someone from your nationality in the very beginning, you feel nice about it. That, uh, and that gave me some support, that yes I have some people here. Initially it is important, so yes, it trained me in that sense, that I became prepared for the future. And this very good suggestion that came from them that was always take care of your health, don't go very frequently to the campus corner, try to cook yourself, otherwise you grow fat. Don't gain weight and all those things."

"This, I have this, I have this one more experience about Reeve's Park that I would like to mention, that on the 31st of March, this year, a few days ago, actually, we have this festival in India, which is known as Diwali and it's a festival of colors, it's a harvest festival mostly. So this is the time when wheat is cut and India is an agricultural dominated country. So they celebrate this, the farmers, basically. But now it's a part of the whole tradition. Everyone celebrates it. So we had the celebration here, at Reeve's Park. So, uh, everyone were from India or from US, from China, Thailand, many people came there, all of us played with colors, powdered colors. Uh, so we started playing, uh, and then, uh, when the colors got exhausted, the previous night we had a lot of rain and there was hail and all those, so we, we started throwing each, all of us in mud puddles. So, so that was a very nice experience. That gave me an opportunity to interact with more with, uh, some international crowd. Because, uh, by doing graduate studies always don't get time to interact with Americans and with, uh, the international crowd, a lot of times, because I'm mostly busy there. But these kind of social gatherings give you a time to do so. So and plus, you, the, the, the premise of playing huli is don't mind it's huli. So you can do anything you want. But then you can do most of the things, people will throw eggs at each other. Yes. So, uh, it, it's very good, it gave me an opportunity to, uh, to be associated more with people and if you do such crazy things, it, uh, you, you find yourself more associated with people sometimes. You build better relationships that way."

"So that was the first time I went there, but then 15th of August is India's Independence Day. And on 14th of August, we had, uh, a small celebration, uh, about, uh, for Independence Day of India, that was again in OMU. And that the first time I was able to interact with students from India, the previous students. Because we were just, I was just, I came on 11th of August of so and it was 14th, so that's three days, I got a chance to talk to all of them and celebrate the Independence Day of India in America. And I am sure you will agree with me. So, so, um, it's, it's a very beautiful place and a very good center for students to, um, interact socially. And social gatherings can be, uh, done

really easily there. There are some games sort of things. A Starbucks. You have, if you want to, the later you go there, so, uh, it, it has never been, I mean, every 10 days I went to OMU for sure."

Theme 5: This place's aesthetic is pleasing

"Even though I've not, in fact, there's a library, when we were new, we just went there, because we, I searched on Wikipedia Bizell Memorial Library, because it's written that it's a very old library. So I just read about it when, uh, I went to that great reading room, it almost felt like I'm in Harry Potter movie, the dining hall, I always feel like that . And whenever all of us, the Indians, when we talk about that Great Reading Hall Library, we always talk about that great reading hall and associate it with the Harry Potter movie. Because you have so many, they have, I mean, the aesthetics, uh, aesthetic sense of people who designed OMU [and the library] is very good, I feel so."

Theme 6: This place enhanced my academic knowledge and expertise

"So as I said that Sarkeys is the home of the petroleum engineering department. But, uh, coming to OU, it was a premiere institute in petroleum engineering; it attracts number 3 in the US for petroleum. They have a lot of experience, they have a lot of knowledge with them and, uh, so working with these kind of professors, taking their courses and all of that, has, uh, changed me, I would say, because, uh, the, my technical expertise was in one aspect of petroleum engineering before this. And, uh, I mean, this is the previous aspect, which is known as resonance engineering, to which I was, I was working in, uh, so petrol-physics and petroleum engineering are like, uh, sisters to each other. So they are very interrelated, but I was not aware of this aspect so much. I mean, I just had some basic idea. But no I've been working in this for like two years or so. So, uh, I would really say that, uh, it has given me a lot of exposure. So, uh, my knowledge has increased."

Theme 6: This place facilitates professional development and interaction

"And we are about 12, 13 GRAs, plus our two professors and it's a big crowd and I mean, those are the people I associate most with within that place. Okay, so, uh, we are, all of us, the graduate students, we are dedicatedly working towards one of the projects, one of the, uh, topics, and our topics are interrelated amongst each other. Yes, because, uh, generally in petroleum engineering, I don't know about other specific things, but in petroleum engineering, there are, out of 16, there are only 2 or 3 Americans. So, uh, so it's all international crowd. The most interaction that we have is always there are some chitchat, some jokes going on, but most of the interactions are related to the work. Because our works are interrelated, we are dependent on each other, the outputs of one project are an input to the other many times."

"So there's, uh, uh, very synchronized relationship amongst us so, uh, that's the kind of relationship. So we need to analyze those. So these undergrads, uh, because in summers they are free, so a lot of them are there and they are, uh, doing this consortium work, the

basic work that has to be done, the ground-level work which is an input for every graduate student and which every company wants to see, it's a basic set of data that has to be connected all the time. So they have to be explained, they have been cases when students have not been able to get what they are doing and there have been troubles and we had to say that no you are doing it wrong. And then these undergrads were the people, I mean, if there are 10 undergrads, you have 20 hands working for you, right? So all those 20 cannot work for you alone, but yes, of course maybe one or two can and you yourself have two hands. So if you get those, get that kind of support, then it's very fruitful. And I have had, uh, great support from them as well. And it has been, uh, symbiotic sort of relationship, they have learned in the process. Because if they work with me, they get to know about my thesis as well. And that prepares them for the future. Because probably, because I have been inspiring them that see, uh, out of 60 people, I don't see many Americans doing, doing, uh, graduate studies, so I think you guys should go, I'm very happy that, uh, those people who are there in summers, who I used to talk to, three of them have applied to graduate school now. So, uh, it is very good. It has been a great interaction with them. [With] undergraduate students, and lab assistants, and the professors, and the company guys. So it was so good. And then during that time, he said that, uh, I feel that, uh, since you have been doing a great job as a TA, I think that you can be a RA as well. Me. So it was then that he offered me a research assistantship and I started working in the lab in May last year. Or...So every one or two days [my supervisor] will come to you and he'll just ask, how things are going? Is there any problems? What are the results like? Things like that."

Theme 7: This place helps me focus

"Uh, not, not, not any changes in the body, I would say, but yes, changes in the mind, because when you are, when you are near all those things, who you work with, I mean, you have your machines right next to you, and I mean, I was always interested in mechanical engineering kind of stuff, so machines always interest me. Whenever I see machines, I'm interested in them. So my brain starts working a bit more when I'm there. So...Yes. Yes, so I reach that kind of state of mind, so, uh, yes, I would say I reach a different kind of mental level when I'm there, not physically, but mentally I am in the changed a bit."

Theme 8: This place is a part of me

"And these days in the lab, I spend nights, so Sarkeys is a second home, actually to me. So, uh, that's why I define myself with this place more. Uh, I would say, I'm almost completing two years and, uh, probably I'll defend by July and maybe I'll go, but I'll definitely be back. Generally that happens, but I would say, even I'm a Master's Student, but I would associate myself to OU a lot. Because I associate myself with this place. So when I was walking through this place, I was like, we should, you guys should come here and take some pictures before we leave OU. I was walking this morning, so it, it's, uh, for me a nostalgic feeling to leave OU. I associate myself a lot with these buildings, these labs. Every, every place. Uh, I would say, uh, since most of my life has been at Sarkeys while I've been at OU, so, uh, my experience at Sarkeys are always the

ones that I carry outside, whenever I go anywhere within Norman or to any other place. That was Reeve's Park, but I don't think I would have a lot, a lot to say about it, because I just associate myself with it, cause I have had a very good experience there. But I cannot say so much about Reeve's Park as I did about Sarkeys."

Theme 9: This place is a part of my routine, everyday life

"I have been there almost two years now. And I have my lab there, uh, in which I'm working as a GRA. So, uh, I mean, I have attended all my classes at Sarkeys, so and all the teachers are there, go ahead and meet them all them all the time, attend the classes there, there are computer labs there. Where I spend almost nights, I have spent nights. I stay in Sarkeys more than my home, I only go to my home to sleep and then come back to Sarkeys the next day again. Within Sarkeys, the thing that stands out is my work in the lab."

Maria

Structural Description

Maria's narrative of relationships to places is one permeated by the importance of family. Almost every place she mentioned in her story has a tie to her family. However, within that overall theme there were other specific thematic structures in her narrative: place that presented challenges, place that debunked stereotypes, family is part of this place, having a place of comfort, places where there are fun memories, places that facilitated meeting other Filipino families, places that feel familiar, and places that are part of her own self, and places that make life normal.

Maria first referred to the challenge of relocating her family of 5 from the Philippines to the US when her mother started graduate studies in the US. She remembered they stayed in a small apartment for about 2-3 months and specifically recalled feeling life was "crazy" when you try to put a family of five in a small apartment. Maria also recalled her having to adjust to a different school system, as she had attended a private school back in her home country. She referred to the shock of realizing that not everyone "looked" the same in school.

Maria's school experience debunked her previously held stereotypes of attending public school in the US. She was afraid of bullying and by having to choose one of the many groups traditionally depicted in American movies: the nerds, the popular kids, and the football players. However, Maria found everyone to be nice to her in the local high school. The family home is a very important place in Maria's life, one that is deeply connected with her family. She mentioned she attended a college in California for a semester but missed her family and her home too much and moved back to Oklahoma. Maria attends the local university but lives with her family in the same home they bought upon arriving to the US.

Maria's home is also a place of comfort, a place to relax at the end of the day. She referred to being able to leave the day behind and feel comfort as soon as she is home. Being with her family in this place is a source of comfort as well, as Maria reported being able to be herself without having her guard up. A tradition in Maria's family was visiting Lake Murray and they have been doing this since they first arrived to the US. Maria talked about having many fun memories made in this place and specifically recalled the time when her little dog pooped in the middle of the lake and everyone started to get out disgusted. Maria said going to the lake in the summer time was the ideal escape from the dry, hot summers in the Midwest.

Two places that facilitated interaction with other families were the university and the lake. Maria said her mother's professors and coworkers were welcoming and helpful when they first arrived. Maria remembers their first Thanksgiving they were invited to dinner by a faculty member and also recalled getting connected with a church through her mother's coworkers. Maria also valued her being able to interact with other Filipino families through vacationing at Lake Murray. She recognized the difficulty of finding other Filipino families in the area, but recalled being able to form a bond with the families they met through their road trips to Lake Murray.

For Maria, home is a place that is familiar, a place where she has lived for 5 years now. The university is also a familiar place, as her mother now works at the university after earning her graduate degree. Although she knows the university, she is also able to be more independent and do things on her own, which makes this place even more meaningful in her life. Maria experiences the family home as a part of herself. Maria referred to her home as a place that is her own and where the significant people and things inhabit her daily life. Maria's home and the university also provide stability and a sense of normalcy to her life. She reported feeling connected to the university, and in turn associating the campus with her own growth. Maria even credits the university with her developing the ability to adjust to life thanks to the people who helped her mom, and now with the development of her newly found independence. Maria also commented on having a home as being the first "normal" thing in her life after relocating to a new country. Thus, her home seems to be the place where she first found a sense of normalcy upon arriving in a foreign land.

Textural Description

Theme 1: This place presented challenges

"Um...Well, I don't really know if it changed me, but affected, obviously, it's different from what I've been used to back in the Philippines. Um, I don't know, like, back home, well obviously I was younger then, I couldn't like make my own decisions, but when I think of OU, I feel like, well it's a college, so obviously people here grow and people mature. I was like freaked out, cause it's like a whole new thing. Um, I guess just, um, it was, we were busy the first like few months, we were buying a house, getting like cars and, like get, getting settled in. So I guess we didn't really have time to like do anything social. Like when we came here, it's like, like what do we do now? Um...I

guess it's like the first thing that we actually did when we came to the U.S., it's like the first thing we did was like buy a house. Um, I guess, yeah, like what I said, it's like, when we came here to the US, it's like, it's like a big, big change. Like when I came here we stayed at an apartment for like 2 months and it was real, like we're a family of five. And we're crazy. So we can't really like, contain ourselves and like a three bedroom apartment, because it's like, it's small. And back in the Philippines, we used to live in like a big house. So it's like, this is crazy, like you know it's, it has changed. Like when we came here, when we came to our apartment, it's changed. Like when, when I came here, it's like, it's obviously different, like going, I went to a private school in the Philippines. No, I thought it was going to be harder. Um, it's like, what, back in the Philippines, it's like a, like my classmates is like my own demographic, you know what I mean? It's like that's us. Like that freaked me out at first. But going to Norman High didn't, they didn't really have any like groups."

Theme 2: My experience here debunked my stereotypes

"And going to a public school here, like Norman High, it's like, it's a lot bigger and it's crazier. But like Norman High, there's like rich people and not so rich people. And like everybody's in the same place, which is kind of weird for me at first and it's like, I don't know, it was weird at first. But I found good friends and settled and it was good. Yeah, but actually it was like so nicer than I thought it would like, you know, like, movies, um, high, high school in movies, like crazy, the popular kids and whatever. And like in the movies, it's like, oh my god, they're going to bully you cause you're like this or whatever. I didn't really experience that at Norman High, there wasn't like the main people bullying like the nerds or like the football players bullying someone. I feel like everybody was nice at Norman High. And whenever I talk about, I talked about it with different like people here at OU that didn't go to Norman High, that went to like a school in Texas or something. And they would always like tell me that they got bullied like in 8th grade or something, that didn't really happen in my school. It's like, that's what I think of, but now I like stereotype it to what I see from Norman High."

Theme 3: My family is a part of this place

"Well, [when I think about my home I] just [think about] my family in general. [I moved to California] and I didn't like it, so I came back. And just like, lived at home, like I don't even dorm right now, I like live with my family. So...My family [is very important]."

Theme 4: This is a place of comfort

"But [being at home] like, it's, it relieves the stress. Relaxed, really, because you don't, like, you don't really think of anything, you don't think of school or like when you're just there. Um, and, um, it's like a comforting place, I guess. So it's very comforting knowing that, and going there, going home every single night, it's like, this is ours and like when you're having a bad day, it's one thing, it's just like it's good to just like lay in your bed and like scream or something. Um, that, like I guess the comfort, it brings comfort. And like going home, it's just like, ah, it's like you kind of like take that all, take that off in your mind and just like, come home and my family was here.

So...Um...Um...[when I am home I feel] more like relaxed, I guess, cause I'm at home and not really like guarded, well I'm not really guarded, but you know how like it just like, oh your guard just like wears off."

Theme 5: This is a place of fun memories

"Then, um, Lake Murray, it's always fun there every summer. But we would go there, um, since I came there, um, that was, I've never really been like, Thunderbird, I guess everybody goes there from here, but my family's always like, drove like two hours to Lake Murray. It's much bigger and I think it's fun. Um, we camp most of the time. Um, but sometimes we just go there for the day and like swim and lay in the sun. I guess, if you, like it's fun and it's something to do in the summer when it's hot. [It is] fun. Like one time we brought our dog with us and she wasn't trained, she was like a few months old at that time. And she wasn't trained yet, so she was swimming with us in the lake and she had a little accident and she pooped in the water and so everybody was like, oh my god, whose dog is that? And we were like so embarrassed. My dad's just like, leave her alone, cause she's still doing her deed. And so my dad got like a bag. And every like, the mom, every mom in that area, the kids were swimming, they're like, let's just get out of here, and so we basically cleared the entire lake because of our dog. It was so fun. Like, that's been the only really like significant thing I remember when I think of Lake Murray. You're just there to have fun, you know."

Theme 6: This place facilitated networking with other families

"Um, [when I think about the university I think about] my friends. [I think about] my mom, and I know her like co-workers and stuff, so... And like life in the U.S., in general. When, when we came here, my mom, like, her like, um, like her adviser and everyone was like very helpful to like help us adapt to living here. So...yeah. Um, well the first Thanksgiving here we didn't know anybody. So they would invite us, like the families are very nice, they would invite us to their own Thanksgiving there. So that was awesome. Yeah. Um, um, they would invite us to church, that's how we found our church now. They're my mom's like coworkers and stuff."

"Um, yeah, just my family and other families that we've come with, that, that we would drive in to go with us [to Lake Murray]. Like, other Filipino families that we know around the area. So... I mean, yeah, it's like since we don't know that much people yet at that time, it's like, it's kind of a like a form to invite more people, because like, even in Filipino families, it's like, it's hard to like branch out if you're new. In the form of like, let's invite them here, so we can like bond. So that's what we did for the first like two years. And then when it, it's hard to like, actually know if there's Filipino people here. Like, we don't know anybody, good thing our neighbor knows someone Filipino, so they kind of introduced us. And with that Filipino family we like, they helped us like find other Filipino families, other Filipino families that we can like reach out to, and like be friends."

Theme 7: This place is familiar

"[The university is familiar] because I live here. Because I have like, I guess, connected myself here, you know. Um, I've lived here for 5 years now. [My mom], she works here and she studies here. So I'm familiar with it, so I'm comfortable here now. So...It's, it's more like, I don't know, you can be more independent, you know what I mean? Since I'm like going, like I'm growing, like, being older and stuff, I can do more things here now. But [I was] nervous and excited [about starting college]."

Theme 8: This place is mine, a part of me

"I don't know like, my house? […]. It's home. So at the end of the day, it's like, that's where you want to be. And it's like the first thing that we, it's, it's, it's like our own. You know? Um, it's, it's our house and, um, I don't know. A lot of things about living in that house too, so it's like, I guess it would be part, like, the significant part of my life too."

Theme 9: This place makes me feel normal

"And since like, since in high school, I've always come to OU, because of my mom. Since I'm like going, like I'm growing, like, being older and stuff, I can do more things here now. Um, well, well like not really going to OU, but going to college, nervous at first. But now when I think of it, it's just kind of a normal just normal, I don't know. Well, from the, it's, it's, I feel like if it weren't for OU, I wouldn't like adjust to life."

"And so it's like, it's like [having a house was] the first thing that's like kind of went back to normal [when we moved to the US]. But when, when we got a house, it's like, everything's going back to normal, you know? Yes. Absolutely. Yeah. It's like, yeah, it's like the first like normal thing after all like the changes."

Mei

Structural Description

Mei's relationships to places seem to be centered on her experience of challenges, differences, and conflict. Although she reported being happy with her roommates being Chinese and supporting each other, she complained about their not cleaning up the apartment. Mei also became keenly aware that her English skills are not up to par whenever she gives presentations in her classes. Although she expressed enjoying the quiet of the city, she also conveyed her disappointment that a US city was slow-paced and not very modern. The structural themes underlying Mei's narrative include: places to shop for basic needs, places where she encountered conflicts, places where she realized her shortcomings, places where she learned to work with diverse students, her realization that in this place her lifestyle is unhealthy, places differing to her hometown, places where she has grown and learned, place she will miss upon her

return to China, places where she developed relationships, places where she learned to belong, a place that is her first home in the US.

Mei referred to the Asian market and the mall in OKC as the places where she buys the basics she needs for her life; her favorite foods in the Asian market and nice clothes at the OKC mall. Although Mei seems to appreciate her roommates' emotional support, she encountered difficulties in her relationship to them due to disagreements on apartment cleanliness. Mei said she has come to realize everyone has the right to have a lifestyle but stated that it is uncomfortable for her to live in a dirty place. During her time in the academic department building, Mei became keenly aware of the limitations of her English proficiency. She talked briefly about the fact that sometimes she does not know the correct way to pronounce a word and explained she does not like to feel uncertainty.

Mei also encountered the challenge of working with a group of culturally diverse students from her college. She recalled being assigned to complete teamwork assignments and stated the team members were of different nationalities. Mei said although they are supposed to have group discussions no one in the group actually talks, which made her feel awkward. However, the biggest concern for Mei was the group members' procrastination on homework assignments. She described her team as always waiting "until the last minute" to turn in assignments, which causes her to feel nervous and anxious about her grade in the class.

In her observation of the city, Mei noticed that people in America are fat and she became concerned about her own lifestyle while living in the US. She reported having a healthy lifestyle back in China, but expressed she has been unable to keep a consistent routine of self-care since she moved to the US. In addition, Mei also realized there were many geographic and cultural differences between her native city and the local community. Mei said she expected the capital of the state to be a big, fast-paced city with modern infrastructure. However, she was surprised to find people in the Midwest US move at a slow pace and the infrastructure is not as modern as her native Beijing. Although Mei has had a somewhat disappointing experience, she also related her apartment to her learning to be more tolerant of others. She recalled realizing her roommates may not be extremely clean but they are very supportive emotionaly. Mei also said she has learned the value of having friends and getting help while living in the US, as she relies on friends to go anywhere she needs. Mei also seemed to become more aware of the importance of working hard and making sacrifices to make your dreams come true and also to balance work and leisure to have a satisfying life.

Mei was positive she would miss the university and her apartment whenever she went back home. More specifically, she said she would miss the calm and quiet lifestyle of Midwest US. Mei developed social relationships with her roommates and with her neighbors in the apartment complex where she lives. She referred to the many times her neighbors have given her a ride to the grocery store or to the mall and expressed her feeling thankful for their kindness. Even though she experienced conflict with her roommates, she did express being thankful for their support whenever she feels

sad or homesick. One way Mei developed a sense of belonging is by cheering for the local basketball team. She was not originally a fan of the local NBA team, but stated she became infected with the atmosphere of support towards the team all around her. Mei attended a game in the city and learned to love the players and felt she is a part of the community. Mei also noted that her apartment is her first apartment away from her country so she will always cherish it. Mei also noted she will always remember the relief she felt when she finally was able to get to her apartment and sleep in her bed after many days of travels.

Textural Description

Theme 1: I shop for my basic needs in these places

"Because I often go [to the Asian market] to buy some stuff. So I will only go to the Asian market to buy vegetables, rice, stuff like this. And in Norman, uh, lots of big malls for me to shop in, so I go to OKC to buy clothes and shoes like this. It just supply me the basic stuff, you know. OKC just supplies the basic stuff for me, for me here."

Theme 2: In this place I encountered conflict

"Yeah, because in this apartment, I [live with] four girls and all of us are from China. So for the first month, maybe, we have some disagreements with each other. My apartment? Not clean apartment, it's horrible. Yeah. Because the girls here, sometimes they are not really clean, but they will help you when you are in trouble. When I go there, [I tell] my roommates is not very clean, I will blame them. And I say, you need to wash, wash, wash, wash. I understand, everyone can choose their lifestyle. Even though they share the same room with you, same bathroom same as you. Because they don't like to be so clean. You have no idea how to, most of the time, you just tolerate it and to eat by ourselves like this. And you know my roommates are from China, so I will judge people just according to my roommates."

Theme 3: In this place I realize I am not proficient in English

"I often stay [at the academic department building] studying. I'm an international student, every time I do [a] presentation, it's my first attempt to say the words when I do the presentation. So sometimes for me it's hard to, I needed to think about the words, I'm not a native speaker. I really don't like this […]."

Theme 4: In this place I work with a diverse group of people

"Yeah, because I have so many projects to do. And, uh, sometimes I need to stop, stop to where others don't have this, it's only stored in the Price Hall Lab, so I needed to do my homework in that lab. Yeah. Yeah, because my projects are group [projects]. Yeah, so it's very strange, my group will never finish the project before the day, the night, last

minute. Yeah, procrastination is really heavy here for...But for my group. I have four people in our group, two are Chinese. And the other one is American now, but he's born Chinese. And the other is from France. And the only one is from America. Personally for physics, I needed to stay, to midnight, can't go to sleep for the projects. It's for the mental sense, I don't appreciate the people will never get up to do their projects until the last minute. Naturally, I hope they will do it before the deadline. Don't be so nervous, you know. Even though I thought it's not enough time, they will just finish it. Yeah. I don't remember that's okay, sometimes I don't talk. I don't know, it just, discuss about the projects, most of the time, we just do our, do our things by ourselves. Not talk with each other. Sometimes. I don't know, it's just the projects is so difficult to talk about or just the numbers program. I'm not sure. I can't understand why they talk, but no one talks. Yeah, it's weird. We get together to have our discussion, but no one talks. It's weird. Sometimes I don't, I don't know how to speak like this yeah."

Theme 5: In this place I do not have a healthy lifestyle

"The reason is […] I can't get used to the American food. [I have seen] fat middle aged women in OKC. Bigger ones. Yeah. Yeah. And I thought maybe...Personally I don't like American food. When I saw […] big people there, I really [thought it was because of] the American food. I'm just afraid that I will get fat. Yeah, if I...In Norman it's okay, not so many [fat people]. But a lot, just shopping in OKC, so, so many people are really fat. I really hate this place. [Before coming here] I really live a very healthy lifestyle, I will go to bed early and get up early when I was in China. But here, everything changed. I go to bed so late. Get up so late. For me, I don't like this thing. Yeah. It makes my body feel […] bad. Oh just, uh, just for the physical lifestyle, not very healthy. Yeah."

Theme 6: Place is different geographically

"[This] place is much slower than Beijing. Because everyone is not so in a hurry. And I found a lot of people are really slow. You're walking more slow, so you had like this, maybe like in Beijing, when I was in China, this pace is really fast, you know. Everyone just has a fast lifestyle and, uh, never stops like this. How to say? You know, OKC is the capital city of Oklahoma state. I thought it was really crowded and big city, just like Beijing, Shanghai. Actually it is so dispersed, the buildings is so dispersed. And there not many people walking in the street. So it changed my perspective about city in U.S.A. Yeah. Not a very, how do you say? Busy. Not busy. Not like a capital city of the state. In my opinion. Yeah. Public transportation is not so good. Maybe this is, uh, place not around me, how do you say? Around me...modern. Modern."

Theme 7: In this place I have grown and learned

"So it's for me, it's a process to learn to how to forgive someone. So maybe now I will choose to communicate more and don't blame [my roommates] too much like this. It [taught] me how to be, how do you say? [A] forgiving person. Don't be [bothered] by such little things like [cleaning the apartment]. [Being] more flexible. You don't know before [leaving your home]. It teaches you how to be a much better girl, I think it like

this. Sometimes I forget the word...Tolerant."

"I don't have a car, it's hard for me to go to Walmart. So here I just know how to appreciate others' help, something like this. Yeah. I will not judge a place, only one aspect. I will not judge OU just because of the apartment. I will not judge OU not clean as my apartment is not clean and this. […] Because this place witnessed my hardship, my hard working in OU. It's easier to give up. Sometimes [you] need to stick to the things that you want to. I think [my view of life] is the same as China, […] [I] keep the same ideas. I will never think about what a life should be like. It [is] just work. Live. But, uh, when I'm here, I learn to balance work and life. Yeah. You can have fun, even though I'm busy. I love relaxing on weekends. [Go] out with my friends."

Theme 8: I will miss this place when I go back home

"Maybe sometimes I love this place. Maybe if I leave I miss it, miss it. Calm. Quiet. Sometimes nervous, sad, and exciting. […] Just, uh...just like this here, I have love and hate together with this place. When I go back, I will say it's just love, I think. When I go back to China, I will remember this in happy OU, I will love this place."'

Theme 9: In this place I developed relationships

"Two of [my roommates] are from the same school as me, and the other one is from Hong Kong. But all of us know it's hard for us to live in a foreign country, so we needed to, how do you say? Forgive each other more. So now the relationship in our apartment is okay now. When I was first there, I know nobody here. I don't have a car, it's hard for me to go to Walmart. Our neighbors are really good to us. They supply rides to us to buy things in OKC, in Walmart. Yeah. Because the girls here, sometimes they are not really clean [in the apartment], but they will help you when you are in trouble. When you feel blue or sad, they will give you comfort. I like my neighbours in [my apartment complex]. So I, I want to say just sometimes […] people in your surroundings sometimes affect [your life] […] [but] my world conception, I will not change."

Theme 10: In this place I learned to belong

"Okay. Oh yeah, I want to talk about the Thunder game, you know, I, I learn about NBA, and I just watched from the TV. I'm not a fan Thunder, I'm a fan of Lakers. But actually if I just go to Thunder game place, I really want to start cheering the Thunder, because the atmosphere, the atmosphere here is really good. And everyone yells Thunder, Thunder, let's go Thunder! Like this. I [am] really motivated by their fans and I really want to start to want the Thunder to win. But for supporting which teams, sometimes you will be affected by the rest of surroundings, because everywhere, most of the people here will support the Thunder. […] Oh I'm also support the Lakers. Sometimes for us, it's a very big deal, since you may be affected by your surroundings. I found, I found that most people here surrounding are support the Thunder game. Thunder team. But I said before, I'm not a fan of Thunder, but I'm not [against]

Thunder, you know. But here, everyone just likes Thunder so much, sometimes I will be affected. Especially after the Thunder game I watched in OKC."

Theme 11: Place is first home in US

"And at first, we just regard this apartment as our home, our new home in OU. Firstly, it is a place, a place for me to rest, to have a sleep, home for me. So actually, it's the first place, I entering when I first at OU. The first day I came there and I just felt, I need a bed, I need a room, and I'm so happy that I have a bed and I can sleep tonight."

Priya

Structural Description

Priya's relationships to places are tied to her search for herself in the context of her evolving value system. Although Priya grew up in India, coming to the US provided her with perspective on relationships, other cultural ideals and values. As a result, Priya associates the university campus with opportunities to learn and grow, to find herself while also exploring possibilities outside her culture. Priya's narrative is a study of contrasts; while she intends to advocate for speaking up for herself in a marriage and even consider marriage by choice –rather than arranged— she seeks out the solace and comfort of her Hindu roots through visiting the local Hindu temple. The structural themes underlying Priya's description include: places that remind her Indian customs are different, places that allowed freedom of choice, places that allowed interaction with children, places that allowed interaction with people of her own background, places that allow performance of familiar rituals and celebrations, place that feels like home, places that fostered academic development, place of renewal, peace, and positivity, places that remind her she is not American, places that exposed her to other cultures and values, places where she found discrimination, and places that provided opportunities for community service.

In her narrative, Priya highlighted the contrast between her Indian culture and customs and those of America. Specifically, she referred to the impact of making choices and the impact they have on her family. For example, Priya talked about planning to get a tattoo and described the strong opposition from her parents even though this was a seemingly small choice. Priya also commented on the differences in terms of relationships, referring to having more than one serious relationship with a man as damaging to a woman and her family's reputation. She referred to the differences in academic systems, as she was surprised by the amount of work needed on a regular basis as opposed to once or twice a year. Priya credited the university with allowing her the freedom to choose her education. She referred to the fact that in India only certain professions are acceptable for a woman. In addition, she believed that being at the university opened her horizons and her ability to make decisions about when and how she will be married. Priya stated "You have to find yourself. And OU made me do that, so this place has changed me profoundly." Thus, the university was a powerful catalyst in Priya's search for herself.

Priya participates in a program to tutor children at the university library. She reported enjoying spending time with kids and referred to her time with them as one of "mutual learning." Priya says she helps children broaden their cultural horizons and in turn, these kids teach her about America, football, and American traditions. In addition, Priya reported her amazement at children's innocent curiosity and boldness of their questions, which motivate her to be like them and move forward with her choices. Priya referred to the Hindu temple as a place that allows her to interact with other people from India. She reported enjoying the sense of familiarity and socializing in her native language. However, Priya also finds the relationships she establishes with other people satisfying, learning from their challenges, and becoming inspired about their successes.

In addition, Priya's Hindu temple is a place where she can celebrate her culture's traditions and rituals. She referred to the isolation sometimes found on campus, as most Indian celebrations are not observed in the US. Priya described the joy she felt when after working all day she wears her pretty Indian dress and joined the temple's celebration of Indian New Year. In addition, she expressed a sense of familiarity that is comfort in this place because everyone observes the same rules. For instance, everyone in the temple dispenses food with the right hand and washing their feet before entering the temple. She is not a stranger in a stranger land when she is in the temple; she is part of a community. Priya also emphasized her feeling that the university is her home, a special place that has special meaning for her. The university is place where she has learned about tolerance, choices, and that has institutional policies to protect vulnerable minorities. Priya also stated she sees the university as a place of justice and equality, where everyone is able to talk openly about anything.

Another relationship Priya established with the university is related to her academic development. She credited the university with developing a passion and love for research and making the world a better place. Through her department she joined a project at a local company where she was offered a job and the opportunity to join their research team. Priya said she has become more independent and self-sufficient in conducting her research, and credited the university with helping her realize her potential. Priya also referred to both the university and the temple as places where she experiences positivity and peace. She finds pleasure in learning the stories of Hindu gods and the Sanskrit chants, which help her find peace of mind. Priya also referred to the university as a place for renewal and rebirth, a place where she found herself and a place where she draws energy to continue her journey. Priya reported she also attends a Christian church and stated she feels at peace whenever she hears about God and about his promises to people, finding this experience satisfying and positive.

Although Priya's culture frowns upon having multiple romantic relationships, she dated a man for a while before breaking up with him. Priya viewed the university as the place where she learned about the ideals of American romantic relationships. She said when they broke up she was disconcerted and confused, citing that in India a man declaring love for a woman is bound to marry her. Although Priya reported suffering

after their breakup, she found solace in realizing her ex-boyfriend helped her see her specialness, her ability to make choices, and her strength. Priya's interest in learning about other cultures and values led her to attend Christian church services. She expressed her enjoyment of the Bible and the concept of an always-loving God. In addition, she joined an international student organization and became closer to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Although in the past she had negative stereotypes about black students, she came to appreciate that all are human beings deserving respect.

As much as the university has fostered many positive experiences in Priya's life, it also brought some negative ones. She reported some Christians on campus told her that wearing a dot on her forehead was a sin and that she would end up in hell. Priya remembered feeling offended, hurt, and disappointed by some people's intolerance. Priya also reported finding joy in attending community service activities both on and off campus. She expressed her feeling a need to give back, to help people, and make the world a better place. For Priya, engaging in volunteerism is also a way to stay emotionally healthy, to overcome depression and preserve her good nature through helping others.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Place reminds me customs are different back home

"Your choice affects your family very, very deeply. In such a way you can be outcast from your society. And that's, they don't understand that fear, even I'm in America for 5 years, my parents have a hard time, even for the smallest choices that I make. Like I wanted to get a tattoo last time I was in India. They were like, so against it, I'm like, mom, it's only a tattoo. Okay. Come on. And they couldn't accept some change. I have lived with my parents for 23 years. I have not lived one day away from my parents, even like for vacations, it's was more like, okay, you can go to your aunt's place for the day, but you're back in the night. It's, so we always have slept, like my parents and my sister and I, we used to sleep in one bed. We are, we, because it's space issue in India, there's not a lot of space, we had one bedroom, you had to sleep in that. There's no choice, there's no other thing that you can do. I mean, I know it's weird, when you say that I slept in the same bed as my parents. So when I go to the temple, it's more like positive feelings that one day my parents will come visit me here, we will all stay together. But there's going to be some times that I'm going to be with my family and everything. Uh, in India, if somebody says I love you, it means he will marry you. It means he is committed, he's going to get married to you. If you're in a relationship, breakups are not allowed in India. It's frowned upon, it's talked upon, and they, you, you go to a second relationship, you are like a slut, that's it. But you cannot force me. Even now like, right now like, in India, if you're not married at 25, it's a big taboo."

"Oh, I came to the US in 2008. And classes were hard, we, we have one exam at the end of the year and you just start studying in January for it. And we don't care about it from

like August to December, we're just like going to school, because we have to go and meet our friends, because we need certain person taking their attendance. And then in January is when we buy our books and then we sit down and cram so much knowledge into our brains, because we're like what the hell? Yeah, so it's, it's hard, but then to understand how it changed me."

Theme 2: Place allowed freedom of choices

"So for me, coming to OU was getting the freedom to do what you want, in terms of your education. It's not easy to make a choice with so many people compelling me to do something. Oh it has changed me tremendously. I, I look back in my life and I would have been married, having kids, and being submissive to my husband, because that's the culture in India. But now I feel like no, I can live without a man, you know. And I will revolt if something is wrong, I'm not going to say yes to everything he's going to ask of me. Identically of myself. It's something I have learned here in OU. Yes. And I'm… See, I will get married when I want to. If you want to find me a guy, you're welcome, I'm not objecting. But if you can find me a good guy, I'm fine with it, but you cannot sit there and say that I cannot have expectations. It's something, uh, which gives me, it's the feeling is about being good at what you do, being confident about what you do, and being happy about what you do. Uh, for, it's like, you have to always know what you want. And you have to find that place for yourself. And OU made me do that, so this place has changed me profoundly."

Theme 3: Place allowed interaction with children and their positive qualities

"And then I went there, I met the people there and it's not about research, you know, when I say about research, it's not about research after all, it's about like making people feel good. This place just popped into my head, I remembered, I worked in Community After School Program for three years. Uh, for CASP, we usually tutor kids after school. And we go there because parents don't pick up their kids until 5:30 or 6. So we'd go there from 4 to 5, help them with their homework and try to give them an broader perspective about life. Usually the kids are school are somebody who goes to OU. Yeah, their parents go to OU. Their parents are in a position at OU.

So when they talk to them, they're like all like, umm, we know this, we know, they know about football games, and it's a mutual learning. And I have always found the innocence of kids very amazing. Children are so innocent. And they bring you down to earth. And they make, they make you smile. And so... And they make, they make you smile. And so... Um, we were sitting in the library, because you're not supposed to tutor a kid alone, you're supposed to tutor it in presence of somebody, so we were, there was something in that school that was happening, so we were all wound up in the library that day. And so I, he said he didn't have homework, so I brought up a big atlas and I'm like, okay, let's talk about the different continents and let's talk about the oceans and different countries. And it's, it's weird. But he pinpointed to me all the countries. He pinpointed to me all the states in U.S., which I didn't know. And then, he was curious of what my country India, he wanted to see where it is in the map. And just the curiosity of the kid was amazing. Yeah. Or the kids giving you a year end gift of like a small part with their hand prints or something. It was special. It makes me feel like I'm doing

good. Yeah. Keep learning, just like them. And sometimes the questions are so amazing. So the curiosity or the boldness, the innocence is something about this place. And there are worse things in life. And with children, the innocence always makes me want to be like them, so it helped me keep my, uh, personality, you see?"

Theme 4: Place allows interaction with people of my culture

"I get to meet people from my country, which is very hard to meet on campus, because I'm a PSE student and I'm like on the south campus, so I never come to the main campus. We have a lot of festivals in India. And when are on campus, we don't celebrate them, because it's not the culture, you know? So when I go there, it's more like celebration and being together. And people, Indian people come there and then we like meet and socialize. And yeah. And then meet everybody and wish, exchange wishes. So it felt like okay, it's New Year's. Oh it's just Indian people. It's, it's more like just saying, like okay, what's, what's happening in your life? What's your visa status? What's your study status wise? What are you going to do next? So it's like finding opportunities, so that's why it gives me hope. When I see somebody who has [gotten] degree from here and has gone to a good company. It makes me feel like, oh, that's nice. And, uh, it has effect of being together, because, uh, right now I'm living with three roommates from three different countries. Yes. So that's one of the good things that we look forward and we...Food and free food. And then when I see like, temples, they usually come to us like older people, they come to us and they ask like, hey, how are you doing? Like, you know, you seen somebody or they give you advice.
You know, because they want you to be in the same culture and everything, yes. So it's a lot of positive feeling when I go there."

Theme 5: Place allows performance of familiar rituals, celebrations

"[The Hindu temple] is related to my culture and religion. So it's usually like a sort of celebration and we talk in our language. Uh, just celebrations. Um, like recently last week we had a New Year's, Indian New Year's, so it, we were like working all day, it was on a Wednesday, no it was on a Thursday, so we were working all day and then in the evening we get to get dressed in our Indian pretty clothes and then go to the temple. It's not like, nobody on the campus wishes you Happy New Year or anything. And like even it doesn't have symbolism for them like we do. Yeah. So it's hard for me to adjust, but then when I go there, I don't have to think about this, because we're all from same culture. When we go into the temple, we take off our shoes, everybody does that. It's common. For me it's not common to see somebody wearing their shoes inside the temple. So for me, it is the familiarity of what we do in general is what comforts me in the temple. And then we have stories, we have a big mythological history and everybody is very specific about what they want to project to us, like we have even women goddess. Yeah.
And then we have god for good luck. So it's, it's like that. We have all the idols and then everybody sits on the other side and we're all like chant […] or prayers and usually you get to eat at the end of it. But still, that has been my life all through, so we don't complain about it. It's not different. It's just that…the familiarity. I, I go to church too and I pick up the text for everything. I'm not very specific about only Indians. It's just a

familiarity that makes me go back to that place. Not the rituals. The familiarity of the rules. Yes, like, you, everybody has some kind of things to do, like, when he's giving you food, eat. We do our right hand, it's not common for us to do left hand. And we wash our feet before we go into the temple. The familiarity of rituals is what makes me like it or feel at home, you know. Yeah. Yes. It, it, it's like bringing back some of your country, you know."

Theme 6: Place feels like home

"And, uh, I do like OU, because it has been my home for so many, so long. I don't know, it feels like home. Yeah, so that's one of the reasons. My first school abroad. It's a special place. And, uh, this place is opportunity for me. Yes. This, this place has special meaning for me for many reasons. OU is very versatile. And tolerant, the policies about OU, like, especially about LGBT, [and] sexual harassment policies. They talk so openly about it and it makes me feel like, uh, equality. And justice. And tolerance."

Theme 7: Place fostered academic development

"You know, you understand being university student is depressing. It's more for me, like hope. Because I never thought in, I wasn't a very bright student, by the way, I was like, I was maybe even in the last few people in the class. So it was hard, uh, to come up in life and realize the importance of education and say what I want. I wanted, in India, you only have two majors, engineering or a doctors. It's frowned upon, it's looked upon if you do something else. But when I came here, I just came for my Master's. And I was like, oh I'm going to do my Master's, cause very few people do their PhD. And I'm like, I'm going to do Master's. I'm going to make big money and I'm going to get a full time job. But the passion for research, the passion to make the world better, is something that OU gave me. Uh, no as an OU as a whole, you know, because not my major, but even to seminars, which talked about how they were doing research in weather, they were talking about how they did research in biochemistry. And like the whole exposure of everybody working as a community to make something better. I was not sure. Uh, my project, uh, is from FAA. So it was a five year project and when I was like finishing my Master's, my prof was like, you can stay and do it if you want. And I was like not sure, so I wanted to experience medical culture. So I did internship and everybody was very positively talking about people who have their PhD. So they were like, oh, you're going to do a PhD, that's so awesome, that's so great. And the encouragement, you know, was very positive, so I came back and decided to do PhD. Uh, optional training, it was a summer internship for three months. We actually went to that place as a trip from the class. So it's OU giving you an opportunity again, like they were like, we are going to make a field trip and I was like okay. Because the research I was doing there was helping amputees developing systems and like hands and legs that will help them in ease of life. And the research I'm doing is also like applied science, where we're trying to make systems better for air traffic controllers ease into life because of stress and everything. So for me, the whole object, because I told you, I'm giving and caring person, for me, mix it with science were some of the things that really

projected me forward and make me passionate about what I do. Yeah. So for us, it was hard to think about like assignments every week, midterms, and finals, oh my gosh, when will this end. So the nature of trying to work on consistently on something, it's something I learned here. And that was something helped me make decisions about doing my research, refine my capability to do research. I would have never imagined. Actually, none of my friends believe that I do this, because of the person I identify them with, you know? They're like, really? You go to lab from morning to evening and you sit there? I'm like, yeah. I'm like reading papers and then we have discussions. And they're like, really? I don't come to campus that much. But yeah, uh, working in the lab is depressing sometimes, you don't, it makes you feel like, when am I going to get out of OU? You know. Because education for so long is hard."

Theme 7: Place of renewal, peace, and positivity

"I really like the Hindu temple in Oklahoma, it kind of makes me feel that I'm home. I'm like it doesn't have, it has effect of positivity. I'm a Hindu by culture. And we have a lot of gods and we don't believe in one god. So we have like gods for rain and for, uh, sun, and, and, and all of them. You know. Yeah, so we have men and we have women and they show us the equality that the men have given women and you know, all that, we have a goddess for money, we have a goddess for power. Yeah, most of the Hindu culture is in Sanskrit, so we don't understand when we talk, but we feel, the good feeling, you know, when everybody is chanting something. The feeling of unity is something we feel, but we don't really understand what he's trying to preach or say. And for me, I understand it. Because in Sanskrit, I don't understand it. So it's hard for me to understand. Yes. Yeah. I remember going to temple like the third day I was in the U.S., and I was like, wow, this is cool. Yeah. So it was good."

"You know, we, we Hindus personify everything in a god, you know. So it would look like my god. It, you see after I talk about my relationship here, OU is a rebirth place. Hm, it keeps me going. It's, um, positive things that keeps me going. Each day, I look forward to going back there. [I think about] Positivity. Happiness. Yes."

"So I love to go to [Christian] church, you know, it makes me feel good. And it makes me feel like positive. Hm, usually positive things that this […] very much, [get rid] of all the anxiousness. Salvation and all that stuff, so they talk about it like how we can get salvation. And it's more positive feeling to give back to society that I, that usually goes to mind. And I usually like sit there and I pray that I be whole and complete and not evil. Yeah, so... It's just peace, you know, just the peace and happiness. Yeah."

Theme 8: Place reminded of not understanding American concept of relationships

"But it's, it's, they don't understand, you know, in America, people think you are individual, you know? You have choices that you can make and you can go along, but it's not like in India. You know, and then I come here and I sometimes wake up and I'm scared. You know, because I'm like, where am I? So it's still hard. And relationships. I had my first American boyfriend here in 2008. I didn't understand it. I didn't

understand that men don't keep commitment, you don't say I love you just like that. You wait for some time before you say it. You don't expect anything until the relationship is mature. So I had my first American boyfriend. He was great. He is one of the persons who changed me completely. And I have been close to his mom also. We have met and we talked about things. And then we broke up in 2009 and I was like, oh my gosh, what am I without him? And [my boyfriend's mom] said, no, he didn't change you. He just made you identify who you are. He just made you see who you are, that special person, the person who can make decisions, make choices. So I'm, and then there was no looking back after that. It was like, I know what I want and you have a problem with, you are welcome to do what you want to do about it."

Theme 9: Place exposed me to other cultures and values

"Um, I have been to church a few times and I have a few friends, uh, it has been experience, because when they talk about Christianity, they talk it in English. So I, when they talk about like how they connect with the Lord, or how they understand that God is trying to show you light, or want to walk in his spot, it's good for me. And I understand how he says to be caring and giving and forgiving and everything like that. I'm, I don't blame them, they have been told that again and again, so I don't blame them, so I understand what they come from... Hm...You know IAC, the International Advisory Committee, that has shown me a broader perspective of different culture. I'm, I'm not proud when I say this, but I was not very, we had been projected in our minds that Afro Americans are not good people, but when I looked and when I saw them, when I talked to them. I was fearful. I was like, oh my gosh, I have to keep my distance, you know. But then, you know, sitting down and eating lunch and we were like hanging out, I'm like, they're human. Everybody is human. And I'm like, why do they project things like that? So for me that's, that's the thing that after I came to American, I have tried to understand everybody as human, which is, at a very deeper level than we think to think about. That's, that's the feeling. It, I think whenever I look back to OU, I look back to being the person that I am today. And I was amazed, uh, for me American people came across as people who don't have knowledge about the world."

Theme 10: Place where I found discrimination

"And we have like language barrier. And then everybody has like rules of what they have to do, like you cannot do this, you cannot do that. But I have some experiences on campus, where people were like, I put a dot on my head, you see. And I have done that 25 years of my life. So if somebody says, don't do it tomorrow morning, I cannot. Because, if I go out, I feel like I'm incomplete. I feel like, when I see my face in the mirror and I don't see that dot, I feel like something is really wrong with me. You know, and somebody on campus was like, you should not do that. It's against Christianity and, and all that. And I felt offended. And then I was like, and they talked about like how I should not wear it. But at the same time, when somebody says to me change my religion, it affects [me]. Yeah, that's the only thing in Oklahoma that I have experienced as an individual like people straight away say, oh you're not Christian, you're going to Hell. I'm like, wow. Like..."

Theme 11: Places provide opportunities for community service

"I am, by nature, I'm very helping and giving person, I think. I don't know if it's the right thing to say about yourself, I think that's what I am. So when I go to temple, it always fills me with, uh, thoughts like, okay, I need to give back, I need to help people, I need to, does the same thing. At the same time, like, I was in the Big Event last week. The feeling of being there was so powerful, like I was like, totally blown away. You know, the big event? It was so profound. I was like calling my friend, I'm like, you should be here. You always complain there's no people at OU, you should come here. There were 5000 people ready at 8:00 in the morning do out and do community service for the whole day. The feeling of being in a bigger community which can make change is something that I feel when I come to... And [I am] an active member of Make-A-Wish Foundation. It's all the social networks which has people like Make a Wish Foundation or CASP. And the Big Event or Green Week Event. So for me that feeling of giving is something, is associated with these organizations. Yes. Yes. And like, those kids have, I was very depressed after some time, and that's why I joined these groups. And the Make a Wish Foundation, people don't have good health. That makes me realize that I am healthy, which is the big thing. Just keep that good nature of yourself. Preserve the good nature of your...Yeah. So it has definitely helped me."

"Even like Eve of Nations you go, the feeling of we can make a change, or the understanding, the big event, major events like that, make you feel, the football games, they make you feel like oh my gosh, it's -5 degrees outside, but everybody's walking up to there, and cheering. The feeling of being united. That definitely. I think it's a lot for them, it's a rush."

Rajesh

Structural Description

Rajesh's experience is one marked by challenges, failures, unmet expectations, and loss of hope in face of adversity. His narrative starts with his dreaming of a place where he can conduct research about what he believes will be the next generation of electronic semiconductors. Him and his wife are both international students and are both earning doctoral degrees. As an international student, Rajesh's ability to work off-campus is restricted by federal law. Therefore, when he received an offer to work for a semiconductor company, he was denied permission and experienced intense frustration towards the system and the regulations he has to abide to. As a result of these restrictions, he is only able to work as a part-time graduate research assistant on campus, which pays a low salary. Rajesh has also experienced frustration due to his advisor leaving the university and also not having an advisor conducting the same research he is interested in. His former advisor offered him an opportunity to move with him to another university but his wife had just been awarded funding to start doctoral studies in Chemical Engineering and he declined. The places he describes are places that bring about memories of failure, negative feelings, and negative interactions

with advisors. However, some of the places he feels connected to also bring a measure of hope to his life.

Rajesh expressed his belief of contributing to the world of semiconductor research by creating computer microchips made of gallium nitrate. He described his quest towards creating this new semiconductor by seeking out graduate training and pursuing research in this area. Rajesh was motivated by creating this material and this drive led him to maintain a perfect GPA during those early days. Rajesh has found hope and support through his visiting a mosque near campus. Although he does not pray five times a day as it is tradition for Muslims, he does go to prayers on the weekends. At the mosque, Rajesh leans on elder leaders for encouragement, support, and understanding of the Holy Qur'an. In the midst of the challenges he confronts on a daily basis, Rajesh has found hope and support in this place.

As a married man, Rajesh intimately connects his home with his wife. Because they moved to this community for him to pursue doctoral studies, his wife stayed at home the first couple of months. Rajesh expressed the deep fear of his wife being deported because she did not have a current program of studies or work. Rajesh's wife was able to get funding in the Chemical Engineering department and enrolled in their doctoral program. When his advisor left the university and offered to take Rajesh with him to the new university, Rajesh had to choose between his pursuing his dream and supporting his wife. In the end, Rajesh stayed in town and his wife continued her studies. However, he did not tell her about his advisor leaving in consideration of her taking her doctoral general exams. When Rajesh's supervisor left the university, he not only needed to find a new advisor, but also find a researcher with interest and expertise in the research he is interested in conducting. Currently there is no professor pursuing research on electronic semiconductors. Even though Rajesh had the chance of joining other research teams on campus due to his good grades and good relationships with professors, he declined and continued to pursue his own research under another advisor.

Rajesh's experience at home is one that serves as a reminder of his responsibilities as a husband and provider. He described a feeling of responsibility he owes to his wife of 6 years, and to his duty to care and provide for her. However, he is also reminded of being unable to start a family and have children due to his limited graduate research assistant salary. Rajesh is also reminded of his inability to provide medical care for his wife's thyroid condition due to their limited insurance coverage. Although his home is also a place where he has nurtured his relationship with his wife, it continues to remind him of the roles he has not yet fulfilled. Rajesh's home brings to his mind the lack of economic resources necessary to fulfill the role of provider. Rajesh's challenging life as a student in the United States serves as a reminder of the wealth his family accumulated in his native country of Bangladesh. He comes from a family of businessmen who became millionaires through industry contacts with his country's government. Rajesh referred to his father pursuing business instead of his training in physics in order to support the family. When he came to the U.S. Rajesh decided to break with his family's tradition in pursuit of his dream of advancing today's technology. Because he has broken that tradition, he has not shared with them the

challenges and setbacks he has confronted. Rajesh believes if his family finds out about his situation they will compel him to return home and abandon his dream.

Rajesh mentioned the building where his academic department is located as a place that reminds him of his failures and deep negative emotions. For him, this place is intimately linked to his inability to continue his research successfully, to the many technical problems he encountered with the machine he planned to use to create gallium nitrate processors, and the many days and nights dedicated to this failed project. A poignant aspect of Rajesh's narrative is his frustration with the employment restrictions imposed on international student visa holders. Rajesh expressed his frustration with not being allowed to work outside the university campus to supplement his income. He described his being recruited by a well-established company from Texas to work in their semiconductor lab. However, he was denied permission even after a professor interceded and lawyers were involved. Rajesh said the company could not sponsor him for a work visa and expressed intense hopelessness and frustration with the international student office, the restrictions of international student visas, and his inability to earn a higher income to provide for his wife.

Rajesh experienced a difficult situation when his advisor left the university he attended during his master's program. He expressed the intense frustration he had towards the advisor assigned to him and the attention he had to pay to details to satisfy his advisor and earn his master's degree. The same experience was re-lived during his doctoral program, as the advisor conducting the semiconductor research Rajesh was interested in quit and moved to another university. Rajesh was left without an advisor and without a senior researcher in the field of electronic semiconductors. In fact, he described his anger about the decision made by his current advisor to store and then sell the machine his previous advisor had bought to test gallium nitrate semiconductor materials. Rajesh tried to "stick to" his dreams and persevered in his pursuit of this new technology. However, the situations he has run into have prevented him from continuing successfully and his academic department is a reminder of this failure.

His academic department building is also the place that housed a machine his previous supervisor had bought in order to begin developing gallium nitrate semiconductors. Rajesh had just arrived when his supervisor ordered this machine and he was asked to assemble it and begin running tests. The equipment was very expensive and did not work during the first test run. Rajesh recounted the many times he called the manufacturing company to attempt repairs and even called the main proponent of using this machine to create new semiconductors only to find even more obstacles in running it successfully. Ultimately this machine was put into storage and this represents the ultimate symbol of failure for Rajesh's dream. A friend of Rajesh's family lived in Ada, OK, a town near the community where he lives and attends school. For him, this place was one that brought luck and hope for the future. Rajesh revealed his belief that visiting this place would result in positive news, as every time he visited he received good news the next day. He describes one day after he had visited his friend, he received a large scholarship from his advisor and even his wife received an employment offer the day after visiting this friend. Home is the only place where

Rajesh can go and sleep, the only place where he can rest and feel like he has done everything he can to make the day a productive day.

Textural Description

Theme 1: In this place I dreamed of the future

"I liked this topic [of creating semiconductor materials], because I was moved at the prospect of research in my undergrad, so I always kept looking for funding into this area. That's why I got an opportunity [at a university that] was not a very good school, but it was a very good school [because it] offered me funding in the time of economic downfall in 2008. Gallium nitrate is the future, it has hundred billion industry in the next 10 years and no one in OU damn cares about it, because they don't know. China is ordering hundreds of [machines] every month, just to make gallium nitrate. […] Electronics based on what? Silicone. That's the basic thing you know. Gallium nitrite is the future. I'm not saying because I'm doing the research, I'm saying because people are saying, because market studies saying, because technology of silicone is limited now. I believe there was a place I could go, if I employ all my times, like 20 hours of a day [to make my dream come true]. […] I had to stay. I made this everything. […] You know how, it was like my baby I created it. I created it. I know I created it. Days and nights, days and nights. I created it. They call it my baby. [My wife and I] were very good and I was taking course works and other stuff and I was maintaining a GPA of 4 out of 4, which is tough to maintain in semiconductor electronics."

Theme 2: In this place I find spiritual support and guidance

"So I think [the mosque] reliev[es] the stress. I'm Muslim. I go there for prayer. Usually on Friday in the afternoon. What happens, uh, now there's no other place for me to, at least in this place when I go for some prayer or something, not on Fridays, but sometimes in the afternoon. You know Muslims pray five times a day, right? If I have some time, I might have some time, which is very rare, if I go over there, sometimes I go there as a last hope, thinking that, okay...at least I can ask God for help. Um...The leader of the prayer, usually the leader of the mosque, uh, he's not an official leader, but usually he leads the prayers. Sometimes I go and talk with him and ask him explanations from the holy Qur'an, relearning the scripture and he, he actually helps me explaining this. And every time when I leave, he just tells me, young man, I have seen a lot of things in my 75 years, you're still young, you haven't seen a lot. And don't worry that much. Like last Friday in the evening, every Friday, before the, uh, weekly prayer, um, there's a speech that the leader delivers to the audience, before the prayer. And he was telling one thing, which actually gave me some hope, but I don't know how much that would help me. He's saying that God said in the Qur'an that I never gave any kind of lord, which is more than what my creation can be. So I was thinking that, that am I destined to carry this load? Whenever I go there, I think it's the last hope for me. I try, I try to believe on God and, and karma, and something like that. I was thinking, asking to God, what's your plan? You said committing suicide is bad. What else is in my life? All I can [do is] just pray for us."

Theme 3: I share my home with my significant other

"Okay, let me tell you a story, I live with my wife here. She is also a Doctoral student. So what we did, we moved here, I started doing PhD and she stayed home for two or three months. So for those three months, starting from August 2010 until November 2011 we were very worried. […] She got a job in the chemical engineering department as a researcher. [My supervisor asked me to leave with him and] I said, look, my wife waited one year to get funded in PhD and she just recently moved into PhD getting a job in chemical. If I move her now...Even though...We are not American, we cannot say, okay, I'm leaving, okay I'm doing this. And I'm not leaving OU just only because my wife is her. The timing is okay, because I cannot go. I did not tell my wife. She is having her general exam in two weeks. I did not tell her. I did not tell her, I don't know this is happening to me. [I am] depriving my wife, depriving my family, depriving my wife of having a baby. [I am] depriving my wife of having a baby."

Theme 4: Place reminds me I could have gone to another supervisor

"[When my supervisor left] there was no other professor in that small school doing semiconductor electronics research. And then all the professors asked me if I am eager to join their group, but I did let my train go. But I believe they don't have a dream, which I have. I did not move to any other project. The supervisors in OU in physics, I could go to them. And they will certainly take me. I took all their courses and I performed the best in the class."

Theme 5: Place reminds me I have failed in my husband's responsibilities

"I see my home as a place [of] responsibility, because I'm not in the age of having some romance or something like that all the time. I'm married for the last 6 years, still don't have any kids. I don't have any kids, just because I don't have any money and I cannot run a family like this. [My wife] wanted to have a baby, I said, no. I don't have money. I cannot raise a baby now. [My wife is] more than 31 now. And she has failed [in her duty]. [My wife had] bad thyroid condition last year. I could not make treatment for her, because we don't have that much money. Just one visit to the doctor costs me a thousand dollars. [If I was home] my wife would have at least two babies and we would be doing fine. Now we have nothing. We have nothing. When I enter my house, I feel this house doesn't need...A stupid leader of the house like me. And most are successful, and I'm an absolute zero. Whenever I go to my house, I feel a lot of responsibilities and I feel like what I should truly have done."

Theme 6: Place reminds me my family is wealthy and I am not

"I'm from a businessman family. If I tell my businessman background, you will think why I am here? Okay. My family is a very well established family in Bangladesh. My uncle's a reputed businessman, my mom and dad, they own millions and millions of dollars of properties.

There's millions and millions and [millions in] properties and they don't even know what kind of life I'm living here. No, no. No. <emotional>. All my members in my family are businessmen. My dad is a, an applied physicist, he left his physics career and went into bank jobs and then he went industry of business. If I...All my family members, they're, they're all well educated. If I tell them, they'll say drop your PhD, come back to our country, I'll make a businessman, I'll make you a businessman. I'm doing PhD in semiconductor electronics, which has no application in my country, I cannot go and tell my parents, I have my family, my family can run this whole project. I'm telling you the truth. There is so much money, they can fund this whole project. Sounds crazy. Bangladesh is a poor country, but they make so much money. They're all industrialists, they're all commercially person, designated by the government. I have chosen to spin out of that tradition, just because I wanted to respect the reputation, I wanted to respect the research. My brother is making a lot of money, he is a junior to me by two years, he's making a lot of money. I cannot tell my mom. Because if I tell them, they'll say, okay, come back. So what's the benefit if I were in my family by this time, I would do...Thank you very much. I would do, I'd make a lot of money."

Theme 7: Place reminds me of being unsuccessful and negative feelings

"And maybe it sounds like, why I'm getting so emotional, uh, if I could tell you, I could tell you that...I could tell you that sometimes I feel like I did nothing in my life worthwhile of mentioning. […] I don't know. Now I'm like, I feel like there's no place for me like that. Yeah. Not even my home. I think it is the last hope. And that actually just frustrated me. It was like this that I cried in the road, there was no way I can do it. They'll just toss us out. Okay?"

"My...and here's the most cruel part now coming to you. The guy who published research on this specific kind of machine, I called him last night. He said, you are working with that stuff? That doesn't work. How does that sound to you after three years? I did not tell [my wife]. I did not tell her, I don't know this is happening to me. I see no sign for me. Now I feel like God doesn't like me either."

"I've passed my general exam […] and there's no way I can go somewhere to do research. If I go somewhere else, they will start again from the course work, the qualifying exam, all those hassles. And I don't think I'll be alive after that. [I want to] get lost. I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't hope, […], I gave up hoping. I gave up hoping. [In this place I feel] unsuccessfulness. Loss of dreams. Yeah. Some day... I used to feel like when I was too much stressed when I was going to sleep at night barely at night, cause I worked late night, feel like if I don't wake up, at least I could get some rest, if I don't wake up. Whenever I wake up, like this morning when I woke up, I said, okay, well that stressful day has started again."

Theme 8: Place reminds me of my limitations as international student

"And you know, the rules of like, internationals staying at home without any work,

right? You have to get a job in three months, and then you have to get everything done, otherwise you, you will be deported back. Okay, [my wife and I] are graduate research assistants and we are funded. And you know, like, as an international, I'm way low paid. It sucks, it's really bad, you know how bad, less than $1000. Yeah. But, I know on average engineering students get the less payments than the others. I was offered jobs by many, like, couple of companies, but I could not go to those jobs just because I'm an international, the University of Oklahoma immigration rule international school [said I could not get a] job. […] I got a job in [semiconductor] company. So my supervisor is telling me, okay, go for 6 months, in the meantime I will figure out things over here. The job didn't work out. You know. International School. They did not give me permission to go. That was one of the jobs that any engineer would die for. […]. Then my supervisor calls and pushes, then they said, okay tell me, tell your student to come with the, the documents tomorrow, we will sign it, and I went there with a big hope. Seeing the light of the bright future and they say, sorry, you cannot go. And the way it works is one day they say, you can go, the next day, they say you cannot go. You are an international, you are regulated by the federal laws. Even the company hired, uh, had their lawyers forcing into this. OU has blocked me. Internationals are selling out here for nothing. I cannot go to any job. If I call...They say, oh you're not U.S., citizen, you don't have a Green Card."

"A couple of weeks back, the...senior researcher from one of the Texas semiconductor companies, very renowned company, like Texas Instruments, he emailed me and said, asked me, I like your profile, is there somewhere I can discuss with you? I said, okay, go ahead. He said, he saw my profile, he liked it, he said. Do you have a Green Card or U.S. Citizenship? I said, no. He said, too many restrictions, I cannot take you. But due to his company they cannot hire me and that guy was so generous and I don't know what happened. He...He kept asking his friends all over Texas, he's a very senior, senior researcher, very senior researcher, he kept asking his friends and sending my resume. Is there some way you can hire him? Everyone is saying, sorry […], we have restrictions."

Theme 9: Place reminds me of negative interactions with advisors and supervisors

"There was a professor who had [taken me in] right before I arrived [to master's program in Arizona], three days before he resigned and that was a shock for me. […] [I was assigned an advisor] from the electrical engineering department, that's why they put her as my adviser. And after all the research work was done, right before my graduation, she say I cannot graduate and I cannot go to university of Oklahoma as a PhD unless I prepare the report according to her will. […] And what happened, the lady mailed every day and night, saying if you don't make these corrections, I'm going tomorrow morning, I will not sign your paper. And you know, without my signature, you will be deported back to your country. There was no benefit for her, because she did not know any detail of what the research I was doing."

"And after I came to Oklahoma, the professor was so gentle, so nice person. He was one of the best persons I have ever met. The research I was doing actually, the supervisor in Oklahoma, he actually ordered some equipment, which I had to install

first. Right after two days he said that I'm leaving OU. My supervisor was from Georgia Tech, [and] left OU because he could not secure tenureship. He was the only person [doing this research]. At that time, my wife was working in the chemical engineering, my supervisor is leaving. He offered me, if [you] want, I can move you to Georgia Tech. I have my boss over there."

"Then this new supervisor [I was assigned to], he was actually, I took his class, he was a very smart guy from MIT. One of the most respected researchers in OU. Well he has experience in the other discipline, but okay. [He says] let's make a new design. We made a new design for 6 and 8 months and made the system come up. I was planning to graduate next year, but my supervisor is trying to extend it and extend it. He doesn't let me write papers. Because he's planning to have me as his [research assistant], which I don't want to be. He always tells me, okay, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, this is going to be this. I don't know. It's happened to me in Master's, my supervisor left. I tried to stick to my dreams. This happened when my previous supervisor in OU left, I stick to my dreams. […] My supervisor doesn't care. You know why? He doesn't look like he has no money."

Theme 10: Place reminds me of the equipment I could not use/install

"[My supervisor ordered equipment] in July, [but] it turned out that they made this mistake. Because I was not explained this at all, I was, I was gaining experience. [This is] $100,000 equipment, if that doesn't run, that means I am just screwed. We were planning to send the equipment back to the company for repair[s]. […] And here's the most cruel part now coming to you. The guy who published research on this specific kind of machine, I called him last night. He said, you are working with that stuff? That doesn't work. How does that sound to you after three years? And nobody cares about that, because there's the future. I tell you, you don't understand. I tell you, okay. [This] machine staying in south campus in the storage that my previous adviser bought […] and OU is planning to sell it […] because no one of them is an expert on it. And they don't want to hire any expert on it. Well I don't want to criticize them, but all I want to say, somebody is going to regret. I'm the, they wanted me to set up this machine and now I'm done."

Theme 11: I believed visiting this place would bring me good luck

"Ada, [OK] is kind of important for me because my uncle's friend used to live over there. And now he moved to Georgia. He's a very successful man. Every time I visited his house the next day I got a good news. And even my wife got […]good news, she got a job the next day we visited his home. I, I didn't tell it to anyone, but I'm kind of superstitious sometimes. That every time I visited him...You know what? We visited his house the last time, before he moved to Georgia, the next day. The teacher that I used to work for as a TA, like I was a half TA, half RA, the teacher that I used to work as a TA gave me a $2500 cash scholarship, because he was pleased at my service with his students. Actually I was sometimes like for the last, they moved out of Ada in

December 2011, after that I have never been there. But after that I have been through some terrible situations doing my research and other stuff. So sometimes I felt if they were there, I visit them, the next day I have really good news. Maybe it sounds crazy to you, but sometimes that helps. Well sometimes it was a place where it was a place where...I could see a sign of life."

Theme 12: Home is a place for hope

"But I believe they don't have a dream, which I have. Well...I feel like as long as that place is here, there's some place where I have to go. When I go to sleep, okay, at least at this moment, I've finished what I should have done."

Sakura

Structural Description

Sakura's experience of relationships to places seems to be centered on both aspects of interpersonal relationships and of her own challenges as an international student in the US. Sakura seemed concerned about being ostracized or discriminated against because of her Asian and Buddhist background in a mostly Christian state in the US. However, she was able to build strong, long-lasting relationships with people of different backgrounds through her faith and through her involvement in college life. Sakura's narrative is also one of struggles, first with the English language and her understanding of people from other cultures, and then with the rigorous academic course load of a doctoral student. She was unsure whether to continue at one point, but resolved to stay and overcome the new challenges. The structural themes underlying her narrative are: pre-relocation concerns about the place, place presented challenges, places where she connected with people of her religious background, places where she overcame challenges, places where she made long-lasting friendships, places that feel familiar, and places that are calm and relaxed.

Sakura's narrative indicates some concern with her religious faith, as the state is predominantly Christian. She also recalled being concerned about the flatness of the place, about the lack of buildings and infrastructure. Sakura also said she was concerned with the potential discrimination based on her Asian and Buddhist background. Regarding her current community, Sakura associated this place with challenges and struggles related to her academic studies. She was surprised by the rigorous studies she had to maintain in order to have good standing in her graduate program. Sakura also recalled thinking of quitting her graduate degree at one point, stating she was discouraged and unsure of whether it had been the right decision. Sakura reflected that the challenge of living in the local university community was not necessarily the environment, but her finding her own way to overcome the academic challenges she faced at the beginning.

Sakura built good relationships with the members of the Tulsa community, the closest temple to her first university in Oklahoma. She reported they drove almost 2

hours to pick her up so she could attend services at the temple. Sakura also recalled she became more familiar with the American culture, as some members of the Buddhist temple were American. In fact, she recalled staying with a couple for a couple months while she started school and they ended up symbolically referring to her as their daughter. Sakura attended a university in Lawton and earned a bachelor's degree. She credits this place is like her second home, as the place where she was able to learn about people from other cultures, and where she was challenged by the environment of an American college campus. Sakura also said she became involved with college student organizations and through these associations met people from other cultures. She reflected that it was then when she realized the truth about stereotypes; not everyone she met fit the stereotype she believed before coming to the US. Sakura also credits Norman, OK as the place where she became more confident and stronger through overcoming her own academic struggles and challenges. Sakura also defined her goals for the future and for her career while living in Norman and reported this was a moment of growth and learning in her life.

Sakura referred to the many long-lasting friendships she cultivated while living in Lawton, OK. She reported having more interaction with friends in school, and stated she is still in touch with them even though they now live all over the world. Sakura credits Lawton with her becoming convinced that it was possible to feel comfortable in Oklahoma. She also recalls that while attending the Tulsa Buddhist temple, she also felt welcomed by Buddhist and non-Buddhist Americans. Sakura mentioned that she met a couple through the temple and became close to them, to the extent they treat her like a daughter. She expressed feeling thankful they are a part of her life. Although Sakura has lived in many cities in Oklahoma, she selected Lawton as her second home because this is the place where she became connected with people and friends. However, she is hopeful that after spending so much time in Norman, she will have good memories of her experience there. Sakura even thought of Lawton as a place that could be good for retirement, a place that is calm, sweet, and relaxed but also a place that has excitement and joy.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Pre-relocation concerns about the place

"Hm, so compared with Tahlequah, where I started my school, Tulsa is really big city, right? So the, the first day of my arrival in US, someone took me and some people from airport to the school in Tahlequah and there are nothing, you know, like really flat and maybe some cars around. So that was my first impression of Oklahoma. Just flat and nothing at all. Because like I say, it was first arrival for me. So I wasn't sure how real Americans live, although I was so nervous. Um, um, I think one thing...To be honest with you, when I came to the U.S., I was so worried that I'm a Buddhist, because especially, especially in Oklahoma, Christianity is common religion. So [my sister] was so worried about me being in Oklahoma, because there are less Japanese and less Buddhist, Buddhists. So she was really worried about if I would be, um, discriminated. Because both Japanese or Asian and also a Buddhist."

Theme 2: This place presented challenges

"We, we could be friends, but just only that time. If I'm taking one class, we are friends, but after the, after the class is over, then we don't talk, something like that. Kind of like that. Sorry. Kind of makes you feeling...I don't feel directly, but I remember how I was feeling. But here, I, I have to challenge my skills, or ability and knowledge, something like that. Kind of school stuff. It's like so big jump for me from a school in Lawton to graduate school here. Because first year, I was, I was thinking if I should quit school, because it was so hard. But also if it was only hard, I don't want to give up, but when I was feeling kind of low, I was, I don't know like I was feeling, what, what am I doing? So it was kind of faded like you say really I want to do. So I was asking myself, and also I wasn't sure if I was thinking that because I was feeling hardship or not. So it was kind of, um, challenging. Yeah. So I think in Lawton, the program I had was kind of around me, of course it's related to myself, uh, kind of challenged me and the environment. But here I feel the challenge in myself, inside. Hm...If I could Norman, since I talked about academic, which is like the university of Oklahoma, but, um...Yeah. Like I said, um, I'm still challenging myself. Struggle. Excited. And also something like worrying."

Theme 3: I connected with people of my religious background in this place

"And out, outside of school, because I'm a Buddhist and Buddhist, there is a Buddhist community, so we have meetings almost every week. So then I met certain people after, and we got close. [I attended] school […] in Tahlequah. Yeah, but, um, because of my religious connections, there's, uh, many active members in Tulsa. They used to come to pick me up every, it took like 2 hours one way. And then, uh, they took me for the meetings, and activities. So from the beginning, from the beginning of my arrival in the U.S., I used to go to Tulsa, because for meetings. And then, um, I don't remember when, but after I moved school around in Oklahoma, and right before I went to Lawton, I was staying, uh, at one of the members in Tulsa for maybe two or three months. And of course I was practicing driving. So I drove around the city. And I was, uh, in the, I was staying with a lady. And she took me in some museums and like for sightseeing. So, yeah...And also Tulsa is really the place to shopping, uh... Yeah, I, yeah, the, um, Buddhist members. Yeah. I don't have any other non-Buddhist friends in Tulsa. So I only know the Buddhist members. And then, you know, the members in Tulsa took me to the Tulsa and I saw many high buildings. But I knew that it was different from real Americans. But you know, in, even in the Buddhist, uh, group, there are Americans as well. And, uh, yeah. Then I think I started learning how real Americans are. Again, I have some Buddhist members here and they always support me."

Theme 4: I overcame challenges in this place

"Yeah, I think so. The most thing I changed [while I was in Lawton] was of course my English. Because I started talking more and I learned lots of slang. Something like that. Yeah. And then also I learned there are so many, uh, kinds of people, I mean, of course

nationality, even if we, uh, I think, um, if we still one culture, for example, Japanese, people may have idea how Japanese behave, you know. But then in Lawton, there are so many people from Nigeria, and the Caribbean countries, and my image of, for example, of Nigeria or Caribbean people are like specific. But then after I met more people like some, some of them are really, you know, loud and party type. But also there are so many quiet and like, like reading books. So I think, I finally noticed that we cannot distinguish people because of where they are from. Of course they [have a] kind of tendency. But there are so many [varied] personalities. So, yeah. Then I noticed that Oklahoma is big, but there's so many activities to do outside. Just my image of, image of Oklahoma changed. This, and also through that, I kind of make problem, I challenged myself. And although I have a goal, like what I want to do in the future. So I think after I go through this, uh, wall, like break down this wall, the wall, and then I can be stronger. And I can get more confident. Personally, my, my personality is not confident kind, but I think after I, how do I say? Overcome any problems or challenges, then I can be stronger and get confident."

Theme 5: I made long-lasting friendships in this place

"So and then, also I have attended other schools in other city or even campus. But there, I just went to school and just study. But in Lawton, I had more connection with friends in the school. So [I had] friends in school, I talk to them from when I go to cafeteria. And I have one friend and that friend has more friends, so then I got friends. And also I attended many, uh, campus activities, like, um, held by like I don't know, like, some Association or something like that. Um...I don't know if I am answering right, honestly. But, you know, when I think about Lawton, I remember my friends. We always hang around. Yes. But most of them are international students, so they are kind of spread out. And then people from other schools, yeah, I'm still keep, keep in touch with them and they are still there. Hm. So like I said, um, before I went to Lawton, I was attending other schools, but there I didn't feel strong connection with, you know, um, people from other countries or even America. But in Lawton, I think one of the reasons we got friends because of friends. So we have stronger connections. So I think, uh, since I went to Lawton, I started making more, like, real friends. Yeah, like I got friends in Japan and friends here are kind of the same, strong, stronger. But after I went to Lawton and experienced more in relationships with people, I, I felt living in Oklahoma is comfortable. Um...I think the time when I was in with the lady, two or three months. Yeah. Because I was driving, I could kind of explore Tulsa more. Um...It's more like people in Tulsa. I think because of them, I felt more...easy to live in Oklahoma. Yeah, but I was so welcomed by people like non-Buddhist American people in the school, and also people from Tulsa. And I started making friends here as well. Yeah. I think I experience, experienced a lot in Lawton, but there I experienced different kinds, like a lot of I experienced related to my life, you know, personal life, or, uh, yeah. Like a friendship and everything. And then there is a married older couple, uh, wife is Japanese and the husband is American. And they treat me like their, uh, daughter. So... Yes. So it's not hard for me to live here, compared with other international students, because I don't think I am alone. So I think I'm fortunate that I have a family here."

Theme 6: Place feels familiar, it is a second home

"Lawton is where I finished my Bachelor's degree. So I felt Lawton is kind of, um, kind of second home for me. When I visit there, for example? Um, when I, when I came to Norman at the beginning, when I went back to Lawton, I felt I was home. But now I'm used to Norman, I suppose. Maybe kind of same. And, yeah, it's good to stay in after retirement. I think in the future when I, you know, think of Norman, I'm sure it will be good experience. And good memories."

Theme 7: Place is calm and relaxed

"[When I think of Lawton I] just [think about] fun. I don't know. Any kind of fun. Yeah, but I, of course I feel relaxed. Yeah. Um, calm, warm, sweet, and something like that. So kind of excitement with, how do you [say]?"

Su

Structural Description

Su's narrative of relationships to places is one where she has bloomed at the university thanks to the support and encouragement of her supervisor and her coworkers. She enjoys her work and enjoys being able to help out new Chinese international students, as she works at the English learning center at the university. Su also has places where she can relax and also places where she can focus; both places necessary to balance life as a graduate student. The thematic structures underlying her narrative: places that bring awareness of challenges, places where she received support and encouragement, places that allow reflection, places to relax, places to concentrate and focus, places to talk to family, places where she developed friendships with Americans, places where she helps other international students, places where she observed and learned from friends, places shared with others.

Su associated the university with the challenges she experienced due to her being an international student. She expressed a major obstacle in her developing academic work is her insecurity about speaking fluent English. Su expressed reading and writing in English is a major challenge in her adjustment to life at the university. However, she also showed some flexibility, conceding that she is not American and English is her second language, which has both advantages and disadvantages. Su's work at the university's English language learning center has been pivotal in her developing more confidence. She spoke highly of her supervisor and coworkers, and expressed thankfulness for their support and encouragement. Although Su had expressed insecurities about her English language skills, her supervisor encouraged and challenged her to increase her confidence through taking on more tasks at the center. Su credits her workplace with her developing confidence and trust in herself and her ability to move forward and overcome challenges.

Su's apartment is a place to reflect on her life, her work, her studies, and her goals for the future. Whenever she confronts a challenge, a problem, or has to make a decision, Su takes it home to reflect on it, think about it, talk it with her roommates and her parents via Skype. Her apartment is also a place to relax and rest, a place to regroup and recharge. One of Su's favorite activities is cooking and she reported being able to relax through cooking her favorite foods. Su also stated she enjoys her comfortable bed and her ability to have a place where she can find comfort and rest. Su referred to the apartment's study hall as a place to concentrate and focus. She reported feeling focused as soon as she goes to this place. There she thinks about her classes, her work, and her homework. Although she studies with friends in this place, she is keenly aware of the purpose of being there, avoiding unnecessary chatter and keeping her attention on her work. Su's apartment is also the place she associates with her parents, as she usually contacts them via Skype when she is at home. She reported talking to them at least 2-3 times per week most weeks, except when there is a lot of homework or during exam time.

Su's experience with her American coworkers at the English language learning center was one where she realized they valued her knowledge. Although close friends had told Su about feeling discriminated against, she reported most of her American friends are kind and supportive, always encouraging. Su also expressed her American friends also have an interest in Chinese culture, and also ask her for help with their Chinese homework. Even though Su has heard negative things about Americans from friends, she is does have a positive image of them because of her coworkers. The job Su has as a graduate assistant at the English language learning center is also one that allows her to help other international students. She expressed a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment from being able to listen and counsel other Chinese students who just arrived to the university and do not speak much English. Su prides herself on being a good listener and even though counseling other students is not on her job description, she enjoys this interaction very much.

During her study time at the study hall in her apartment, Su has also learned a lot from her Chinese and American friends. She reports her American friends will help her revise papers and homework, and she will in turn help them with their Chinese class homework. However, they also have conversations about culture, about traditions, and about life in this place. Su appreciated her apartment and the comforts it provides in her life. However, she was aware of having a roommate and sharing her home with her. Although Su has a good relationship with her roommate they do not see each other very much due to their different schedules. In spite of these conflicting schedules, Sue valued having another Chinese individual as a roommate and being able to share the same culture and language.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Place makes me aware of challenges

"Yeah. But I mean, at that time, I feel, um, so...so I think, okay, uh, since my English is

not good, so I want to do more things, like something like without speak a lot, but can do for students. And think, okay, it's okay if your English is not good. I think maybe mostly of my study, because, uh, because...I think the education system is totally different from China and here. So maybe change a lot about like understanding things. Yeah. Yeah, it's very different than they the attitude there. Yeah, sure. Because I think study makes, is the, the top challenge, challenge for me here. And, uh, I, it is very difficult for me, and, because I need to read more and to write it a lot, write a lot of things, and, uh, since my, since English is not my native language, so, yeah, it is very hard for me. Yeah, yeah. I feel, yeah, I think it's better to have a balance like, just say for me, like, I am not American. I'm different. And, uh, but I still have a, I want myself to have a balance, like, like I'm Chinese, I know who I am, and my English level, and I know where's my advantage and disadvantage."

Theme 2: In this place my supervisor was supportive and encouraging

"But, uh, my boss, she's so good, she trusts me a lot and encouraged me, and she told me I can do this, I can do this. And, uh, yes, and finally I did it. So I really appreciate her. And she always encouraged me and just say, you're good, you're good. So she think, oh you're good, like you always try to help. And not just stay there waiting for the job, or waiting for the task. So I, I, I think, and, and she, she is, and also she encouraged me to take notes for our staff meeting, actually is very hard, because I try to understand and to write it down everything. And, and there, at the beginning, I think, oh I cannot do that. But if you want me to do that, but I will do... But she told me, like, yes, you can do that. I know you can do that. So I think, okay, I will do. So, and she always told me she appreciate me to help students figure out their culture shock things. And also I, I really appreciate she, she's thinking in this way, so I think we, our relationship is very positive and encourage each other. Yeah. I really like her, she's very good. Yeah, and she's, she's a wonderful person. And, uh, and, uh, we always thinking, we always think my English is good enough, so always encourage me. Changes? I don't think it changes me a lot, cause it's just my, you know, it's a place. Hm, warm. I, I feel my boss, both my boss and the students, they trust me. And I do these for, after one month. And I think, yeah, I really can do that. But for me, I think it's my job, it's my responsibility to do that, but she really appreciate me do that. Hm, I think friendly. And, uh, trust. Encouragement, something like that. It's not relax, but comfortable. I know the people there, they trust me and love me. So...Instead, like, I feel more encouragement. Because I'm from China, English is, is not my native language, so people tolerate me more. And so I feel, yeah, I feel I'm so lucky and, and, uh, and this made me think, oh, American people is good. But I think maybe I'm lucky, but yeah, it is, yeah, I really appreciate this. It's kind of lucky. Um, I just, I just appreciate this place when I'm doing, I feel, yeah. It is a good place."

Theme 3: This place allows reflection

"Maybe I, I have more time to think about myself, instead of think about my job, or my study. I have more time to think about, um, yeah, life, something like, okay, you know, what is the kind of things you really want to do, and, uh, why you come here. And, uh,

what you want to do in the future, yeah, something like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah, reflection. Hm, I think reflection helps me a lot, like, sometimes if I have some problem, yeah, and I go back to home and I can, I can really think about it or maybe talk to my roommates or my parents and then we will change something."

Theme 4: This is a place to relax

"Most of the time I can have a rest there. And, uh, cook my favorite food, and, uh, watch TV, or movie and Skype with my parents. And just relax. I think most of the time I relax, it's just like, just, uh, eating food and do not focus on study. And, uh, yeah, sometimes just nothing, or just read some like, some like, my favorite book, like any book, not study book, not test book. So... like the home is a place to have a rest, and, uh...relax and, uh, yeah I don't think it changed me. It's just my lifestyle, like, okay, I come back home and just relax and to, to take a shower, or like listen to the music, something like that. I think relax. Relax, yeah. And, uh, good food. Yeah, I cook a lot. I really enjoy my cooking. Hm...Uh...Hm...Not too much, but I really like my bed, because it's very, very comfortable. And, uh... because I have a computer, I have a bed, I have food there, so I cannot concentrate."

Theme 5: This is a place to concentrate and focus

"Hm. Yeah. Most of the time, I study there, and, uh, it's quiet. So I can focus on my study. And, um, most of the time I studied by myself. Yeah, concentrate. Or, because it's, most of the time, I don't like to study at home. But, but if I'm in this room, I definitely can focus on my study here. I was, I was thinking more about my, uh, my classes, my course, and do assignments. Yeah like that. Very formal, it's more formal than my job, I think. Maybe they, in the study room, I'm not relaxed, I'm just study. Focused. Focused. And sometimes the interesting thing I always, like, I won't talk, I want to study and I just talk to my friends and they told me like, hey, focus! So I think study with my friends in the place where I can concentrate my attention, it helped me a lot."

Theme 6: In this place I talk to my parents

"And, uh, cook my favorite food, and, uh, watch TV, or movie and Skype with my parents. And just relax. Like two or three times a week, sometimes if I'm very busy, like one time, one time a week. And also my...can I say my parents? Because, yeah, we talk to them most of...Because I don't think I have, I can't talk to, Skype with them in my office or other place, so..."

Theme 7: In this place I realized I have had great experiences with Americans

"They joke with me. I think, oh that's fine. I like to be with them. But for me, I, maybe I'm lucky, I didn't feel much about this. Because they always encourage people and, uh, and, uh, help, like to help people. But maybe other international students feel different from me, so...Yeah. Um, I heard a lot from my friend, but for me, maybe, but maybe I didn't realize. Yeah, because I think most of the people around me, like American

people, they all treat me as their good friend. And take care of me more than other American people. So, so maybe sometimes maybe on the, maybe some people did something, but I don't know, I didn't realize it, yeah. Most of my, also most of my American friends, they have interest in China. And, uh, and then I will sometimes we will discuss, or sometimes just talk about our daily lives. But, uh, maybe someone thinks oh they're Chinese […]. But some, you're Chinese, but I'm, I think most of my friends, the reason they become my friend, because they think, oh you're Chinese, or you're interesting, or something. And I have a balance about these, not just, oh people are so nice to me. So American people, they're so good, so good. I know some people it's not good. I know some people it's not good. And some of them, so...I think, I always remind myself to keep a balance, and appreciate people who are nice to me."

Theme 8: In this place I help other international students

"Most of the time I, I, I stayed here in the daytime, and, um, I am a graduate assistant on the floor, so my office is at OU, […] like second, learning English as a second language. So most times, um, I connect like, I communicate with Chinese students, who are just freshmen, just arrived here. And they have many problems, problems about cultural things, or their English is not so good, so I have done about this. And they all younger than me, like four year, four years younger than...And, um, I treat them like my, uh, cousins, or my younger sister, or brothers. So I really like take care of them, and help to figure out problems. And I like to talk to them, because they're young and they always have some funny things and talk to me, and they always, sometimes, sometimes they tell me, like, oh you're too old, or something like this. So and sometimes they talk about their life, or they have some bad things, or some like problems, they will like to talk to me. It's, I think, I really enjoy the time they talk to me about their feeling, or something, and I'm glad sometimes I could be a good listener. And, uh, yeah, maybe I cannot have a good way to solve this problem, but I can listen and understand and, uh, try to help you to figure out this problem. Yeah. I think that is very important. They like to talk to me. And, uh, since I just, because I got this job and that, that is the beginning of my second year here, my English not as good as, uh, other people. Yeah, and also my students, they treat me like the older sisters, older sister, so they talk about their, maybe they have some problems with their parents, or with their girlfriend, boyfriend, and, um, yeah, they will like to talk to me and, uh, yeah. I give them some suggestions. Because I, I was in that age, and I know what kind of feeling, I, I know their feelings, so…And also nowadays, I know what their parents feeling, or their girlfriend or boyfriend's feeling. So I talk to them and, uh, say, and let them calm down. And, uh, and really think about how to solve this problem. The kind of, the problem with family members or with your girlfriend or boyfriend is you still love them, but sometimes communication is a problem. So I like to help them to figure out this. Or maybe just I think part of, take care of students, because I can communicate with them like in Chinese. So I always said, hey, do you, do you have other jobs, or other things I can help? Communicate with students or something? I always offered this kind of, hey, do you need me to do something? I think most of the people feel they have like discrimination, is that a word, right?"

Theme 9: In this place I have learned from my friends

"But, uh, sometimes I study with my, either Chinese friend or American friend, and, uh, if I study with my American friend, he or she will help me to revise my papers and things. And if we, if I study with my Chinese friend, we can discuss more about the things. So, so yeah. Maybe not my classmates, but, uh, um, both American friends, or Chinese friends. Hm...I think, for American friends and, uh, I think, most of the time we study together, we didn't talk a lot. We just work a lot. If I have questions or, at end of the study, we have some time for discuss or have some time for help each other to revise. So they might enroll in Chinese class, or they might know a little bit about Chinese. So they need me help about their Chinese, so I need them help me about my English. So they...And, uh...My Chinese friend, actually I didn't study together with my Chinese friends very often, because my classmates, they all have their own kind of schedule. And, uh, but I have one or two, sometimes we study together, just focus on each study. And sometimes for, sometimes, I didn't figure out why the professor gave us this kind of assignment. And, uh, so my, my, most of my Chinese friends and American friends, they can explain it to me, because they already been here for a long time, so they know much more than me, more than me. So most of the time I will just talk about this and, uh, they will say, oh, because something, so, uh, this question, because the professor want to know how you apply, or this question, like, just to describe your understanding of something like that. Don't talk to me. We can talk after that. But okay, I'll focus."

Theme 10: I share this place with others

"Yeah, also like most of the time my roommates and I, we won't talk about something, yeah, and, yeah. Um, it was okay. And she is, uh, exchange scholar and she's Chinese professor. So, um, but most of the time she's very busy. And, uh, she did her, uh, yeah, her research, and she had her own classes here. So yeah, most of...And also most of the time, I just, I just went back every, like night and also every weekend, so the, the other times, like daytime, we didn't have time to talk, to say, to meet yeah. People? I think my roommates."

Svitlana

Structural Description

Svitlana's lived experiences in places are multifaceted and reflective. While she values interpersonal interaction that happens in places, she also values places that promote individual reflection. She was especially impacted by the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial and while it was a place where she reflected on the grief felt by many people, she also reflected on the repercussions of terrorism all over the world, including her native continent, Europe. The thematic structures underlying Svitlana's narrative are: place's architecture captures meaning, place is a reminder of terrorism back home, place brings feelings of sadness and grief, place brings realization that no one is safe, place where she can help international students, place where she can relax, place where she finds support from her international organization, place where she takes

care of financial matters, place that exposed her to culture shock prior to coming to US, place facilitated building social circle, convenient and multifunctional places, places that remind her she has a family away from home, places that reminded her of frustration, and places that remind her of her native country.

Svitlana chose the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial as a special place. In her narrative, she expressed her feeling impressed with the architecture, the memorial wall, the chairs with the names of the victims, and the water staying still, as if time had stopped. Svitlana recognized the architectural details made it even more emotional for her to visit this place. Svitlana said that when she was at the Memorial she thought of the terrorism back in Europe, including the bombing of a train in England, and a recent mass murder in Norway where she attended high school for 2 years. She reflected on the sadness and grief felt by her Norwegian and English friends during those times. Being at the Memorial also brought feelings of sadness and grief to Svitlana's mind. She recalled that a close friend had told her he was supposed to go to this building the day of the bombing, but changed his plans last minute. Svitlana thought about his friend's good luck, but also of the many people and kids who died at this place. When she thought about this place, she recalled feeling paralyzed with fear and sadness also for the people who lost loved ones in this place. Upon being at the Memorial, Svitlana reflected on the idea that no one is safe in the world. She thought about the seeming impossibility of terrorism happening in such a small town and the even higher probability of terrorism attacks occurring in bigger cities over the world.

Svitlana also chose her apartment on campus as a place where she can help other international students. She reported often helping them with directions, educating them about the system, and helping them get in touch with other international students. Svitlana also expressed a sense of fulfillment from being able to help new international students. Her apartment is also a place where she can relax and have time to unwind when she is tired. Svitlana reported enjoyment of social interaction, but also expressed her need to get alone time. She referred to her apartment as a sanctuary she does not want polluted by too many parties or carless people. Another place where she experiences relaxation is Campus Corner, since she meets most of her friends in this place. Svitlana referred to an invisible boundary between Campus Corner and the university that makes her feel relaxed instantly. She mentioned enjoying spending time alone or with friends at the coffee shop located in this place.

As a student sponsored by an international organization, Svitlana referred to their office as a place where she gets support. The office is located in Campus Corner, and this is a place she selected as meaningful in her life because it fulfills several roles in her adjustment to life in the US. One of those roles is housing the office that provides support for her scholarship, her visa status, and even her emergency contact in case of an accident. Svitlana also referred to Campus Corner as a place where she resolves financial matters. She reported being a customer of a bank located in this area, and also going to her coordinator's office if she has questions about tuition or her scholarship. This place appears to be a hub for many activities in Svitlana's life.

Svitlana talked about her apartment being a reminder of sharing a place with other international students when she was in Norway, and the marked differences between her experience there and her experience in the US. Svitlana said she had never seen individuals from other races, and remembered being shocked by meeting African and Asian students. She also recalled being extremely surprised about one of her roommate's customs, as she was a Muslim girl from Yemen who wore a veil and was very conservative about her interaction with men. Svitlana said these experiences paved the way for her to become more open and expressed feeling thankful for her international roommates in the US. Both her apartment and Campus Corner served as hubs of social interactions. Svitlana said many of her friends live in the same apartment complex she does and often stop by to play games or simply talk about their life. She even referred to her apartment as "very social." She also referred to the diversity of friendships she cultivates, including many international students from other countries and also Americans. Svitlana referred to Campus Corner as a place that is convenient and multifunctional, as she is able to do some shopping, but also tend to financial matters, or even go out for a drink or dinner with friends.

Although she has lived away from her native country of Latvia for many years, Svitlana feels her roommates are like family away from home. She reported they knew each other since they lived in the dorms and selected each other as roommates when they transitioned to living in a campus apartment complex. Svitlana expressed pride in their decorating and making the apartment feel "homey" and "cozy" between the four of them. Although there were many positive feelings about Campus Corner, Svitlana also expressed some frustration because she was not able to go to bars due to her not being 21 years old yet. She reported that back home individuals 18 and over are able to enter bars and buy drinks. Thus, upon coming to the US and discovering she was not allowed to drink in bars was disappointing and limiting. However, she also recalls her coming to terms with this restriction through realizing she is in a foreign country that has different laws than her native country. In addition to appreciating the convenience of Campus Corner and its multiple services, Svitlana also reported that the layout of the area reminds her of her home in Latvia. She reminisced about characteristic features of her home country, including the people walking around, the small and narrow streets, and the stores and businesses next to one another. Svitlana found all those features in Campus Corner and it brought her comfort and predictability.

Textural Description

Theme 1: Architecture of the place captures meaning

"And then there's this wall [by the Oklahoma City bombing memorial] where people put like pictures and some kind of chains, like all kinds of memorable, yeah, and it's so sad. Hm, also I, like the architectural part of the place, it's very impressive, like there's this water, which is kind of still, and then it's not pouring and it's like the time has stopped. And there are like numbers, which are like when the bombing started and something like that. So it's very impressive. And the chairs and setting, and all the walls like the walls from the building still existence, you know. It's, it's, it's impressive,

like how they managed to make that place. Because I feel like, it's very beautiful, also it has meaning."

Theme 2: Place reminds me of terrorism back home

"[The memorial reminds me of] like 9/11, also what happening around the world now. Um, yeah, as I mentioned the terrorist attacks around the world. Uh, also I could probably cry like what's happening like in also Europe. Like in like not particularly my country, but like, I know a few years in London there was a bombing in metro, remember? Also, I don't know, there's just all this killing, you know, and some, someone, or the guy who killed so many guys in Norway. Yeah, that was, like, I was in Norway and then I went home for the summer. And that happened exactly when I was home. Like I graduated at the school. So I was, I don't know, I had like people I know and they were very mentally destroyed."

Theme 3: Place makes me feel sadness and grief

"I would say Oklahoma Memorial, uh, in OKC. You know, where the bombing happened? I think that's, that's very, very important place for me. And when one of my very good friends, uh, he was supposed to go that day, he was little, so he was supposed to go and get some ID number or something like that. Um, but for some reason he didn't go, so he was lucky, he kind of survived. And then one day, like, year ago, he took me there during the Christmas. And it was, it was so emotional experience. It was like this sadness, and like you see like people who have died, there's like chairs, it's very sad. But I feel it's very special place. And yeah, that's how I feel. Yeah, I would say my, my friend who almost, like, who, who happened to be lucky actually. So I, I kind of felt where he's coming from, you know? So I think, yes...Um, as I said before, it kind of, it was very emotional experience, like it's a memorial and I don't know, when I go there, I feel, like the idea that people have died here, it's already very emotional and kind of scary, you know what I mean? Because there were like daycare, so very little kids died. And it's just like, like all emotional experience. Like had enough emotional, you know, it's just very scary. And like I don't want this to happen with any other person. Yeah, I feel very, I don't know, I just can't speak, it's like, it's, it's kind of, it's not scary, but I just get in this like, paralyzed, like, I can't really understand what's going on. Like your relative, your kid, your, I don't know, best friend or something, because of one person who is just like crazy. Yeah, I try to go there, like at least once a year, or as much as I can. Like if people would say, oh, let's go to OKC. You know, just like friends […], yeah, but the part of OKC I really want to go to Memorial. And I want other people to, you know, learn even like some Oklahoman, Oklahoma people, they haven't been there. Which is very, very sad, I think they should know about, you know, tiny history of this place."

Theme 4: Place helped me realize no one is safe (reflection)

"Um, I didn't know that there was a bombing that happened some years ago. So it just, just makes me thinks this can happen even here, you know, it's not like you're in this

bubble and no one can protect you. Even in this very kind of tiny city, right? So that's kind of scary. Because I, I probably will never be able to you know, understand fully how it is for other people to lose someone."

Theme 5: In this place I can help other international students

"But I learned a lot, experience [at this university] is brilliant. Also, uh, cause I am international, but there are exchange students who just come and live, come and live, so also I, I, I kind of feel like I'm helping, in a way, I'm helping them to adjust sometimes. Because they come and then like, oh, what is this? What is union? Or where is Dale Hall? So you know, I feel like, as a international student, I help other internationals, which is a place to learn, you know? Like educate other people, which is great. I'm very happy about that. I'm also trying to contact with Chinese students, but it's very hard. Uh, but I'm working. Uh, they kind of create like their own, like, Chinatown. And as the way they explained this, it's the same, exactly the same as in China. So and I don't know, they, first of all, they, they're English is very limited sometimes. And some people are not very tolerant of that. So they would be like, oh, you don't know how to speak English, so I'm not going to talk to you. But like I, I know how it is to not understand, you know, sit in a class and be like, what is this girl talking about? Because I have been through that, you know, when I went to Norway. So I really like Chinese people. If they just could also try, you know, from their side. But I understand where it comes from. So..."

Theme 6: In this place I can relax and be myself

"Oh, I have, like, tons of memories there. As a sophomore, so I have lots of memories there. When it comes to studying, I don't associate the place with studying, because I think it's, it's like a place to live, not where you study, you know. For instance, if I need to go do something, I will go to the library. Yeah. Kind of hard to, to maintain good academics in that place, I would say. Um, I feel that place is my home here. If I would for instance be in the Union, I always say, hey, I'm going home. They would understand I'm going to Traditions. I'm going home. Uh, I like that I have my own space, my own room. I can just, you know, close the door and have my own time, cause it's very hard, because it's very hard, cause I'm a very social person, so I, I just sometimes I forget myself. So that's a place I can, I can isolate myself. Yeah, but it's also sometimes very hard, because there's so many people. Uh, home, home like feeling. That place makes me happy. Um, family. Family. Uh, also happiness. Because being there, I'm happy. I know I'm always going to find someone there. Uh, I feel like I have respect to that place, like I want to save that place, like for the...Let's say if there's a party and if there's another party, I would rather to just go to other party so I can save my place, it doesn't get like trashed or something. But it's not about being like dirty or something, but it's just the fact that, I don't want to, you know, I don't want to get it polluted or something. I don't know, do you understand what I mean? Yeah, I just want to kind of keep it. It's like my home, you know. Yeah, and I just want to...It's my temple. You know. So I want to just keep it there. Yeah, it is, it is fun. Sometimes it's, it's kind of hard, because it's too much, too much. Uh, there is kind of divided

feelings, they can be very happy and, like, friends, party, you know, going out, feelings."

"So I have lots of...And also I meet lots of people at Campus Corner. Because my friends are usually, they are smokers, I am not, but like they smoke at the Campus Corner, because of the new policy. Especially this year, it has changed. So also this very adjustment, you know, how people, if there's a break, there's a flow to Campus Corner. Very good observation. Yeah. Uh, there is kind of divided feelings, they can be very happy and, like, friends, party, you know, going out, feelings. Also social time, um, like if they go to eat in some place, you know. Uh, I feel like, I don't know, the whole concept of Campus Corner, is very like, it's Campus Corner, it's out of OU. You know, it's like a boundary, where this is not school anymore. So that kind of gives me like this, um, stress relief, you know, like, I'm out, kind of...Yeah. It's, it's great, it's, it's, I don't know how your state of mind changes, like, it just like, something psychological inside my mind that just like, it's chill, you know, don't think about class, just have, just sit down, you know, enjoy. Because it's like a traditional place, lots of people, you know, just bike there, or walk there, so I meet my friends, usually I just run into my friends. So people enjoy being there, you know, just like maybe sitting on a sidewalk and just having coffee from Starbucks, you know. So it's, it's, it's very chill place. Some people go there. And, yeah, I think it helped me adjusting here. And it was chill. And it was relaxed."

Theme 7: In this place I get support from my international organization

"So I, when I come, I know some people here. Uh, so there, there's this school system called United World College. Uh, where it's like last two years of high school. And there are like 12 or 13 schools around the world, so you're very lucky if you get one of those. And so at this place, we have lots of UWC, we call them UWC kids coming every year. And it's, it's, we have our [office], everything. So...So it, you feel like you have someone here. Because, like, for instance, I don't have anyone in this country, like no relatives, nothing, so it's like my family kind of, my kind of family. And also my coordinator, my international coor- got me here. His office also in Campus Corner. Yeah, as I said, it's, my coordinator is there. [He] coordinates us being there, all the documents, or, you know, all this like paperwork behind me being here. He, he, he has that connection, of course with the ISS, but if, if I have to deal with ISS, I will go there. But everything else, like, it's with that guy. Yeah, kind of. Yeah. And he's like responsible for me being there, here. So international is like, double or something, it's crazy, it's extremely expensive. Uh, he works for OU, but he's, he's, he's like the main person responsible for OWC kids. And he like knows everything, cause he has like connections with, he knows like many deans and he has worked with [many people] so he, he knows how the system is here. Which, which is very helpful for us."

Theme 9: In this place I take care of financial matters

"Um, because, uh, he's the one who like, makes the scholarship happen. Like, he, he finds out like loops, like he waives, for instance, us as, uh, residents of OU, like

Oklahoma. So we get, we get little money to pay, comparing to other internationals. Yeah. Or there is out of state and there is international fee. So he like, helps us, if there's something like, like money-wise, or like let's say, oh I broke my leg, you know, and how do I get, have the money flow, or you know? This kind of money issues, document, […] you know, those kind of stuff. They provide, pretty much. Um, also the bank is there, so I, all my money, my money, I work for OU, so that's also important. But also like if there's something going on, like regarding my scholarship, or something, that's like, also Campus Corner. So it's like...the, divided, very divided feelings."

Theme 10: Place exposed me to culture shock prior to coming to the US

"Yeah, and it's very, very like isolated. So I was brought to that school, with very kind of limited English. And put in one room with like girls from Yemen, from Spain, from, uh, Denmark and, and then good luck with that, kind of thing. Like we all the same, we are white people, so for me it was like extreme to see Chinese person talking to black person. Or like, Yemenese girl, she was a super Muslim, so she would not allow a guy to enter the world, so it was like, from nothing to like, everything, you know. This exposure to like, it was, it was crazy."

Theme 11: Place has facilitated building social circle

"Uh, I would say Traditions East apartment complex, because that's where, the place I lived and most of our friends are. But all like international friends were there as you might know. They lived there. Also like, cause it's like, Traditions, and Kraetli, it's like, I mean, it's on campus, so there's like tons of people there. Uh, there have been many parties, that's, uh, that's not a secret. Yeah, there have been many parties, like very social events, like quality time. Like, it's not like watching, nothing like watching movies, I wouldn't say that. It's more about like, getting together, playing games, you know, uno game, for instance, it's, it's so much fun, just like talking about life with other people, you know, sharing experiences. Um, which is great. Um, meeting also, like, cause sometimes, my apartment's very social, so people just come and they bring their friends. So that's also the point where I meet other people."

"And they are very open to international. And not only internationals actually. Because my friend cycle also consists of Americans. I'm very open. I'm the person that would be like all the people.
And this is like, I'm a sophomore, so I have two more years, and then I'm probably leaving this country. So I'm making most of my time here. And adjustment in a way that, since I know those people, they help me, like for instance, I don't have a car, so I meet some people who help me get around. I help, for instance if I meet some people, we, we become good friends, usually I meet the same major, or minor, so I'll be like, hey, what classes are taking next semester? And then some of us end up in the same class, even if we don't know. Yeah, and also I'm trying to contact, like, make contact for the American, American students. Uh, but I'm working, I'm, I'm getting involved in many, like, organizations and exchanges. And it's great. Like, most of, some of my

American friends, they have been to China."

Theme 12: Place is convenient and multifunctional

"Because, uh, first of all, there are, there are banks, uh, there are food places, there are ethnic entertainment places. So this is a very multifunctional place for me. It's like, key place, I would say. Yeah. Like stores and, uh, yeah, even like, lots of things. Um, also I got haircut once, uh, there. And I go to this place pad Thai to eat. It's delicious. It's a Thai restaurant. Uh, and it's very, it's very nice, it's clean. Actually I want to add on, because you mention walkability. I think that's very important. That's very, very important. Like, let's say Campus Corner, it's very, very walkable, friendly. So that's like very, very social place. And I have like people upstairs, you know, that I know, actually in the whole building, cause, uh, I come from this international school. It's like a United World College, so they have like 40, 50 people from those schools here. Uh, so it's basically like just putting tons of international kids in one place."

"When the apartment is empty, I feel very lonely. You know. So that's why they come, they keep coming. It's like, welcome, welcome. Uh, yes. Definitely. I would say. Because I meet people, uh, so I meet other people. You know? Or, just like, my classmates or something. So we adjust, you know. We're like, we kind of narrowed down our friend cycle in a way, I would say. So I in Traditions, there's like tons of international business people, there are studies major, securities studies. Yes. Because most of the people...I meet also."

Theme 13: Place makes me feel I have a family away from home

"And one of my best friends are there, and, um, now I live there. Also my family, like because I have, uh, I chose my roommates, it's not like I have random people. Yeah, cause I knew them from freshman year. So that makes much easier, cause I know them, you know. And it's not like you have to live with some stranger, which is just....Sometimes you're lucky, but like sometimes...it's horrible. They're dirty. But like, uh, I'm really happy. Um, family. Family. Uh, also happiness. Because being there, I'm happy. I know I'm always going to find someone there. Yeah. I think my house is harmony and, and people, I don't know, we have made it very homey, very cozy, so people when there, they're very happy, they're very comfortable being there."

Theme 14: Place reminds me I was frustrated

"I was, because my country's very different from like United States. But then again, it's like, this is university. Uh, affect me? When I came here, for instance, I was, uh, I was 18. So my friends were like, oh, let's go to Campus Corner, so much fun, and, you know, there's so much funny places. You can go to the bars, whatever. So I go there, and I'm 18. In my country, I am open, you know, I can do everything, cause 18 is the age. So I felt the first thing that I was like, I was blocked, I was like in a box and I couldn't do anything, you know? It's like, you can't go into the club, you can't even dance. Because you can't get in, you know. I was really, I felt frustrated, you know. But then

again, I have to face that oh, I'm in another country, they have different sets of laws, so you have to respect them. So you have to respect them. So that's how I felt. That was one of my experiences."

Theme 15: Place reminds me of home

"Because it's like a traditional place, lots of people, you know, just bike there, or walk there, so I meet my friends, usually I just run into my friends, you know, and the fact that there are no cars, kind of, it's kind of tiny streets and narrow and that makes kind of reflects the, you know, that views , the memories from back home. When you told me, now I was like, that's very excellent, I never...Because it's so obvious, we never think about it, but, but now and then the shops, it's just like so tiny. Also bring so much memory. So that's why also people choose to go...That's why I notice that...like international people, they prefer, you know, Campus Corner. And that's, that's one of the reasons why that place is nice, because it brings so many memories, you know."