

# Just like home

The influence of consumption choices on recreating a sense of home



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**Problem formulation:** How do transnationally mobile students use consumption in order to turn their accommodation into a place that feels like home?

**Purpose:** This project seeks to explore what leads to recreating a feeling of home from the point of view of transnationally mobile students in Aalborg, Denmark. The focus is on the participants' consumption choices and seeks to investigate the possible connections in relation to identity-building and place attachment. The potential different meanings of home will also be explored.

**Methodology:** The research methods of the thesis are qualitative and reflect a rather untraditional approach. The participatory visual methods will shed light upon possible new perspectives. The use of auto-photography and photo elicitation might have diminished the potential distance between the researcher and the respondents.

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## 1. Introduction

The words of proverbial wisdom indicate that “home is where the heart is.” But is this statement as true today as it was fifty, one hundred, or even one hundred fifty years ago? Nowadays, we travel so much and “leave our heart” in many places, as we make friends and create great memories everywhere we go. This led me to ask the question of what actually is a home in the modern society, particularly in the specific case of transnationally mobile students. In exploring this idea I focus on their consumption choices and their importance to building or preserving identity. As Todd (2012:48) reinforces in her article, suggestively entitled “You Are What You Buy: Postmodern Consumerism and the Construction of Self, “consumption has a communication function for the other.” Thus, it might have also become a way to transform the self in order to belong, to fit within a specific social structure.

This thesis seeks to explore what leads to recreating a feeling of home from the point of view of transnationally mobile students in Aalborg, Denmark. The focus is on the participants’ consumption choices and seeks to investigate the possible connections in relation to identity-building and place attachment. The potential different meanings of home will also be explored under the following problem formulation:

**“How do transnationally mobile students use consumption in order to turn their accommodation into a place that feels like home?”**

I was inspired by my daily interactions and personal context, as I myself am a transnationally mobile student. My fascination with consumerism started a while ago, when I was still in Romania. I think that as future Marketing and Communication specialists, it is absolutely necessary to be informed and aware of the fast changing times we live in. This is reflected in my choice to investigate consumption by students like me. Apart from the fact that I experienced it myself once I arrived in Denmark, I wanted to research how consumption of various objects is used in order to transform the standard student accommodation into a place that feels like

home. Being away from my home, I came to the realization that this particular topic has a lot of potential.

Not only students are transiting from their homes, but along with their departures, they are assuming an overall transition. Leaving behind their culture, familiar places and loved ones, students might feel that their identity is also changing, transforming. As I started to read more and more about this topic and other similar studies (Sixsmith, 1986; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Hanssen and Danielsen, 2004; Hauge and Kolstad, 2007; Woodward, 2011; Lincoln, 2012; McCarthy et al., 2013), I realized the need for more exploration in this field, especially with a focus on young people.

Therefore, my first chapter will focus on some of the theoretical perspectives related to “Consumerism” and “Identity.” After that, another section will develop on the concept of “Home” and its various meanings. The importance of objects will be pointed out and linked within these sections.

The next chapter, “Methodology,” will present my “Philosophical Considerations,” along with my choice of methods. I think we live in times where images have a great impact so I decided to use this to my advantage, by including participatory visual methods, such as auto-photography and photo elicitation.

The “Analysis” chapter will be structured in three parts: an introduction, followed by a section with a focus on my research participants and their photographs and their related stories and narratives. The last section will contain a thematic analysis of the answers the research participant gave to my questions regarding their consumption patterns and sense of home.

In the “Conclusions” section, the analytic findings will be summed up under: “General conclusions”. After that a section concerning the methodological conclusions will follow. Limitations and future research perspectives will also be debated in this chapter.

## 2. Theory

### 2. A. Consumerism and Identity

*"[...] Every aspect of life, like every commodity, is imbued with a self-referential meaning; every choice we make is an emblem of our identity, a mark of our individuality, each is a message to ourselves and to others as to the sort of person that we are, each casts a glow back, illuminating the self of he or she that consumes."*

*Rose (1999:231 in Lincoln 2012:114)*

Various disciplines such as marketing, psychology, anthropology, consumer studies, have all focused on the purpose of consumerism in interpersonal relations. This section will point out how consumerism is linked with identity building through the purchase of various objects that personalize a space. Thus, the aim is centered on the identity-forming aspects of consumerism; more specifically, this section will focus on how consumption choices can be used to define or re-create identities in the particular case of young international students who left their homes in their native countries. The connection between their purchases of various objects in order to personalize their standardized accommodation and the identification of self and other is being investigated.

Considering the plethora of theories and different approaches on the chosen theoretical concepts: identity/identity-building, consumerism/consumption, objects/meanings-signs, I decided to narrow down the discussion of theories to those considered relevant for this particular research. A specific theme of interest is reflected in what ways consumerism and consumption of objects are used to express identity and lead to generating a feeling of home, a space to manifest and express identity (as opposed to the concept of a house as merely living quarters of no emotional value). In order to achieve this, I will focus on standardized university accommodations as dynamic identity spaces in which transnationally mobile students can express themselves in private: away from the public sphere or the external pressures such as academic or professional work. I hypothesize that these standardized rooms can be personalized as an expression of students' passion, along with their present and former

interests. Furthermore, young international students live in a fast changing world, thus I argue that their interests, along with the social interactions and material goods, are also constantly changing. Nevertheless, the objects they chose to personalize their environment with can become important elements that cement their identities.

Each chosen theorist may have a slightly different conception of the terms of consumerism and consumption, nevertheless common to all is the fact that consumption is closely tied to the creation and production of a sense of self. Todd (2012:48) points out that “today, it is virtually impossible to buy any product not embedded with certain symbols of identity acquired by the buyer knowingly or otherwise.” Besides, in her article suggestively entitled “You Are What You Buy: Postmodern Consumerism and the Construction of Self,” Todd (2012) argues that consumption has a communication function for the other and that it became a way to transform the self in order to belong, to fit within a specific social structure. Thus, when already in a transitional position - such as the one of a foreign student away from home - the need to define oneself is increased and so is the need to shape the identity to further integrate in the newly entered environment. Much like Todd (2012), Deutsch and Theodorou (2009:230) outlined that consumption shapes independence and defines the self: “consumerism, as a social ideology, and consumption, as an individual activity, are used to both mark and mask differences in the process of individual identity construction.” This relationship between consumption and identity could be better researched among foreign students I propose, as they are moving from their culture and home while identifying themselves within a new social context. Zepf (2010: 151) also draws attention to the fact that “to what extent buying is effective in enlarging or building identities cannot be known for sure. However, it seems to me that the identity-building quality of consuming is becoming more and more dominant.”

Nevertheless, the consumptive discourse is built upon a negotiation between the newly gained independence and navigation through various options of expressing the self, enhanced by the immediate need to buy in order to build self-identity and imprint the standard given space. “As one’s identity is always evolving and new products are advertised as fitting for certain



personalities and lifestyles, we are propelled to consume more” (Kennedy and Krogman, 2008:179)

A similar stance is held by Baudrillard (1998), who argues that people need to consume to feel alive and that consumerism has become a way to express one’s social status (for example for those who are rich and start spending more on shopping experiences). Baudrillard (1998) points out how objects become imbued with meanings, how they transform into signs and not simple objects of use. The combination of signs and the meanings they represent create a code. As these codes are accepted, they become patterns in the minds of the consumers who no longer rationalize their consumption. In other words, Baudrillard (1998) uses the sign/signifier framework to explain consumption and the fact that we do not buy simple products, but symbols that construct a sense of identity. In Baudrillard’s (1998) vision, what we buy is showing our deepest desires; therefore, there is a link between consumption and the psychological production of self. Similarly, Woodward (2011: 371) holds the view that the potential of an object to support self-transformation is what makes people “object-seekers.”

Much like Baudrillard (1998), Campbell (1987) draws attention to the fact that a central idea to the complex notion of consumerism is imagination. A major part of consumption is fantasizing as people desire objects, because they think they will receive something new and empowering. Therefore, consumers have an actual desire for acquisition of “dreams and the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in imagination” (Campbell, 1987: 90).

On the other hand, Bauman’s (2007: 47) perspective argues that the consumer society “thrives as long as it manages to render the non-satisfaction of its members perpetual.” The process of consumption is continuous as new expectations are induced and “new hopes promptly fill the void left by the hopes already discredited and discarded, the road from the shop to the garbage bin needs to be shortened, and the passage made ever more swift” (2007:48). This stance is also supported by Slade (2006:5) and the concept of “repetitive consumption” (as producers design the products in a manner that their durability will be limited). Much like Bauman (2007) and Slade (2006), Lacan (1998:100) pointed out how “the object is encountered and is structured along the path of a repetition - to find the object again, to repeat the object. Except

it is never the same object which the subject encounters. In other words, he never ceases generating substitutive objects.”

Given these remarks, the question of how consumption choices might help young migrant students’ identity transition and self-transformation is raised. Erikson (1980) is known for his psychosocial theory of identity formation and socialization developed in his essay “The Problem of Ego Identity.” He proposes that “the conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one’s selfsameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity.” (Erikson, 1980:22)

These two observations applied to the specific case of foreign students in relation to their new dwelling outline the immediate need to shape their identity in order to preserve it and ensure its continuity and, at the same time, gain recognition among others. Identity is established through ‘object identification’ and is a result of the student decision-making in the process of adaptation to the new environment. Moreover, Erikson’s (1980) definition of identity in relation to consumerism outlines the relevance of identification with a specific person or object in the process of identity formation. As suggested, this identity can be challenged or shattered, therefore must be protected and developed. Hence, this pursuit of meaningful objects is vital to the formation and shaping of the self and its perpetuation. These objects and their significations communicate messages about self and form bonds between the subject and others in society.

A similar view is held by Elliott (1997), who proposes that the products we buy, the daily routine activities we pursue, and the philosophies or beliefs that we hold tell the world stories about who we are and with whom we identify. A parallel can be drawn between this theory and some of the findings applied to the context of foreign students, who strive to create their identity through symbolic consumption. Additionally, students are arguably characterized by movement, flexibility, continuous creativity and this ‘fluid’ state might reflect on their personal choices. Choices which are based not only on a product’s utility value, but on the personal

symbolic meanings they invest in objects they chose to personalize their rooms, will be the focus of the empirical part of this paper.

Winnicott's (1953) ideas on consumption, identity, and the use of objects in establishing relationships were first introduced by his studies of child psychology. In Winnicott's (1953) view, the understanding of objects should not be constrained by material or physical aspects. He points out to a rather more extensive understanding psychological "objects", for example, a parent or a body part.

As it follows, Winnicott's (1953) model of object-relations serves as a basis for a number of similar theories, such as the argument made by Woodward (2011) in his article entitled "Towards an object-relation theory of consumerism: The aesthetics of desire and the unfolding materiality of social life." Woodward (2011) further develops Winnicott's(1953) theory regarding the relationship between objects and creating a sense of self. Consumption is viewed as a continuous practice, shaping identities and creating bridges between others and the external environment. "Objects and a person's relationship with them are incorporated into a sense of self, becoming psychic resources for integrating maturing personhood" (Woodward 2011:373) and much like children playing and learning with their toys "adults also have a range of special objects, to which they may feel attached: a favorite mug, a photograph, a special item of clothing, a pen, item of jewelry, and so on" (2011:373).

As Woodward (2011) points out, one of the most interesting concepts in Winnicott's theory is the idea of a "third space." More exactly, it is an intermediate space which is created between the subject and the object. This is a space of creativity, play and imagination. Here, a connection with Campbell (1987) is evident, since he also brings up imagination as a central idea of consumerism. Furthermore, this potential space is at "the interplay between there being nothing but me and there being objects and phenomena outside omnipotent control" (Winnicott, 1953:100, cited in Woodward 2011:373). In the student-object relation, a type of transaction takes place that influences both parts: the object becomes imbued with meaning

and thus desires become materialized as they are expressed. This is an aspect I will further investigate in my analysis chapter.

As Woodward (2011:376) concludes, “a temporary space of cultural possibility – a fusion of person with thing” is created and the basis of future social interaction is shaped. This could be a reason behind the need to transform the given house into a home, personalized with objects that had fused with meanings and significations central for the student’s newly shaped identity. Given these remarks, I argue that objects and physical environments can shape identities and influence the relation Self-Other while consumerism can represent a continuous search for a transformation of the ever evolving identity through the engagements with these material goods.

In the book “Youth Culture and Private Space,” Sian Lincoln (2012) outlines the essential role played by private spaces in shaping young people’s identities. Even though the focus of her work is on teenagers’ identities in relation to their bedrooms inside their parental home, references to young people leaving their homes are made. Using photography and interviews, Lincoln (2012:2) highlights the need for research in this area, as “only very rarely has there been any acknowledgement of youth’s relationship to private space.” In the introduction of “Youth Culture and Private Space” the reader is asked to engage in a thought experiment: to recall what one’s bedroom from one’s teenage years looked like. The exercise outlined the fact that no matter how old a person is, he or she can still remember relevant details of how that particular room was arranged, which underlines the importance of customization of the place where we spend most of our time. I argue this might become essential when being a young student, in transition.

Lincoln (2012:146) refers to “the example of young people moving into university accommodation.” The example illustrates how moving into a new home can be a rather more complex process than in the case of teenagers imprinting their bedrooms. There are many reasons for why the relation between young people and their rooms should be taken into consideration and researched, such as the accommodation being one of the first places the

student gets a sense of ownership over by personalizing it with different material objects. It is a space where students will have the freedom to express themselves, away from the constraints they might have had in the parental home.

Furthermore, as Lincoln (2012) suggests, it will become a representation of who they are in this specific time of their lives, a vivid picture of what they transformed into and what they used to be like. Much like teenage bedrooms, the temporary student housing is an essential space in their lives, but one that is continually changing, together with the person who inhabits it.

Lincoln (2012:146) further explains: “material objects and items are selected that help a young person to personalize and individualize a standardized, generic space.” Students may want to recreate the bedrooms they had in their parental homes to a certain extent, but at the same time “there is the ‘dual’ pressure to create a space that is, on the one hand, self-referential but, on the other, a display for others who enter the space” (2012:146). Being aware of the temporary nature of the accommodation provided by the university can also put additional pressure on transforming the bedroom and making it feel like home, I would suggest. Aside from recreating the particular desired atmosphere, Lincoln (2012) draws attention upon the duality of a private space that must be taken into consideration when debating young people and their dwellings. There are multiple functions associated: both a place for recreation, study and other individual activities and a place for collective gatherings and social interaction. Furthermore, based on these findings, I argue the duality itself is being reshaped, particularly in the case of international students, as they are in a continuous state of change and development.

As Lincoln (2012:36) suggests, through consumerism, the presence of public influence, especially in the case of young people, cannot be ignored and it gets tangled in their private sphere, going beyond the choices of style or selection of objects that might fortify their social and cultural identities. Thus the notion of “space” and the ways in which young people construct themselves must be understood in the context of a “world dominated by consumerism, the media and globalization and in somewhat adverse conditions.”

Identity is transiting and it is being exhibited on a new canvas. Hence, my thesis argues that aside from the pressure of protecting this individuality, there is the pressure of a context characterized by unsteadiness and endless possibilities given through consumption. Thus, I explore the potential reasons behind this consumption and I argue and outline its decisive role and presence. Even though they experience exterior pressure, students might buy because they need to shape and search the self or because in this particular context, the self needs to be reconstructed. In a rapidly changing world, this given physical space offers the prospect of taking control and establishing some significant expressions of identity that will further mark the stability of a growing adult.

Other studies on the topic of consumption, identity, and home point out the need for more research in this area, and highlight the relevance of this kind of research. Hanssen and Danielsen (2004) conducted their work in "House, Home and Identity from a Consumption Perspective" in Denmark, raising questions of what a home signifies to its residents, what makes a house a home, or how and why residents maintain and decorate their homes. The authors suggest the potential and necessity of "studies of younger households for instance may be more indicative of future trends" (2004:26). Thirteen qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out with families living in older villas and standard houses and established how various symbolic values influence the choice of home. The study also highlights some findings that shape applicable points on home decoration and furnishing as "a less structured and more individualistic self-expressive approach to the life-style concept in terms of home and identity" (2004:17). The paper also emphasizes the importance of having and making a home attractive in Scandinavian countries: "Danes today use almost one-third of their income on consumption related to housing" (Statistical yearbook, 1999 in Hanssen and Danielsen, 2004: 17). It draws attention to the fact that "in this identity creation, consumption of anything from houses to furniture and clothes is central" (2004:17) and thus I argue that living in Denmark, even if temporarily, might have an influence on the identity expression through home personalization of the foreign students.

The research carried by Hanssen and Danielsen has also shown that “as class structure and individual identity may not be as fixed anymore, identity-creating through home-decorating has become a way to develop and express identity, especially for women” (2004:25). Therefore the gender aspect will be crucial to the investigation of consumerism patterns expressed by university students in their making of a home.

Much like Hanssen and Danielsen (2004), Hauge and Kolstad (2007:272) were interested in researching “people thoughts about their dwellings as an expression of identity.” The study was carried out in Norway with residents in high-priced and low-priced neighborhoods. A significant finding was that younger to middle-aged participants were more aware than older ones of the “communicative aspects of their environments” (Hauge and Kolstad , 2007:272). Thus, this might indicate that students are more aware of their dwellings and their identities more influenced by them.

Another outcome shows that “additional research is needed to find out more about gender differences regarding the communicative aspect of the dwelling. There are probably also differences in attitudes towards this phenomenon in relation to ethnicity and different cultural backgrounds.” (Hauge and Kolstad, 2007:272). As the focus of my research is on international students, these different cultural backgrounds are implied and might have influenced their self-expression in the new environment.

Both articles emphasize the necessity and significance of further investigation of international students’ self-expression and gaining insights into how consumption of objects can turn their standard accommodation into a place that feels like a home in a new location of residence.

## 2. B. Home

*"Home was not the place where you were born but the place you created yourself, where you did not need to explain, where you finally became what you were."*

*Bolger (2008)*

Being placed in one standardized, furnished "plain" room and faced with various restrictions of a lease, immediately creates the urge to STAMP IT, to mark it as an extension of the self for Self and for Others. As explained in section 2.A. Consumerism and Identity, this need to express oneself is fulfilled through consumption, through usage of different things, objects that have the purpose to become a showcase of the self: bed linings, pillows, posters, mirrors, lamps, colored materials, candles, all serving their goal (Baudrillard, 1998; Slade, 2006; Woodward, 2011; Lincoln, 2012). To this impetuous necessity adds up the desire to recreate a sense of Home, as the physical characteristics of the house must be transformed and personalized (Hanssen and Danielsen, 2004; Lincoln, 2012;). But the question is raised: what exactly does feeling at home mean? Or, more precisely: what is "Home"?

This section will mainly focus on several different theoretical perspectives assigned to the term of "home" in correlation to the particular selected group of study: international students in Denmark living in given standard accommodations from the University of Aalborg. Furthermore, it will investigate their relation between personal identity and place identity formation.

As pointed out by the views of various researchers (Sixsmith, 1986; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2013), little work was focused on this particular case referring to the meaning of home for students, and the literature within the field is filled with rather disparate ideas on the notion of 'home' and 'place identity.' This leads to supporting further investigations of the possible connotations given to the concept of 'home' in direct relation with the newly gained identity and assumed status of a transitory foreign student, as explained in the previous section. Furthermore, there is an argument which states that the places students describe as home have a rather unusual nature (Sixsmith, 1986) and this is also supported by McCarthy et



al. (2013): students are regarded as an interesting group since “it is often the first time they have lived away from the family home, they are in flux between student and parental homes, between dependence and independence” (McCarthy et al., 2013: 76).

Being situated in this transitory position, the view of a “place-in-process” is being brought into discussion. As stated by Cristoforetti et al. (2011) in a study on widowhood and ‘home,’ there is a re-definition and re-construction of the domestic space. A parallel could be made with this study and some of the findings applied to the circumstance of students, who, like widows, experience a change in identity described by belonging to a “place-in-process,” characterized by movement, mobility and continuous creativity in regards to their personal meanings of home. Another similarity of both groups is that they suddenly experience having to live on their own, maybe for the first time.

Moreover, in the case of students, the familiar is placed in contrast with the temporary nature of the student accommodation. McCarthy et al. (2013:89) further elaborate on how “student houses are described as being ‘plain’, insufficient in themselves to provide homeliness” and how students find themselves in the position of having to transform a house into a home. Hence, given these remarks, the question remains: how is this newly gained identity influencing the understanding of home?

Further elaboration on the various significations and connotations imbued by the term of home in sociology, environmental psychology and literature of spatiality are required in order to point out the vast complex interrelations that are found in relation to the notion of “home”.

According to Cuba and Hummon (1993) this concept of “home” can be represented in association with three different locals: dwelling, community, and region. Consequently, when speaking of the notion of “home “or “sense of at home,” it is necessary to explain that this research will focus particularly on the meaning of home, or in Cuba and Hummon’s terms: ‘dwelling’ (in this case referring strictly to the given standard student accommodation). Thus, in order to narrow down the investigation, other concepts like the new region (Denmark) and the new community (Danish) will only be taken into consideration and debated when directly

associated with a possible influence on the student's perception regarding the given accommodation.

Additionally, Cuba and Hummon (1993:112) outline the concept of place identity as "an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity." As a student in a foreign country, the individual is in transition on many different levels. Both personal and social identities have become fluid. The question of "Who am I?" already present in the minds of young students who find themselves in challenging situations because of their fluid identity is now also accompanied by the question of "Where am I?" or, more precisely, "Where do I belong?" Here is a first connection with the fact that in order to preserve the self, to express it, PLACE is of great importance and there is a direct connection between place identity and self.

A similar view is held by Proshansky (1983, cited in Sixsmith, 1986:290), stating that the place identity is a sub-structure of self-identity, and that every human being is defined by the relation with the given physical setting. More specifically, when arguing the particular case of young international students living in standardized student accommodations, also adding up the personal experience, the question of "Where do I belong?" is mostly likely to be raised. First of all, because of this transitory state that is immediately assumed, along with the newly achieved status - away from what was once called "home." Then, faced with many changes on different levels, both personal and social, the international student is prone to wonder about this kind of question and try to reproduce and re-create that sense of belonging. Therefore, anchoring in one available fixed reference point in a world of constant rapid change, this freshly given "canvas" which is the new house becomes a symbol for communication of the self. This idea is reinforced by Cuba and Hummon's (1993:111) view on how the self is "situated in complex ways in the social-spatial environment" and emphasizes how places can become a framework where identity is created, preserved and transformed. This idea has been extended by Lincoln (2012) who refers to the new home as a canvas on which to display their identities and give shape to the self. Being away from the parental home, as explained by McCarthy (2013:92), can

also mean more freedom of expression, less control and more independence, thus “home may be an on-going construction intertwined with the construction and performances of the “self.”

On the other hand, McCarthy (2013:92) also points out that the nature of the student accommodation implies a negotiation, since the property is never actually “owned” by the student who is also faced with various restrictions and “because of the many people who have lived in the house previously” the need to “stamp” the place, to transform the house into a home becomes absolutely necessary. This idea was put forward by Sixsmith (1986) who outlines the importance of this transformation through personalization. Furthermore, Sixsmith (1986:285) outlines the idea of home from three perspectives which are meant to balance each other in the way the notion of “home” is supposed to be understood: the physical, the social, and the personal. The physical home refers to the design, layout, and architectural style of the house as “instances of self-expression.” Further, Sixsmith (1986) describes the social dimension as the place allowing entertainment, where friendship is formed and relations with other people are created. As well, the personal aspect of home is viewed as an expression of oneself, a “center of meaning, creating a sense of belonging and the place where the person can be themselves.” Much like Sixsmith (1986), Cristoforetti et al. (2011:226) draw attention to the importance of home as an extension of the self-identity and refer to the home as a “meaning maker.” In addition, people attribute personal meanings to the place, transforming it from a “simple container” - in this case the standard student accommodation - to a painting of the self.

Cristoforetti et al. (2011) take the stance that there are two dimensions in the space-place relation represented by the attachment to the place and the meaning of home. The first one refers to the feelings related to a place that emotionally connect a person, while the second dimension is based on central concepts of privacy, security, and identity.

Thus, in the particular case of international students in Aalborg, Denmark, I argue that this reinforces and explains both the need to personalize the standard accommodation in order to develop attachment to the place and to the given meaning to the new home, even if it is a temporary one.

The idea has been introduced by Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992: 139-140, cited in Cristoforetti et al., 2011) who argue for three different roles of attachment to the place:

1. Nurturing identity and protecting the self against damaging changes,
2. Strengthening the self,
3. Representing independence and continued capability.

Even though the specific group that Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992) are referring to is elderly people, I argue that all three roles are essential and can be applied for the international student, as going through a change on so many different levels can be damaging for the identity that needs to be cultivated. Building a home away from home finds reasoning in a reinforcement of the self and last, but not least, deals with the gained independence, but keeps the already built-in values and personal meanings that ensure continuity of the self.

Much like Sixsmith's (1986) ideas regarding the personal and social dimension of the home, Cristoforetti et al. (2011) argue that "home" stands as a symbol for a transition from the outside world to the inner one, creating a distinction from the public to the private sphere. Home can be regarded as a place of security and recreation, of detachment from the "Other."

This view has been challenged by Cuba and Hummon (1993:115), who outline the concept of "social mediation" of place which refers to socially mediated relations inside the sanctity of the home. This refers to the importance of integration in the local area, the weight of time component, where a longer term residence is more likely to be linked with significant life events that nurture the sense of home, the influence of the stage in which the person is in the life cycle and the gender differences, women being more likely to use the home as a reference point, according to Cuba and Hummon.

In this researched case, with Aalborg international students as research subjects, because of the special social status of a foreign student and the short/temporary nature of the accommodation, I believe both functions of home can be valid. It can easily represent a place of separation from the Other. In this particular context the distinction self-other is already more outlined by the cultural differences. However, in order to be transformed from a physical house

to a home, it implies the “social mediation” which might create a comfortable place, with emotional comfort.

In addition, when discussing the notion of Home, not only the characteristics of the place itself, but people’s interpretations through the prism of their backgrounds and past experience must be taken into consideration (Cuba and Hummon, 1993). Similarly to this idea, there is a view that further explains how personal meanings of home emerge out of the interrelationship between different homes. The home can be represented by more than one place for each person or a number of places simultaneously and “[...] a home is home depending on the extent to which it fulfils the person’s requirements, their changing objectives and circumstances [...]” (Sixsmith, 1986:285). Much like Cuba and Hummon (1993) and Sixsmith (1986), Blunt (2005, cited in McCarthy 2013: 95) outlines that “home is a sphere shaped by memories” and suggests that the understandings of the meaning of home should not be fixed, but rather include both visions of “the home as a performance for others and a performance of home-making rituals inherited from the parental home.”

Nevertheless, when discussing the notion of home, McCarthy (2013:89) draws attention to the importance of objects as “home or the idea of home becomes imbued with objects.” A similar view is held by Cristoforetti et al. (2011:229) when “objects thus become an important component of the sense of self [...] objects for expression and consumption are essential for the maintenance of a sense of self,” particularly in times of change.

Given these remarks, it all links back to the question raised in the beginning of this theoretical section, a question that’s probably been in the minds of many other international students faced with a home away from home: what is Home? And what exactly does feeling at home mean?

### 3. Methodology

*“Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work, everyday lives, conversations and dreams”*

*Sarah Pink (2001:17)*

In the following chapter of the thesis, the choice of methods and methodology will be elaborated and discussed, along with specifics and insights of the working process and some of the limitations of the methods.

First, the philosophical considerations that will elaborate on the epistemological and ontological directions that this thesis will follow are going to be developed in this following section.

#### 3.A. Philosophical Considerations

Guba (1990:17) holds the stance that it is difficult to clearly define a paradigm, but explains it as “a basic set of beliefs that guides action.” However, Guba et al. (1990) along with Jonassen (1991) explain that this basic belief system is the sum of three elements of which the researcher must be aware in order to comprehend how we come to know what we know. The three elements are considered to be the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions.

In this research, I aim to uncover how do transnationally mobile students use consumption in order to turn their accommodation into a place that feels like home.

Therefore, I have adopted a social constructivist approach, which means that I, as a researcher, believe that humans construct their own realities based on interaction and opinions of others, but that the same reality is under constant change throughout a person’s life (Bryman, 2012).

In my research, I believe the interview participants have been influenced by their transnationally mobile status, currently changing surroundings, backgrounds and newly assumed position.

The ontological question addresses issues such as: "What is there that can be known?" or "what is the nature of reality?" (Guba et al. 1989) In other words, it is the assumptions that we hold about the physical world (Jonassen, 1991). This means that one has to consider matters of existence or being (Guba et al. 1989).

My ontological stance within this thesis is relativism, where I recognize that multiple realities, which are socially constructed, exist. This means that each individual constructs his or her own reality through experiences and understandings of the world around him or her (Jonassen, 1991; Guba et al. 1989; Guba, 1990; Guba et al.1994; Murphy, 1997). An example of this is the multiple social constructions of what it means to be an international student living away from home or to use consumption of various objects in order to recreate a feeling of home, while maintaining a sense of self. In addition, knowledge and "truth" are created by the individual, not discovered because there is no "real truth" to be found (Schwandt, 1998; Murphy, 1997). Therefore I expect to uncover various ideas, constructions and experiences in regards to transnationally mobile students and their perceptions of identity and home. Hesse-Biber (2010:455) holds the stance that "there is not just one story but multiple stories of lived experiences". Thus, I also expect to encounter throughout my investigation various stories of turning a place into a home through consumption of various objects, and the meanings attributed to those particular objects. I assume a wide range of experiences and interpretations of this phenomenon. As Berger and Luckmann (1966:19) point out, everyday life is a "reality" interpreted by individuals through the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives.

The epistemological question approaches, according to Guba et al. (1989), issues such as: "What is the relationship of the knower to the known or knowable?" or "How can we be sure that we know what we know?"

The **epistemological** approach in this study is a subjectivist one. Subjectivism holds the claims that reality and truth depend exclusively on the information and amount of complexity accessible to the individuals and audiences present when forming those assertions.

“Inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two.” (Guba, 1990: 27). The inquirer is me as the researcher, and the inquired into are the participants. The realities mentioned by the students in this research are constructed together with the researcher. This means that I am connected with my participants. Therefore, the findings in this thesis are recognized as specific to the study. In other words, because I am part of the study, these findings are not merely images on the students view, thoughts and feeling, but rather images of shared constructions making the findings less generalizable, thus this is not the intent.

Taking into consideration all of the above, I argue that being a constructivist with regards to this study means that I recognize that identity and constructions of meanings regarding consumption and home are constantly created and re-created in various ways. Thus, two students do not share the same reality, and generalizing on behalf of all students is therefore not possible and also not the aim of this study.

Rather I acknowledge that each student must be viewed in the context of his or her daily life and the findings are to be diverse because of each student’s individual experiences, views and thoughts. This view will be later reflected in 4.B. "Narrative Analysis." Nevertheless, the individual behaviors might reveal social tendencies and meanings, as each individual is part of a social world. Additionally, I hope bring a contribution to this topic, highlighting the various implications of my subject.



### 3.B. Insights of the structure

To continue with insights of the structure of the working process, the following figure is shown. It is an image of the researcher's choice to organize and plan the writing of the thesis and was chosen as it sums up the logistics of the research process.



Considering the personal nature of the research and my position as a researcher, I thought of a less formal way of getting in touch with the participants. First of all, I was faced with an “easy way out” as I could have interviewed my friends or flat mates, but I decided it would be better for my research if my participants would not know me. The main reason behind my choice was the fact that I did not want to influence the quality of my data because of personal connections or by having a personal relation with my respondents. Therefore, I decided to use the snowball effect and include two boys and two girls in my research.

One of the most important characteristics I was looking for was that the participants were part of a dorm or Collegium and lived in similar rooms with the same standard furniture. This was not that easy to find, as most international students in Aalborg live in different areas and different kinds of housing: apartments, houses, studios, some unfurnished, some only partially furnished, and so on.

Eventually, I did find one of my participants at the “International night” organized at the Student House as I was always discussing my thesis topic; he happened to mention that he lives in an International Collegium. From there, I was added to their Facebook group and decided to write a “letter” that was designed in a manner I thought would best attract fellow students and capture their interest in my topic. Also, I decided to share a bit of my story and be personal and friendly so they would also open up and perhaps relate to it. Here is a fragment of the letter I posted on Facebook in the hope to attract research participants:

*“One year and few months passed, I changed several rooms, burned a lot of candles from Ikea, glued a lot of tape, killed several plants, printed a lot of posters and carried my things around Ålborg, but each time with the same strange enthusiasm of having a new place that I can personalize myself but still wondering how will I make my new house... a home.*

*And here I am writing my master thesis about it! “*

The strategy was very efficient as I easily found the other participants. Another idea I got was to offer them a compensation for participation: cookies. This was also effective, as one of the participants named our actual conversation on Facebook: “Cookies for an interview.”



Thus, my recruitment strategy led to interviews with four students: one German woman, one French woman and two American men. The interviews were carried out in their rooms, which were part of Aalborg International Kollegium, located on Brandevej 10. The following table offers more information on the participants, but this will be further elaborated in the "Analysis" chapter:

Celine	Neuilly-Plaisance, France
21 years old	10 months
Sonja	Goslar, Germany
19 years old	6 months
John	Calera, Alabama, USA
21 years old	6 months
Mitchel	Tucson, Arizona, USA
24 years old	6 months

I did not promise anonymity to my interviewees, but I see no reason to use their surnames, and hence only first names will be used when referring to them. The number of months refers to the planned length of their stay in Aalborg.

At first I wanted to research transnationally mobile students who were going to be in Aalborg for at least one year. However, I thought it would be even more interesting to explore this topic with students that are here for only one semester. I argue that their identity is even more challenged by the pressure of knowing the housing they currently live is only temporary, and while also being constantly aware that they will return to their country. I argue that the relation between their multiple views on the notion of "home" and their views and consumption habits would have various implications that I wanted to research.

Though, one fault was made in my plan, as it so happened that the first participant I interviewed was only here for ten months, not six like the others; I decided to keep the research like that, as she arrived at the same time as the others and I had already finished the interview when I realized this. Eventually, I thought it would be even more interesting to observe if this would have any influence on her answers compared to other participants.

Also, I decided not to correct the grammatical mistakes in the transcripts of the interviews. However, I did correct them in my analysis as I saw no need to point out these differences. Especially considering that two of my participants are from the USA and keeping in mind that there are changes from spoken to written language.

### 3.C. Methods

The participants were asked to take five photographs with my mobile phone of five things that they added to their accommodation to make it feel like home and which they felt were representative of their identity. While they were taking the photographs, I decided to leave the room, as I thought it would be better to leave them some private time to take these photos. After photographing, they called me back in the room and we started the interview. The interview was based on the five photos they took; I was asking them to elaborate on the meanings of the things they chose, as well as asking other questions based on a structure I designed. However, the order of questions varied from participant to participant. I was not following a strict structure, as I wanted the participants to develop and elaborate on their answers.

The methods chosen for this project are qualitative; more exactly, participatory visual methodology: auto-photography and photo elicitation. During the past years, several researchers have used qualitative methods to explore beliefs and experiences of young people in relation to space (e.g., Mc. Carthy 2013, Lincoln 2012, Cristoforetti 2011, Harper 2002, Noland 2006, Scarles 2010). The effectiveness of these methods will be further explained and evaluated in relation to the researched case.

Therefore, I argue that in order to answer the question of a relationship between individuals and their private spaces, participatory visual methodology is the most suitable approach. As Mack et. al (2005) state, one advantage of qualitative methods in the investigation is that it offers the respondents the possibility to answer in their own words, rather than constraining them to choose from fixed responses as quantitative methods do. Taking into consideration the nature of the investigated matter: international students in relation to their identity, consumption choices and housing, obtaining answers not anticipated by the researcher that are more meaningful and explanatory in nature were essential.

Mack et. al (2005) hold the view that another advantage of qualitative methods is that they give the researcher flexibility in elaborating further consecutive questions and engaging the participants in further explanation of their initial answers. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to investigate according to the individual characters and styles of the participant and allow a rather spontaneous development of research. This was specifically the case in my research, as the investigation took place within the private homes of the respondents.

Much like Mack et. al (2005), Bryman (2012) also draws attention to this advantage of flexibility given by qualitative research. Also, Bryman (2012) points out that by using these methods, the responses are inclined to be more complex and elaborated.

One of the most commonly used methods for data collection in qualitative research are interviews, with a usual focus of the research on verbal exchanges with participants to co-construct meaning (Bryman 2012). On the other hand, when it comes to obtaining original data in qualitative research, the encounters faced by the researchers can vary. I argue that when it comes to transnationally mobile students, the very nature of the subject of feeling at home is private, more intimate and it can be difficult to express the idea of home and define your identity in simple sentences. This idea is outlined by Cristoforetti et al. (2011: 226) as “the space of home – experienced in terms of places and relationships, objects and emotions – includes and completes a person’s self-image and sense of identity.” Therefore, one could argue that the use of participatory visual methodology improves the quality of the produced data and facilitates the process of obtaining it. Pink (2001) elaborates on the advantages of visual

methods in improving the quality of produced data. In addition, researchers like McCarthy (2013:98) also point out the suitability of visual methods as they can “give voice” to the participant and “allow people to share their feelings in ways that other methods don’t” (2013:100).

As it follows, I argue for the use of participant-generated photography in my research. Participants taking photographs on the topic of interest created the opportunity to generate inspiring qualitative data. Furthermore, I suggest that using these photographs as stimuli in the interviews diminished the potential distance between the researcher and the other students. Distance was taken into consideration in the first place as it might have been created by the simple fact that it was the first time we were interacting face to face.

The potential model for research is explained by Harper (2002:23): “when two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs, they try to figure out something together.” As Harper (2002:13) explains, “photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview.” Also, the stance that photographs could function as a link among these distant cultural worlds of the researcher and the participants is suggested by Harper (2002).

Also, the fact that the investigation itself implied rather intimate questions about the private space and personal things of the participants was taken into consideration when choosing research methods. Students can become aware of a new perspective through photographs (Harper 2002, McCarthy 2013). Thus, auto-photography was used as an aide in order to reveal the perspective of these four individuals. They were approached with these visual research methods in order to expand their narrative responses on their experience of temporarily living away from home in relation to consumption.

In this research, photo elicitation will be based on photographs taken by the research participants themselves. The participants were asked to discuss and explain the significance of their photos in relation to their consumption habits in order to turn their standard accommodation into a place that feels like a home to them. Keeping in mind the advantages of photo elicitation, I argue that this method is suitable for investigating the experiences of transnationally mobile students living in Denmark.

Furthermore, when doing photo-elicitation interviews with students, I decided to use my own mobile phone as it was the most efficient and accessible option given time and resources. Correspondingly, I support this choice in my thesis on the arguments debated by Hjorth (2007) on camera phone practices as new forms of storytelling.

As suggested by Hjorth (2007), along with the evolution of technology, the mobile phones have become more sophisticated and the quality of the pictures taken has increased considerably. Apart from being accessible from both a cost and time perspective, as Hjorth (2007:230) points out, “the camera phone signifies a glimpse into one’s personal world.”

Initially, I wanted to ask the participants to take the five photographs with their mobile phones and then share them with me via the Internet. Then I came to the realization that giving them my own mobile phone would actually make the process more efficient. The quality of the photographs will be the same for each participant, and I would gain quick and constant access to the photos.

“The ultimate fetishization of the personal” is how Hjorth (2007:235) refers to using camera phone practices, as we are allowed into someone’s personal world. I was allowed into my participants’ rooms, as their pictures started to build up in my phone, gathering confessions, meanings, and stories.

Hjorth’s (2007) view is backed up by Harper (2002), who argues that photo elicitation “expands the opportunities of conventional empirical research and creates a different kind of information, a particular form of representation”(2002:13).

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, examples of similar investigations and other researchers’ insights are reinforcing the advantages of choosing these methods for my project. This choice is further reinforced through Pink’s (2001) theory who, much like Harper (2002), draws attention to research and paradigms from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, photographic studies, and media studies to describe visual methods in the qualitative paradigm. Images surround us, pervade in our conversations and dreams, and so researchers are encouraged to use visual methods in their studies. Pink (2001:96) outlines what she calls a

different approach to analysis which "begins with the premise that the purpose of analysis is not to translate visual evidence into verbal knowledge, but to explore the relationship between visual and other knowledge." Thus, the photographs will be analyzed in relation to the comments and further elaborations that took place during the photo elicitation phase of the data collection process. Moreover, Pink (2001) stresses the need to pay attention to the visual aspects of culture and the fact that visual research methods cannot be used independently of other methods.

Much like Pink (2001) and Harper (2002), Noland (2006) states that auto-photography is an important way of building bridges with participants in the research process since it offers researchers a way to let participants speak for themselves. In addition, Noland (2006) argues that auto-photography can create more authentic data: participants share their view on the world as they select the images they think are most representative.

The choice of mobile phones in my research is sustained by another argument stated by Noland (2006:3) who reinforces that "clearly, measures and instruments that allow participants to play more active roles in defining themselves should foster a better understanding of the construction of identity."

In my particular research, the four students were given freedom to pick and choose to photograph the objects within their rooms that were significant to their construction of identity. Furthermore, as explained above, the nature of the investigated concepts (identity, housing, consumption, leaving the parental home, personal choices, private daily aspects) might have been much more difficult if other methods of interviewing were used. Instead, giving the participants the mobile phone and allowing them to take the photographs might have eased some of this pressure. Noland (2006:5) proposes is that "photographs should be used as tools to help identify what people value, what images they prefer, how they define their world, and how they picture others." She argues that auto-photography can be used efficiently in studying identity and other dimensions of culture and self.

A similar view to Pink (2001), Harper (2002), and Noland(2006) is held by Scarles (2010), who emphasizes that ever since the development of photo-elicitation, the benefits of using



photographs in the interview setting have been established. The opening of a new kind of understanding, breaking the limits of verbal discourse and other methods are also brought into discussion by Scarles (2010). Creativity, as well as better comprehension and communication between the participants and the researcher are mentioned as advantages of such an approach. Scarles (2010) suggests that “ownership shifts away from the researcher and the research agenda is viewed through a variety of lenses.” I hold the view that these “variety of lenses” can also offer a variety of enriching data, allowing me the access into the homes and views of the participants, both literally and symbolically. Thus, by empowering the respondents, they are given the chance to communicate their views, pushing away the potential limitations of verbal communication. Scarles (2010) refers to this “through intersubjective exchange,” as it is once more argued that visual material provides a bridge between the researcher and the respondents.

### 3.D. Limitations of methods

In this section of the "Methodology" chapter the limitations of the chosen methods will be debated. One of the potential limitations encountered in this particular research is the one of time. As other researchers have concluded (Pink, 2001; Noland, 2006; McCarthy, 2013), the usage of photo elicitation and auto-photography is time consuming. This time limitation also influenced the number of participants chosen for this research, which most likely further influences the conclusions. Although my approach allows the participants to get more involved, the time given to them for taking the photographs can also influence their choice.

Another limitation could be the language barrier. Even though all selected participants are international students who study in English, not being able to express themselves in their native language could impose some obstacles in expressing themselves and understanding the questions they were asked. As I will debate in my analysis below, this seems to be an issue with particularly one of my interview persons, Celine.

Furthermore, the private, personal nature of the investigated subject could represent a limitation, as the participants met the researcher for the first time on the day of the interview.

Some of the participants might not feel comfortable enough to talk openly about these private matters. On the other hand, as explained above, I purposely sought to interview persons I had no prior acquaintance with.

Additionally, another limitation of the methods is my own lack of experience as a researcher. This might have led to me asking leading questions, therefore influencing the participants, and this is an issue I will keep an eye open for in the ensuing analysis.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.A. Analysis Introduction

The analysis will be structured in two sections: "Narrative" and "Thematic." The first section will focus on each of the four participants and the photographs they took with my mobile phone, and the questions and discussions related to these photographs. This first part moves from more general observations about my interaction with the participants to more specific issues. These issues are concerned with a discussion of the collected photos and followed by how all of these issues were connected to the theoretical perspectives.

After the section focused on auto-photography and photo elicitation, the next part investigates the main themes that came up in the semi structured interviews. However, these interviews are informed by and closely related to the discussion of the photographs preceding the second part of the interview. The "Narrative analysis" section will also offer background information of each participant, along with other crucial contextual observations, that may impact on issues raised in the "Thematic analysis."

## 4.B. Narrative analysis

### Celine's canvas

#### Background observations

My first respondent was Celine, from France, who is twenty one years old and will be staying in Denmark for ten months. As I previously explained in the "Methodology" chapter, I thought Celine would also be in Denmark for six months. However, this small difference from the other participants turned into something interesting to research.

When we first met face to face, Celine gave me the impression of being an introvert and seemed rather uncomfortable to welcome me to her private space. I think the fact that she was the first one I interviewed had an influence on the collected data. Despite the fact that, as explained before, distance was taken into consideration in the first place, I did not know what to expect from my first actual interaction. Unlike the rest of her colleagues, Celine proved to be the least talkative one. Her body language expressed insecurity and reticence. She was avoiding eye contact and not smiling. Also the fact that English is not her native language might have added up to her giving short answers and speaking in a low ton. Even though I was trying to make her elaborate on her initial answers with my follow up questions, she was still brief and often made pauses in her speech.

Even though I explained to her the auto-photography task, Celine seemed rather not sure on what to photograph with my mobile phone. However, I was pleasantly surprised to notice she had no trouble in accomplishing the request. Later on, comparing her photographs with the others' photographs. I argue they were the most meaningful ones. In contrast with her less chatty nature I think the photographs showed a lot of connections with her home, while also revealing aspects of her identity. These observations support my argumentation for the use of participatory visual methods that I previously elaborated on in the "Methodology" chapter. The objects she chose to photograph stand as vivid reminders of her home in France, as well as they are imbued with various significations. Even though her narratives were not so developed as the other students', Celine pointed out significant objects in regard to my research. For

example, later on in the interview she revealed her passion for painting, as one of the photos she decided to take included her drawings and brushes.

### **The Visuals and their stories**

The first photograph reveals several letters which Celine decided to carefully arrange on the floor when she captured them:



She gave further details: “They are old letters that I received from my family, they are very important for me, because I always enjoy to receiving them [...]” The letters were mostly from her grandmother and while sharing their story, Celine exposed an interesting facet of her identity: “I like this old fashioned way to communicate with her, because she doesn’t have internet and we go back to the old school manners and I like that.” She also chose to keep them in sight, as constant reminders of her loved ones back home.

The second photograph she took was of a clothing item:



“This is a t-shirt that my sister painted, she gave it to me for Christmas, I don’t really wear it but I like to see it,” she explained. A clothing item that she turned into a vibrant reminder of her sister, placed where she could see it all the time. I think her decision not to wear it proves the symbolic meaning behind it, as it is also a memory from Christmas time spent at home.

The third photograph is showing several items:



When I asked her to explain what the photograph meant, she explained looking around: “These are the books that I receive for my birthday, they are pretty right there.”

I couldn’t help but notice the box in which she received them, displayed in a way that made her name and current address visible. I think this choice of location was not random, as it was probably written by someone in her family.

She continued: “This is a drawing from my cousin that I receive by letter too, and this is the name of my student’s union in France which I was part before leaving.”

I had noticed the drawing that was taped to her bookcase when I first got in her room. Looking back at the photographs I would have asked more questions about the actual content of the drawing, as it happens to show a girl and a house, which I think might be a representation of Celine and her home. I hoped she would elaborate, so I asked what it meant to her. After a small break, while she kept looking at the drawing, she replied: “kind of represents all my life in France, in my school and this is my family....” I think she was visibly emotional recalling this.

The fourth photograph reveals several pair of shoes:



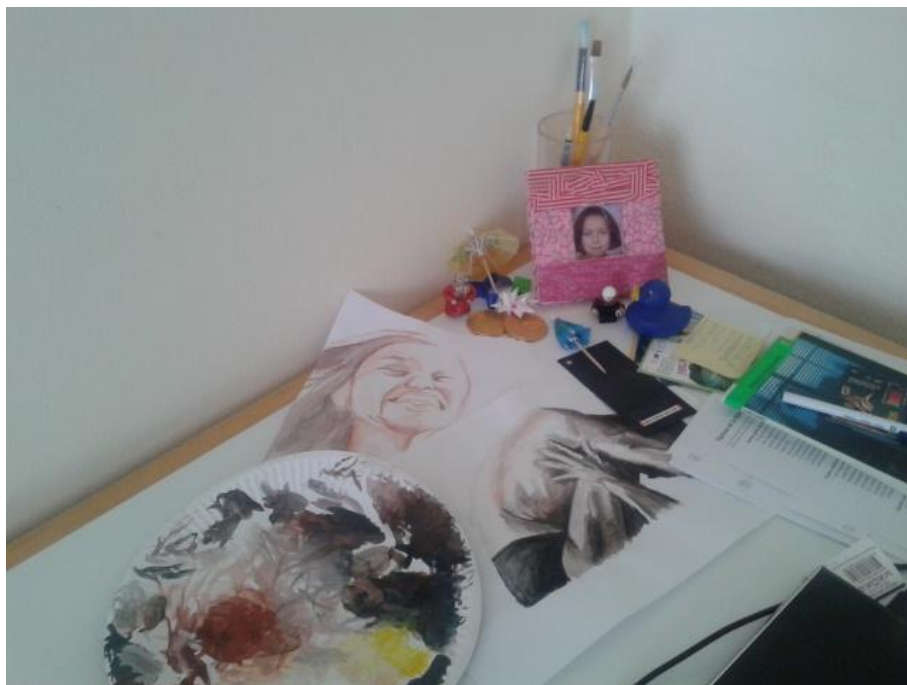
I admit: at first I was rather intrigued by this particular choice of objects, but Celine explained: “[...] what I meant with this is that I like to not feel restrained by the stuff I have here. I like to

have the choice, not feel like: "okay I am going to wear this because I only have this" or "I am going to cook this because I only have this."

I think through this she revealed another part of her personality: the need for independence and freedom of choice. Perhaps having this possibility to choose what to wear or cook contributed to creating a feeling of home as she experienced the same way in France. On the other hand, lacking some objects can make her feel constrained and away from what she is used to at home.

Furthermore, I identify a potential connection with the "Theory" section here. More exactly, to where Todd (2012) argues that consumption has a communication function for the other and that it becomes a way to transform the self in order to belong, to fit within a specific social structure. I argue that in Celine's case, the various pairs of shoes help her integrate in the newly entered environment. As previously explained, the need to define oneself is increased and so is the need to shape the identity, and for Celine keeping her options like this seems to shape and define herself. A parallel can be made with Deutsch and Theodorou (2009:230) theory which suggests that "consumerism, as a social ideology, and consumption, as an individual activity, are used to both mark and mask differences in the process of individual identity construction."

Hence, both marking and masking the differences she might experience, Celine finds refuge in the daily routine activities she can pursue with the help of a number of distinct, meaningful objects for her. The last photograph is also showing several small items placed on her desk:





In the "Theory" chapter, I mentioned Elliott (1997), who proposes that the products we buy, the daily routine activities we pursue, and the philosophies or beliefs that we hold, tell the world stories about who we are and with whom we identify. I think Celine's display of small objects stands for both telling stories about her personality, and as constant reminders of events and memories she built up in her new place. Celine narrates the stories, while grabbing different objects from her desk: "These are paintings that I made here, and also some small stuff, small things, that I have found out here and just keep them."

Furthermore, I also mentioned in the theory section Cuba and Hummon (1993:115), who state that "[...]a longer term residence is more likely to be linked with significant life events that nurture the sense of home[...]." Even though this dwelling is only temporary for Celine, I think the fact that she links significant life events (Christmas, dinners, time spent with her colleges) with it and the objects she's surrounded by contribute to her feeling at home. She picks up two decorations and points out: "This is from a party that we had this semester, and this one from Christmas, the Christmas dinner that we made here, just reminds me of different things." Her story develops: "This one is a present from a Chinese girl who lives around here, it was for Christmas." She carefully puts everything back in place, as if they had a specific order understood by her and shows me small, blue duck toy: "[...]and this is something I found with my group mates in my University and they gave it to me."

## **Sonja's canvas**

### **Background observations**

My second respondent was Sonja, from Germany, who is nineteen years old and will be staying in Denmark for six months.

When we first met face to face, Sonja gave me the impression of being really excited to welcome me to her private space. Unlike Celine, her body language expressed openness and confidence. She was always making eye contact and smiling very often. Also in contrast to Celine, she spoke loud and clear, laughing and joking around.

Whereas Celine seemed rather uncomfortable to take the photographs with my mobile phone, Sonja gladly complied with my request. I think her personality did reflect in her answers and in



the meanings attributed to the objects she chose to photograph. For example, later on in the interview she revealed her passion for photography, as one of the photos she decided to take was of her camera and printer.

The stories she associated with the photographs were more detailed than Celine's and had numerous references to her family, friends, habits, and home in Germany.

### **The Visuals and their stories**

The first objects Sonja decided to photograph were her camera and her printer. As she further explained:



“[...] I have to take photos, is kind of my hobby, I usually do it back home, like walking around and taking random photos [...]”

Sonja was aware of the advantage of coming by car when moving to Denmark, so she decided to take the printer; she continued: “I decide, ok, you can take photos but you can't print them so there you go [...]” I think this links with the theory section where I argue that in the student-object relation, a type of transaction takes place that influences both parts: the object becomes imbued with meaning and thus desires become materialized as they are expressed. (Winnicott,

1953, cited in Woodward 2011:373). Sonja gives meaning to the camera and the camera gives her the chance to express herself and manifest her creativity, both being influenced in this way.

The next photograph Sonja decided to take is of her coffee machine and of a cup she brought with her from Germany:



First, she revealed something about her identity, affirming that “[...]without coffee in the morning nothing works for me [...].” The cup is also imbued with signification for her, as it tells the story of “a voluntary three weeks long vacation in the summer.” Thus, the cup becomes a symbol of her personality, as well as a memory of time spent with her friends. “[...]it gives me that feeling of home [...],” Sonja gave details as she smiled while looking at the cup that even had her name painted on it.

When I asked if she also used to drink coffee at home, she replied that “[...] it’s like routine and I want to keep that [...].” I argue these affirmations are settling a connection with Blunts’ (2005,

cited in McCarthy 2013: 95) vision, which outlines that “home is a sphere shaped by memories.” As explained in the Theory chapter, Blunt (2005), much like Cuba and Hummon (1993) and Sixsmith (1986), points out the understandings of the meaning of home should include both visions of “the home as a performance for others and a performance of home-making rituals inherited from the parental home.”

The third photograph is showing some posters of horses Sonja had placed out in the open, on her table:



When moving onto this, photo Sonja started to laugh and joked about how she “[...] wasn’t sure if I can take a photo of Taylor Launter half-naked on my wall [...]”. She pointed to the poster placed in the middle of the biggest wall and told the story behind it. This particular narrative revealed Sonja’s sense of humor, but also her strong connection with her sister. As the poster on the wall was a gift from her sister, she chose to display it even though she admitted: “[...] to be honest I’m not a huge fan of him.” Even so, the meaning imbued in this particular poster was pointing out a memory of home: “[...] back home she usually had those posters on her wall, so now it kind of reminds me of my sister [...]”.

I think her choice not to photograph the poster but still share its story with me also stands as a facet of her identity. However, I decided to continue my interview inquiring after the meanings of the posters she did chose to photograph. The stories lead to Sonja talking about the limitations of living in a temporary student accommodation, as one of the problems was that she couldn't tape all the posters on the wall. She explained: "I don't want to use black tape, because that would look nasty on my wall. There is nothing I can put in my wall, like nail is not working [...]."

This leads back to the theory section where McCarthy (2013:92) points out that the nature of the student accommodation implies a negotiation. The space is never actually "owned" by the student who is also faced with various restrictions and "because of the many people who have lived in the house previously" the need to "stamp" the place, to transform the house into a home. I similarly argue Sonja's photographs reflect this need.

The fourth photograph presents a candle surrounded by three stone hearts and a small figurine of a pig with a coin inside:



As explained in the "Theory" section, Lincoln (2012:146) states that "material objects and items are selected that help a young person to personalize and individualize a standardized, generic space." I argue students may want to recreate the bedrooms they had in their parental homes to a certain extent, and Sonja's auto photography reinforces this idea. She recounts: "[...] back home my room is decorated in this purple or violet colors like my blanket, and as you can see my bedding sheets are like purple too. So I was looking for a violet candle of a long time [...]."

However, another connection is made with the theory section as, when discussing the notion of home, Cristoforetti et al. (2011:229) draw attention to the fact that "objects for expression and consumption are essential for the maintenance of a sense of self[...]." The idea that "home or the idea of home becomes imbued with objects" (McCarthy, 2013:89) is reflected here.

As Sonja further narrated the meanings behind what she chose to photograph here, she showed the connection with her family again, as the candle and the hearts were a gift from her mom. Similarly, the small pig figurine was a gift from her grandmother "[...] basically it says good luck for the next year and my grandmother is always getting these little pigs for the whole family." Traditions behind these objects and similarities to her home in Germany recreate a feeling of home in Denmark for Sonja. Being constantly reminded of her friends and family by these objects seems to be essential in contributing to her sense of self and belonging.

When discussing the notion of "Home", not only the characteristics of the place itself, but people's interpretations through the prism of their backgrounds and past experience must be taken into consideration (Cuba and Hummon, 1993).

A part of Sonja's background can be seen in the five photographs she took and the narratives that seem to be infused with past experiences. Sixsmith (1986:285) holds the stance that the home can be represented by more than one place for each person, or a number of places simultaneously, and this is confirmed by Sonja constantly making references to "back home."

I was not sure what I saw in the last photo Sonja took until she explained it was a special object to have meals on. She told me the knife was placed there on purpose so it would be more obvious what it is used for:



I think it is significant to the analysis to notice that the pattern of this is actually a representation of her home town, Goslar. "This is supposed to be like a nice map of my town [...] it was a present [...] to remember home [...] when I have breakfast I can remember where I belong."

In the Theory chapter, the relationship between objects and creating a sense of self was investigated. Consumption is viewed as a continuous practice, shaping identities and creating bridges between others and the external environment.

Woodward's (2011:373) theory that "objects and a person's relationship with them are incorporated into a sense of self, becoming psychic resources for integrating maturing personhood" is reflected here. Much like in the other photos she took, the last one also shows a gift. This denotes the fact that the objects that remind her of loved ones help Sonja recreate a feeling of home away from home and reinforce her identity.

Accordingly, in Sonja's case it is evident that much like children playing and learning with their toys "adults also have a range of special objects, to which they may feel attached: a favorite

mug, a photograph, a special item of clothing, a pen, item of jewelry, and so on” (Winnicott 1968, cited in Woodward 2011:373).

## **Mitchel's canvas**

### **Background observations**

My third respondent was Mitchel, from USA, who is twenty-four years old and will be staying in Denmark for six months.

When we first met face to face, Mitchel gave me the impression of being really polite and not as introverted as Celine, but not as open as Sonja either. Mitchell's body language expressed openness and during the interview he became increasingly relaxed and talkative. He was making eye contact from time to time, but was more preoccupied with showing me around when explaining his photographs. I think the gender difference might have also influenced his behavior, as it might have been more comfortable for the women to talk to me. On the other hand, I experienced a difference in his way of speaking, as his native language is English. Thus, the potential language barrier was clearly reduced and I assume it was easier for him to express himself verbally compared to Celine and Sonja.

Furthermore, even though at first Mitchel seemed concerned he didn't have too many things to photograph, his interview was the longest. I think his personality reflected mostly in his stories connected to the things he captured, as well as in the stories encouraged by my questions. The meanings attributed to the objects he chose to photograph were similarly revealing of his individuality. For example, by simply looking at the photographs he chose to take, I couldn't tell much about him or what is in the pictures, as I could with Celine and Sonja. But as he started to explain more, he revealed numerous stories of his background, passions, and meanings he attributed to each object.

These stories he associated with the photographs were more detailed than Celine's and Sonja's and he frequently referenced his family, friends, habits and his understanding of home.



## The Visuals and their stories

I had no clue what was in the first photograph, but as he explained, it was a travel compass and a temperature gage in the empirical system:



This photograph exposed his passion for hiking, as the object initially belonged to his hiking backpack “back home.” After I found out what it was, I insisted on knowing what the meaning of it for Mitchel was. “It reminds me of home because where I live I can get in my car and drive five, ten, fifteen minutes and be outside the city where I went to school, before I came here and just be in the mountains and just hike and get away from things it's kind of something that reminds me of things that I used to be able to do [...]”

His choice of object to photograph links back to the theory chapter, where I argue that there is a connection with the fact that in order to preserve the self and to express it, PLACE is of great importance, as there is a direct connection between place identity and self. Cuba and Hummon (1993:112) outline this concept of place identity as “an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity.” As I explained, as a student in a foreign country, the individual is in transition on many different levels. For Mitchel this particular object was reminding him of the places he travelled to when he was in USA, pointing out links between his surroundings and his individuality.



In the second photo Mitchel decided to photograph his desk:



Even though at first I could not understand why he chose this, he explained it was the position of the desk that mattered more. He elaborated: “[...] I always keep my desk next to my window back home which is because I like it when it’s a window next to it [...]it’s somewhat organized.”

On the other hand, I suggested in my theory section that being aware of the temporary nature of the accommodation provided by the university can also put additional pressure on transforming the bedroom and making it feel like home. As Lincoln (2012:146) was previously cited, at the same time “there is the dual pressure to create a space that is, on the one hand, self-referential but, on the other, a display for others who enter the space.”

I also argued in the theory section that students may want to recreate the bedrooms they had in their parental homes to a certain extent and much like Sonja, Mitchel’s auto photography and narratives strengthen this idea.

The third photograph Mitchel chose was of canned food:



More precisely, as he explained, “those are caned hatched green chilies which you will not find in this country.” He accentuated the last part as he wanted to highlight they are from “back home.” The story behind these food cans revealed they were also a connection to his family, as his parents decided to send him a “care package.” He elaborated on how he told them “hey, send these so I can make some traditional Mexican food from home.” Unlike Sonja, he didn’t have the advantage of coming by car, but similarly to her coffee routine he wanted to keep his food routine: “literally, a taste of home...”

In the fourth picture Mitchel also decided to capture traditional food and drink:



“It's going to be a similar, same thing, this is a cinnamon rice drink which is also very Mexican, southern Arizona, United States area because the Mexican culture influences where I live so heavily. It's part of what I am used to [...]"

Mitchel makes numerous references to his culture and traditions and explains how this particular food helps him recreate a feeling of home and traditions.

Not only a vivid reminder of his culture but also a specific thing he shared with his friends, reconstructing memories: “[...]where I am from tequila, well it's the traditional drink that it's always brought, especially if you go to Mexican friends or Latin decenter from Center or South America[...]"

Mitchel's sense of identity is also strongly reflected in his choice as he further relates “[...] tequila is just a part of the culture where I am from, even though I'm American, it's still a part of our culture [...] it's a good thing to have and it just reminds me of home and it's good stuff to drink..."

For the last photograph, Mitchel chose three items:



Mitchel seemed to enjoy talking about these specific items as each one had a different story. His narratives were very rich in details as he explained: “[...] the patch is actually a sheriff’s uniform patch, because my mother is a law enforcement officer back home.”

In the theory section I point out how Woodward (2011:376) draws attention to how “a temporary space of cultural possibility – a fusion of person with thing” is created and the basis of future social interaction is shaped. Mitchel’s answers highlight this concept as he further elaborates on how these objects create meaning not only for his identity, but also for his interaction with others: “and I brought a bunch of them over because I have some Danish friends that are in the military here and patches are a very big thing to trade [...].”

Once more, the link with his friends and parents and, thus, his native home was created through these objects: “[...] I have a lot of friends that are law enforcement officers, but that reminds me of both my parents [...].”

Mitchel narrated the story behind the second item in the picture, the “folded American flag,” as it was something that he always had with him since he left his home. He narrated how his father used to take this flag everywhere, marking the strong emotional signification behind this particular object. Not only a link to his father, the flag becomes a must-have symbolic item for

his transnationally mobile status: “I never once unfolded the American flag since my father gave it to me six years ago, it's always been folded and whenever I travel or whenever I go to places for long periods of time I pack it in my suitcase...”

The third item in this photo is described in detail and with a proud attitude visibly showing Mitchel’s interest and affection to it: “the smaller flag it's my states flag [refers to Arizona], it's what we call a copper-bloom-gold so it signifies the horizon, the stars and then the rise of the sun coming up over the clouds, cause when the sun its setting you'll see the rays shooting up from the horizon through the clouds so that's what our flag signifies and it reminds me of Home.”

## John's canvas

### Background observations

My last respondent was John, also from USA, who is twenty one years old and will be staying in Denmark for six months.

We first met face to face in the Student House. John was my first connection to the rest of the students, but I chose to interview him last, as he already knew more details about my research than the rest. From the very beginning, John gave me the impression of being really eager take part in my investigation. Even if we already knew each other, when I first entered his room I noticed the same care as with all the other students for my comfort (for example, offering me water). John’s body language expressed openness which I think was rooted in his interest in my topic, but also shyness, to some extent similar to Celine’s. Much like in Mitchel’s case I assume it might have been less comfortable for the male students to be interviewed on private, intimate matters. Nevertheless, John was smiling very often and much like Mitchel had no problem expressing himself loud and clear. Also, often laughing and joking around like Sonja, he was visibly emotional when talking about the meanings of the photos.

Alike all the rest of my participants, John appeared relieved when I told him I was going to leave the room while he took the photographs with my mobile phone. I think his character reflected in his answers and in the meanings attributed to the objects he chose to photograph. For

example, later on in the interview I observed that apart from his laptop, all the items he chose to photograph had history and were marked with meanings gathered over the course of some years.

The stories he associated with the photographs were not as detailed as Mitchel's or Sonja's, but more detailed than Celine's. John had a clear focus on the meanings behind each object as he seemed more emotionally attached to them than the other participants. Much like his collegium colleagues, he had several references to his family, friends, but not as much on his passions or habits. This leads me to think that John's identity and feeling of home is less focused on routines or conducts, but more on a few emblematic items he always carried around when assuming the transnationally mobile status. Rather than following some traditions, John created his own tradition from taking these objects with him, as a now integrated part of his identity.

### **The Visuals and their stories**

The first object John decided to photograph was his laptop. As he further explained:



“My computer is how I keep in touch with everybody from home. It's how I entertain myself when I have nothing to do. Basically that's my connection between here and home.” His choice reveals the importance of keeping in touch with his friends and family. The laptop becomes essential when transiting away from home in order to preserve the connections. This also might point out that for John, not necessarily the object itself but the access he gains through it helps recreate the feeling of home. This indicates a connection with Bonini's view (2011:869) which outlines that “We can, with our media, take something of home with us: the newspaper, the video, the satellite dish, the Internet.... Home has become, and can be sustained as, something virtual, as without location. A place without space.”

Also it is important for his identity as it is described as a main modality to entertain himself. Another connection with Sixsmith's (1986) theory, a social dimension of the home is emphasized here. The home is represented as the place allowing entertainment, where friendship is formed and relations with other people are created, but also maintained. The second photograph John took reveals a piece of clothing:





John described the sweatshirt: “[...]it has symbolic meaning cause it's the first piece of clothing that I bought myself, that my parents didn't actually pay for. I've had it for almost 5 years now [...]”

I argue his choice reinforces the theoretical view of McCarthy et al. (2013) on the fact that these participants are in a flux between student and parental homes, between dependence and independence. More precisely, in this case John gives meaning to this object as it became a “symbol of my independence, a symbol of home.” Apart from gaining double meaning, it is a constant reminder that marks his transition.

For the third photograph John chose a symbolic street sign on his wall:



When I first entered John's room I noticed the completely white walls, apart from the one right above his bed where he had this sign placed right in the middle. He told me the story behind it: “I got it when I was in New York, couple of years ago, so it kind of reminds me of home in a way [...]” After that our conversation focused on a comparison between how “[...] back home, I



have posters and pictures and everything. There is not a single wall that is not covered with everything, but that's the only thing that I brought with me" and how he would have done the same thing here, but since it's only temporary, he decided not to.

I could observe the change in his voice tone and a rather melancholic outlook when talking about this limitation of his current situation: "I could have bought some and put them all over the place but I am here for only one semester so there is not much point for bringing a bunch of flags or posters or album art work from cities and putting them on the wall."

John revealed that he "would have totally brought so many more things, if I would stay here for longer that entire wall would be covered, half of the space here, there would probably be things on the ceiling."

Much like Celine, he was faced with the need of having more objects but deciding not to purchase them because of the transitory nature of his current status. Cristoforetti et al. (2011) theoretical concept of "place-in-progress" could be identified here. Movement, mobility and continuous creativity are experienced in such a place, contrasting the familiar with the temporary nature of the student accommodation.

In the fourth photograph John captured another clothing item:



Much like the hoodie and the street sign, John had this beanie since he was “a sophomore in high school [...]” As John shares with me the story of this object, he recalls all the places he had it with him: “[...] that has gone with me to Jamaica, Ireland, Europe, New York, Washington, Pennsylvania, Boston [...]” The symbolic meaning of this object is evident even for John who admits he even took it to “places where it can actually be too hot to use.”

A parallel can be made with McCarthy’s (2013:89) theory, which draws attention to the importance of things as “home or the idea of home becomes imbued with objects.” Also, this reflects the view held by Cristoforetti et al. (2011:229), pointing out that “objects thus become an important component of the sense of self [...] objects for expression and consumption are essential for the maintenance of a sense of self,” particularly in times of change. John simply admits how “it’s just absolutely fantastic, it reminds me of home.”

The last photo John took is of an old photograph portraying his family:



Much like the other students I interviewed, for John the element of family is also very present in association with his notions of home and identity.

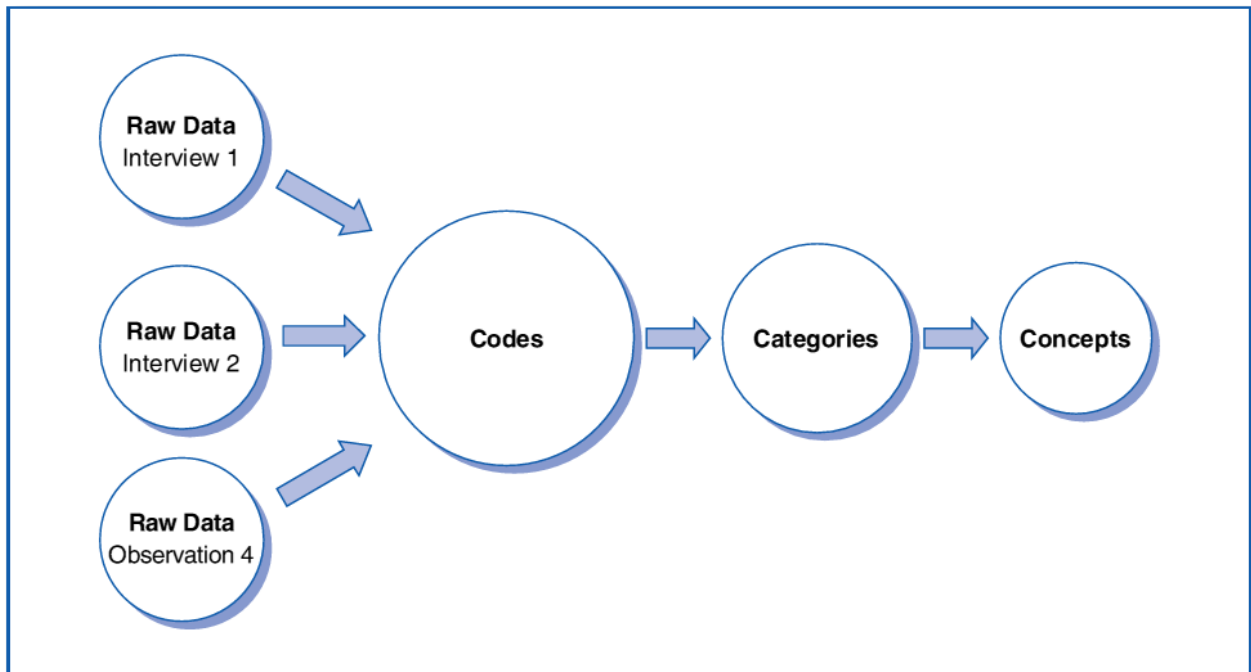
“That was taken in my 7th grade year in middle school and I’ve kept it in my wallet ever since. It’s extremely tattered but it’s one of the only pictures that I have with my family and I keep it with me almost everywhere I go.”

#### 4.C. Thematic Analysis

The following analysis pertains to the questions that followed after the students were asked to take pictures and talk about their meanings. While the analysis is divided into Part 1-Narative and Part 2- Thematic, it is important to note that the interview questions were largely informed by the previous discussion of photos with participants.

Additionally, the following approach outlines another advantage of using photo elicitation, which is the fact that discussing the photos first seemed to make the participants more open to discussion later in the interview. As explained before, it was the first time we met face to face and I believe that asking them to take the photographs before interviewing them resulted in a better collection of data and increased the quality of the follow-up answers. Placing the respondents in a position where they had to choose and think what to photograph might have given them new angles and ideas, thus leading to an easier, more fluent flow of the conversation. As mentioned in the methodology section, research participants can become aware of new perspectives through the use of photography in data collection (Harper 2002, McCarthy 2013).

In the following section, I will thematically structure the answers, while looking for key concepts and outline the ideas that appear richer and more powerful. Lichtman and Tech (2013:243) explain “key concepts are derived from the data through a process of coding, sifting, sorting, and identifying themes.” Thus, after carefully reading the transcripts several times, I applied the following strategy explained by figure 12.1 The 3C’S of Data analysis: Codes, Categories, Concepts in (Lichtman,Tech 2013:252).



Using this strategy, I first looked for similarities and frequently mentioned topics in relation to my question. After that, I designed four key concepts that reflect the meaning I attached to the data: “Different meanings of home”, “Individuality”, “Contextual Constrains” and “Temporality.” I argue these four concepts are in direct link with how transnationally mobile students consume objects in order to turn their accommodation into a place that feels like home. All four are relevant to revealing possible connections and patterns in the given answers. “Different meanings of home” refers to the fact that all participants had showed they share different perceptions on what home means. Considering their answers, I decided to divide them into: “Feeling at home,” “Back home,” “New home” and “Future home.” I organized the similarities and differences related to this “Back home” sub-concept into “Stories,” “Freedom of expression” and “Cultural background.” In connection to the “New home” sub-concept, the answers were structured following “Adjustment-Current Feeling” and “People” patterns. The topic of “Future Home” also came up from some of the students. However, I did not divide it as I thought it would be applicable to structure it along with the other two main different meanings given to the notion of “home.”

The next key concept, “Individuality” was also divided into patterns that were found referring to: “Self-expression,” “Separation from the Other” and “Reflection in the new room.”

To continue, I came up with the key concept named “Contextual Constraints” as all my participants brought up this theme in the discussion, referring to various constraints like income, time, space, transportation and objects. These constraints are influencing their consumption habits and choices in relation to transforming their current accommodation into a place that feels like home.

Even though I mention “time” as a contextual constraint, I decided to use it as a key concept because it was a more predominant, powerful idea present in all interviews. I named this key concept “Temporality” and associate it with the following meanings: “First time away,” “Traveling,” “Time spent in new room.”

I argue that my data could have had different interpretations. As I was coding the answers, I came across various topics that were brought into discussion by my participants and some similarities in their answers. I think the focus and structure of these topics could have been represented in several ways. However, I chose this structure because I find it most relevant in connection to my research.

As Lichtman and Tech (2013:246) outline, “you will also need creativity and discipline as you embark on your data analysis. The challenge is that the way you do this is flexible and open to discussion and interpretation.” Hence, I agree with the idea that there are other ways this data could have been interpreted. Nevertheless, the fact that each participant had own views and perceptions was taken into consideration.

The table below was designed for a better representation of the resulting main concepts:

<b>1. Different meanings of home</b>	<b>2. Individuality</b>	<b>3. Contextual Constrains</b>	<b>4. Temporality</b>
<b>1.1. Feeling at home</b> <b>1.2. Back home</b> 1.2.1. Stories 1.2.2. Freedom of expression 1.2.3. Cultural background  <b>1.3. New home</b> 1.3.1. Adjustment-Current feeling 1.3.2. People  <b>1.4. Future home</b>	<b>2.1. Self-expression</b> <b>2.2. Separation from the other</b>  <b>2.3. Reflection in the new room</b>	<b>3.1. Income</b> <b>3.2. Time</b> <b>3.3. Space</b> <b>3.4. Transportation</b> <b>3.5. Objects</b>	<b>4.1. First time away</b> <b>4.2. Traveling</b> <b>4.3. Time spent in new room</b>

### 1. Different meanings of home

Sixsmith (1986:285) outlines how personal meanings of home could emerge out of the interrelationship between different homes. The home can be represented by more than one place for each person or a number of places simultaneously. Moreover, Blunt (2005, cited in McCarthy 2013: 95) outlines that “home is a sphere shaped by memories” and suggests that the understandings of the meaning of home should not be fixed, but rather include both visions of “the home as a performance for others and a performance of home-making rituals inherited from the parental home.” These affirmations were reflected in the analysis, as it will further be debated:

## 1.1 Feeling at home

Sixsmith (1986) explains how what students often describe as home has a rather unusual nature. When I asked about what “feeling at home” means for her, Celine answered shortly: “just being at ease.” Like Celine, Sonja talks about feeling comfortable and routines “home has a lot to do with routines, like drinking coffee in the morning.” Mitchel thinks that “you can kind of define it, but it's very hard to finally describe it because when you grew up with it your entire life, you really have a hard time trying to fully detail describe it...”, he agrees “it’s a feeling” and states that “Home is... well it's a cliché term but... it's where the heart is.” John feels that he “can feel at home almost anywhere I go as long as I had connections to my actual home.” Thus, he is making one of the first distinctions between his different interpretations of the notion of “home.” I think this draws attention to the fact that none of the students associated consumption or objects when referring to “feeling at home”, but rather they focused on other aspects.

## 1.2 Back home

### 1.2.1 Stories

With the exception of Celine, who was more reserved, all participants made references to the notion of “back home”. Some used different stories in connection to this term, others just pointed out this clear distinction between their current accommodation and comparisons with “back home”.

Mitchell revealed the story of a Viking necklace he hanged on his wall and which he plans to take back home with him. Similarly, John thinks “it would be fun to have a Danish flag in my room once I get back home [...]” and later mentions again that “a lot of the Danes have flags in their room. And I'm considering getting one and displaying it in my room when I get back.” I think it is interesting how both Mitchel and John want to bring something from Denmark, “back home.” This can also be an indicator of how they use objects as symbols for memories.

The female participants did not mention any objects they would bring back home with them, but Sonja shared the story of some things she brought with her from home: “Actually I also brought some books reminding me of home [...] Yeah, it's kind of a journal, and it is a good word for it. I look through all these things, which are reminding me of home”. Again, the importance of objects is emphasized here.

Mitchel also makes a comparison and, similarly to John, mentions the Danish culture: “Back home, I try to make things that make me feel comfortable or cozy. I mean the Danish have a word for it “hygge”. Much like Sonja, he mentions some things he brought from home, but points out a clear distinction between “homes”. He points out: “Yeah, I have my own place, I bought some things to make it feel...to remind me of home but I know that while yes, this is home for 6 months, this will never be home.” A link could be made with Sixsmith’s (1986:285) theory which claims that “[...] a home is home depending on the extent to which it fulfils the person’s requirements, their changing objectives and circumstances [...].”

### 1.2.2 Freedom of expression in parental home

All my interviewees revealed they had freedom of expression in their parental home, including Mitchel, even though he moved a lot when he was younger. One of the ways in which freedom of expression was evident for Mitchel was the ability to personalize the walls of his bedroom at home.

Much like the other participants, Celine recalls: “At home I could do whatever I wanted; I was impressed when I asked them if I can paint the walls and they were ok with it [...].”

Sonja also describes “back at home I have a lot of photos I took on the walls, but I wasn't able to take them because it's too hard, I was scared they would get damaged. And I can print that huge ones, I really miss that.” She adds up “I decided to paint my walls [refers to back home, in Germany] so they were in a light blue and I kind of feel not okay with that anymore. I painted like three walls in white and one in really aggressive orange, so it's still an orange because I like that color, and I have a lot of photos because as I told you I like to take photos, and back at home I have the possibility to like print them in that size so that's pretty nice.”



Both Mitchel and John showed me the importance of how they had personalized their walls. Mitchel says “[...] we painted the room in colors I like.[refers to back home, USA].” Like the other three students, John talks about colors and pictures: “Oh I had absolute possibility to change my room [when living in parental home], I could change my room any color I wanted if I had the paint then I could do it. One of the walls in my room was a bright red and the rest of them were white. And I had this little cove right beside the window and I had all of the album and the artwork that comes in albums, like the little sheet that comes in the cover on one entire wall of music artwork.” Later on, John points out again the importance of walls personalization “[...] I mean if you could see my walls back home at the University, I have music posters, I had posters of the declaration of independence, I have all my walls completely covered by everything.” I argue these examples outline the importance of room personalization. My participants had the opportunity to express themselves through bedroom decor in their parental homes, which in turn reinforced the idea that identity can be expressed in a way a room is arranged. Because of that, they seem to offer me detailed descriptions of how their walls used to look like back home, while also showing the need for personalization. Lincoln’s (2012:2) experiment: to recall what one’s bedroom from one’s teenage years looked like outlined the fact that no matter how old a person is, he or she can still remember relevant details of how that particular room was arranged. Here, the importance of such customization is suggested.

### 1.2.3 Cultural background

Cuba and Hummon (1993) explain that when discussing the notion of Home, not only the characteristics of the place itself, but people’s interpretations through the prism of their backgrounds and past experience must be taken into consideration. Thus, the potential influence of the respondent’s cultural background was discussed. While looking for patterns, I noticed some differences in the answers the female participants gave me. Whereas Celine was not sure and eventually said there is no such influence, Sonja assumed there might be some. “Are German coffee drinkers?! Probably, yes. I think my family drinks a lot of coffee so that’s

probably the reason why.” and also adds: “Yeah, I brought some knives and some other kitchen stuff, ok, that's probably German.”

Mitchel talks a lot about his background but I did not directly ask him this question related to his cultural background. For example, he says: “[...] Arizona culture is probably the best way to describe that[refers to essential aspects that constitute a home]: very laid back, we will make fun of people that are not from our state, especially during the summer because they don't know how to react to the heat ,when our average summer temperature is 44 degrees Celsius or more, so it's very hot, very dry, we live in a dessert, little rain, a dessert with plants, but a rough life [...].”

On the other hand, John, much like Celine thinks there is no influence of his cultural background reflected in his current choices.

### 1.3 New home

#### 1.3.1 Adjustment-Current feeling

The issues related to adaptation came up during discussions of my participants’ temporary housing. There is a possible connection with gender differences that could be observed here. Both Celine and Sonja had difficulties in adapting to the new place, while Mitchel, together with John, had a similar attitude and had no problem with adjusting to the new place, according to the answers they gave in their interviews.

Mitchell revealed that “I can adjust very well. Like here, I've met a lot of internationals that have a hard time adjusting to the way Danes do things here. I would say I really did not have that problem, just because I'm so used to moving and having things done differently when I go to a different area but the states, so regardless of what I do, I'm just ok....”

Much like Mitchell, John had no problem adjusting as he had lived in a similar place before: “This room is almost the same exact room as my previous room at home and with those I would share the space with another person, so this is actually more space than I am used to.”

On the other hand, all participants revealed how they felt increasingly comfortable as time passed. Celine said she felt good now but she wasn't sure why; as she invoked how the room was organized or the interaction with her neighbors. Sonja tells "[...] to be honest, first week was horrible. I was still unpacking stuff and I missed stuff." However, now that she had organized her things and personalized her walls, she feels more comfortable: "[...]I feel comfortable here. In the first weeks I tried to avoid staying here because it felt weird to me but right now its fine." After that, Sonja points out again the importance of routines and things she brought from home: "I think it's like this routine, I was able to copy and paste here from home. You know what I mean? You get used to it, you have half of your things here and it's looking more like home, even like these colors [referring to the purple theme present in her current room]."

When asked how he felt now in the new place, John also added: "I'm excited. I love meeting new people. I love being in new places. This past two and half mouths have been absolutely fantastic so like I said before I can feel at home pretty much anywhere."

### 1.3.2 People

When talking about their adjustment to the new place and how they feel now, I encountered another pattern. One way or another, students mentioned the connection with people and how this contributed to turning their accommodation into a place that felt like home. This indicates a connection with Sixsmith's (1986:285) "social dimension" of the home, as the place allowing entertainment, where friendship is formed and relations with other people are created.

Celine says: "[...] I'm getting to know my neighbors and, I think I enjoy living here because of the people around and what I do [...]" Much like Celine, Mitchel outlines: "[...] I'll probably have more an attachment to Denmark because of the people I know." Similarly for John, "people" are one of the essential aspects of what constitutes a home: "As long as I meet new people where I am I can feel at home anywhere that I've been." John also sums up: "You can't really

have a home if you are the only person there. What constitutes a home is mostly the interactions between people.”

#### 1.4 Future home

When discussing the notion of “feeling like home”, along with numerous references to the idea of “back home”, the concept of “future home” came up. Celine said that “Living here, noticing what kind of things I would want to have liked to have and what I want for my future house, so it makes me dreaming [...]” Much like Celine, Mitchel referred to his future home “[...] I’ll have a place to go to but I’ll be looking for my own place, my own apartment, hopefully a house at some point, I can buy a house.”

McCarthy et al. (2013:76) point out that students are regarded as an interesting group since “it is often the first time they have lived away from the family home, they are in flux between student and parental homes, between dependence and independence.” The different meanings they associate with “home” might also indicate this flux, this constantly changing, mobile status. Even if for the first time away, or not, students clearly tend to move back and forward between these various meanings they attribute. Thus, perhaps “home” could be a feeling-reminding of the parental home and kept close as it shapes memories and marks objects with connotations. Home could be a feeling experienced within each new location the transnationally mobile student moves to. Nonetheless, home might be an idea of future, idealistic place, where one hopes to eventually, belong.

## 2. Individuality

I argue that one of the other key concepts which are reflected in my data is the concept of individuality. This indicates a link with Cuba and Hummon (1993:111) who explain that the self is “situated in complex ways in the social-spatial environment.” Thus, places can become a framework where identity is created, preserved and transformed.

Identity was expressed by my respondents, directly or indirectly, and linked with the following:

## 2.1. Self-expression

Being away from the parental home, as explained by McCarthy (2013:92), can also mean more freedom of expression, less control and independence, thus “home may be an on-going construction intertwined with the construction and performances of the “self.”

Celine said that “[...] when people see my room the only thing that they remark is the paintings [...]” revealing that apart from her display of her hobby, her current accommodation was not used as self-expression.

Unlike Celine, Sonja revealed a stronger need to express herself, as she explained: “[...]you need something like showing your personality, making what you are[...].” This indicates a connection with Hanssen and Danielsen (2004) and Lincoln (2012) who explain the desire to recreate a sense of Home, as the physical characteristics of the house are being transformed and thus, personalized.

Sonja also gave the example of a symbol of both her independence and personality, referring to her coffee machine: “[...] So I am lucky my coffee machine is standing over there, it really reminds me of home, because I am a coffee drinker and this has been my coffee machine since I lived alone so that is kind of my personality I think.” John thinks that “The only thing really is the New York street sign [...]” which could be considered a representation of his self-expression. But as the analysis will reveal later, I argue he would have expressed his personality more in the room, if he was not constrained by different factors.

As opposed to John, Mitchel doesn’t feel the need to express himself through various objects: “[...]I can live with my computer, my backpack, my clothes, my bed and some little things to remind me of home[...].”

## 2.2. Separation from the other

Cristoforetti et al. (2011) argue that “home” stands as a symbol for a transition from the outside world to the inner one, creating a distinction from the public to private sphere. Home can be regarded as a place of security and recreation, of detachment from the “Other.”

This was reflected in my research as, when talking about their current accommodation, their consumption habits, and what feeling at home means to them, my respondents showed they try to separate themselves from others. This need for separation is directly connected to their transnationally mobile status, which can be challenging for their identities.

For example, Sonja revealed that “[...] everybody here in this dorm, has the same room, the same furniture and that kind of feels wrong. So I am really happy that I brought my own bedding sheets and a blanket and some other stuff, just to put things in this room, not everybody has.[...]”. She also accentuated: “[...] they make me feel like, okay, you live here, this is your place, nobody else is here. I can have my coffee and print some other stuff that’s kind of making me feel happier with this room.”

Sonja also considers herself “[...]I’m like the lone wolf, studying on my own[...].” and continues “[...]I’m the type of student that can’t stand any noises when I study, it needs to be silent. [...]”. Much like her, Mitchel also talks about his style of studying and his need for silence: “I’m going to sit there when I’m maybe doing some light work, taking care of emails for school or reading, I’ll sit out there but when I really want to work on writing a paper or writing something, I need to do it in here to get away from distraction, I go to the library, in quiet rooms and just do it there just to get away from things, but it really depends on what it is.” I think Mitchel shares more about his identity when he says “Me, I love being in the mountains, so I want to be close to the mountains...”

Much like his collegium colleagues, John separates himself from the rest, as he explains “[...] I’d rather sit here and be a hermit, not talk to anybody.” However, this need to be alone depends on how he feels at the moment, as he is also comfortable in the common area. This indicates

Sixsmiths' (1986) personal dimension of home as it is viewed as an expression of oneself, a contributing to a sense of belonging to a place where the person can be themselves.

### **2.3. Reflection in the new room**

Cristoforetti et al. (2011:226) draw attention to the importance of home as an extension of the self-identity and refer to the home as a "meaning maker." However, all my participants think their current accommodation does not reflect their personalities. "Not a lot", "it's hard", "not a good representation of whom I am" and "this is a very poor representation of what I usually do" are examples of answers that were given to me when asked about this matter. I think the next section of the analysis named "Contextual Constrains" will reflect some of the reasons behind their answers.

## **3. Contextual Constrains**

### **3.1. Income**

All the students I interviewed said they did not go shopping here, apart from food and other utilities. For example, Sonja explained "[...] the only things I bought are groceries and some clothes. I was buying some clothes but nothing more [...]."

The Income constraint was given as an example by both male participants in regards to their decision to not purchase anything here.

Mitchel explains "[...] you are strapped for cash you only buy what you need and you save money so when you can do something you want, you have that." Similarly, when asked about impulsive shopping, John argues "I do not have enough income to just impulsive buy random things".

However, I argue the temporary duration of their stay in Denmark had an important influence on this decision. Thus, this income constraint is directly linked to the time constrain, as it will be explained below.

### 3.2. Time

When asked if they went shopping in Denmark or bought things for their new accommodation, all my participants mentioned the time constrain. Their short duration of stay was brought into discussion many times. Cuba and Hummon (1993) draw attention on the weight of the time component, where a longer term residence is more likely to be linked with significant life events that nurture the sense of home. However, all students did show the need for personalization and revealed they would have probably invested more in shopping and purchasing different objects if they would have stayed longer.

For example, when Celine was talking about how much of her personality was currently reflected in her room, she explained: “[...] I am only here for one year so I did not invest myself in making it nice.[...]”. Furthermore, she presented a need for a bigger mirror, but when asked why she did not buy one, the reason was again connected to duration of stay: “[...] because I am only here for one year, and I can deal with it for one year.”

Much like Celine, Sonja replied “[...]I did not go to IKEA, [when asked about shopping in Denmark] I was thinking to go there, but I’m staying here five months, so it is not that long time, if I would be staying here longer maybe I would have gone somewhere and buy stuff [...]”

Similar to both female respondents, Mitchel explained why he did not go shopping: “I’m really here for only 6 months and it’s kind of a pain to get rid of the things or try to sell them”. Compared to the other participants, he mentioned this time constrain most frequently. For example, when asked about his choice to personalize his current accommodation, he replied: “I mean, well, if I was here for 1 year or more I would probably gone out and bought some things and probably made a trip back to the US [...]”. Moreover, he adds “[...] but I am only here for the 6 mouths and then I can do very well with minimalist living [...]”. For Mitchel, the choice of not bringing more things from the United States was explained through his background and his awareness of the short period of time spent in Denmark: “[...] it all comes back to how I grew up [both parents working in the Military, he spent most of his childhood moving to different

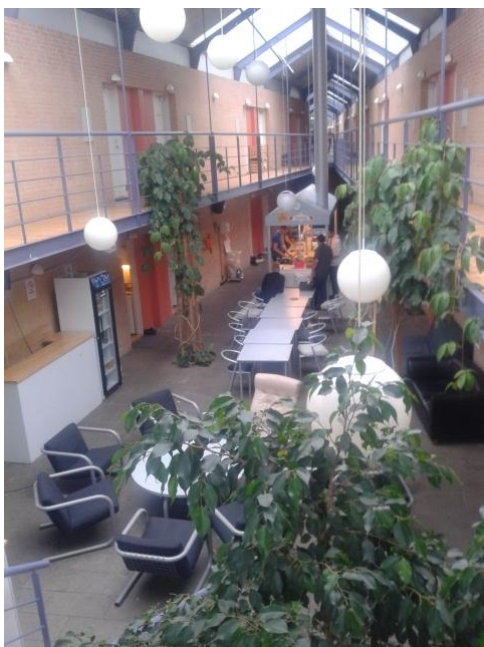


places], I mean I was used to moving and then I also knew coming here that I would only be here for only six months [...].”Furthermore, Mitchel shows that this time constraint had a significant contribution to how he perceived his present accommodation: “[...] after I leave it will never be home, so it is home until July 14<sup>th</sup>, but after July 14<sup>th</sup>, it is no longer home. It's a place I lived and visited.”

Much like the rest of the respondents, when asked about shopping here, John replied: “No I have not actually. And if I did I would have gotten anything major because it is something I would have had to get rid at the end of the semester.” Also, in connection to his choice of personalizing the room, John explains: “[...] I would have liked to put up a lot more, but it's just a temporary place so... If I was going to be here for longer I would have brought more stuff [...]”.

### 3.3. Space

Before talking about the space constraint, it is important to mention that the physical dimension of the accommodations had a considerable influence on my participants. First of all, when I decided to interview them, I did not know about the interior design of the “Aalborg International Kollegium.” Only when I arrived there, I discovered that apart from the standard, similar rooms, there was a large common area, with a shared space for cooking, a ping pong table, couches, tables, chairs and even a private cinema room. Of course, as it follows, I decided to include this element in my interviews and take it into consideration. It has been shown that all my participants enjoy spending their time in this common area when they want to interact with each other, organize events and cook. For example, John explains that “one of the most interesting things about living here [referring to Aalborg International Kollegium] is that no one uses the kitchens that are in their rooms, they always use to common kitchen because it is bigger and there is more space, so no one uses this two small burners that are in the room.[each individual room is equipped with a small bathroom and kitchen, separated from the common ones].”



On the other hand, they prefer to spend time in their rooms, but this will further be developed in a section named “Time spent in room” grouped under the “Temporality” main concept.

Despite the common room facilities, both male participants felt there was not much space in the room. For example, John said that “[...] As you can tell there is not really that much space in here[looked around the room]. If I am going to talk with people it's better to talk outside”. When the space in the room came into discussion, Mitchel pointed out “[...] I mean yeah we have little stoves in our rooms but I haven't even bothered to try cook on one, I haven't used it yet. I mean I turned it on to make sure it worked but other than that I never messed with the thing because it is, one, too small and I prefer cooking out in the common kitchen, because I can talk to people, joke around and when we have parties, it's a lot easier to cook out there and host things out there.”

### 3.4 Transportation

Another constraint that was noticed by both male respondents was related to transportation. Mitchel and John came all the way from USA and were constrained by the luggage limitation imposed by the airline. Mitchel explained: “Yeah, I've thought about bringing some posters or things that remind me of home, like some of the landscapes or some of the photos that I've

taken, that I've had printed out in poster size back home. But then I was like - It's more crap to pack in my suitcase and it's a lot of stuff!"

John recalls his time spent in college, in USA, where he also moved many times "[...] at home, it was super easy to move it, a couple of miles down the road or from one building to another. Here I had to take it on a fifteen/twenty hour flight..."

Much like Mitchel, Sonja would have brought more posters and pictures "[...]back at home [in Germany] I have a lot of photos I took[she explained how she likes to take photographs] on the walls, but I wasn't able to take them cause it's too hard, I was scared they would get damaged. And I cannot print such huge ones; I really miss that [...]." On the other hand, she outlines the importance of bringing her car to Denmark "I brought my car, that's kind of my personality, because I am used to having the opportunity to drive wherever and whenever I want to, so I have my car here. That's like a huge impact [...]."

### 3.5 Objects

Apart from the actual physical space in the room, some objects constraints were brought up by the participants. For example, despite his minimalist way of living, Mitchel still felt limited by the furniture in his room: "[...] some people have parties in their rooms more than others but it is kind of difficult for me in the same time because I have so little with me that it is hard, I have three chairs, a bed and a table [...]."

Later on, Mitchel makes a direct connection between objects and feeling at home, as he points out how he feels limited: "[...] I won't be able to do certain things that I can do in the US, like pocket knives [shares the narrative of how he always keeps a pocket knife with him back home, in America], my firearms, things like that. [...]It doesn't allow me to have home [...]."

Much like Mitchel, Celine reveals: "[...] I would have liked to have a big mirror. Right now I only have a small one in the bathroom, and it can't work for every day just having this small mirror or things like these [looks around the room at the furniture]". Resembling Mitchel and Celine, Sonja also feels constrained by the furniture in her room, as she explains: "[...] I mean I didn't buy this furniture and gives me a weird feeling. I really love beds and this [looks at her small

bed which is placed next to a wall and covered with pillows and blankets] is the worse bed, really! [...]"

All these observations add up to the fact that they would have brought more things from home if they were not constrained by their duration of stay in Aalborg. Also, the transportation limitations influenced their decisions as it which will be detailed in the following section:

#### 4. Temporality

As I explained in the beginning of this section, although I pointed out "time" as a contextual constraint, I decided to use it as a key concept because it was expressed in relation to various topics. Sometimes, these topics pointed out similarities amongst the participants. I divided them as it follows:

##### 4.1. First time away

Apart from Celine, all respondents were away from their parental home before. Sonja studied in a different town in Germany and lived alone in her own private apartment. Mitchel grew up changing locations many times, as his parents worked in the Military service: "[...]I've lived in Tucson, Arizona; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Valdosta, Georgia, then back to Tucson, Arizona where we are now when my father retired in Valdosta. So I've been in the Southwestern, Midwestern, and the Deep South of the United States and for me just moving around and everything was just part of my daily life, I wouldn't call it daily life, but it's part of my life [...]" John also moved away to study and had lived in nine different places, including other student dorms: "[...] I have not lived at home since I was eighteen. So I lived from the time I was eighteen until the time I moved here [in Denmark] in nine different places[...]."

I think the fact that they were away before had a significant influence on their current approach to Denmark. As explained before, both male participants had no trouble adapting to the new place. In contrast, Celine did not really know what to expect when she moved here, as she explained: "[...] it is the first time I left my parent's house so it is the first time I'm facing this

[...]” Even though she left her parental home before, Sonja also said that: “[...] I brought a lot of clothes. It's so hard to figure out what you could need [...].”

#### **4.2. Traveling**

I think that the time spent traveling might have had an influence on the current perceptions and consumption habits of some of the participants. This might have made the adaptation to their transnationally mobile status easier. For example, when he talked about a beanie he photographed, John mentioned some of the places he has been to: “[...] Jamaica, Ireland, Europe, New York, Washington DC, Pennsylvania, Boston, even places where it can actually be too hot to use it[ the beanie]”.

When talking about his time spent in his current accommodation, Mitchel revealed his need and passion for traveling: “ I've traveled I wanted to see the country, I took a flight south from Billund to Venice airport to visit some friends that I haven't seen in a long time and I had a great time exploring Venice and northern Italy. I have been to Copenhagen; I have taken two different trips to East and West coast to see the Baltic and the Nordic sea [...] when you are exchange student, especially from the US, coming to Europe is big deal for us. If we want to get anywhere else besides Canada or Mexico we have to take a plane. For me, I want to go see things, I have been to Sweden, I will probably be going to Norway just to see the other Nordic countries, probably London [...] My parents are actually coming over to visit me, so we are going to take a road trip: Belgium, Luxemburg, London, France, Germany [...].”

#### **4.3. Time spent in room**

Considering the above factors and the presence of a common room, I argue it is important to investigate the amount of time spent in the actual room by my participants. Both similarities and differences were noticed, as all participants seemed to have a clear separation between the time spent outside with the others and private time. For example, if they need to study and prepare for exams or just need some quiet time, all participants prefer to stay in their rooms. Celine says that “[...] compared to other people leaving here [Aalborg International Kollegium], I

spend a lot of time in here [refers to her current room.] I'm only out when I know I am going to meet someone or I'm going with someone to cook [...]" and continues saying "[...] it's just more comfortable to be in my room." Much like Celine, Sonja reveals that "[...] I really spent here most of my time [...] I really think I spend most of my day here, that's kind of sad when I'm thinking about it. But I feel comfortable here. "

On the other hand both male participants prefer to spend more time travelling or just outside the room. Mitchel explained he "wanted to see the country" and John preferred to go "[...] to the Student House, it is not that far away, there is always people to talk to anywhere, so there is no really need to sit in here and be bored.". He summed up: "[...] I don't really spend very much time in my room over the year."

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.A. General conclusions

With the constructivist approach in mind, it is important to note that generalizing the findings of this study to all students at Aalborg University is not possible; it is also not the aim of this study. Each student was viewed in the context of his or her daily life, accounting for a diverse range of individual experiences, views and thoughts.

Nevertheless, certain patterns and similarities were revealed by the analysis of the data. Thus, the individual behaviors might reveal social tendencies and meanings, as each individual is part of a social world. As it follows, I will elaborate on the conclusions of my thesis which is focused on the group of four respondents, for convenience referred to as "students;" it is important to note that this phrasing does not indicate an attempt to generalize findings and only refers to the participants of the following study.

The following section of the thesis seeks to present the outcomes concerning the research question:

**“How do transnationally mobile students use consumption in order to turn their accommodation into a place that feels like home?”**

As one of the aims of this research was to investigate the identity-forming aspects of consumerism, I looked at how consumption can be used to define or re-create identities. Also, the possible connections between the purchases of various objects in order to personalize the standardized accommodation and the identification of self and other were explored.

I expected to uncover various ideas, constructions and experiences in regards to transnationally mobile students and their perceptions of consumption linked to their identity and home. My thesis is showing that “there is not just one story but multiple stories of lived experiences” (Hesse-Biber, 2010:455). Throughout my investigation I encountered a variety of stories from four students related to how they transform a place into a home through consumption of various objects.

Some of the ways in which consumerism and consumption of objects are used differed significantly from the initial assumptions and expectations of the final results. I assumed that students would chose to express themselves through personalizing the room with immediately purchased items.

However, one of the findings of this study is pointing out the importance of various constrains transnationally mobile students’ experience. These constrains appear to have a direct connection to particular choices of consumption. The short period of stay, transportation limitations, and low income lead the students to not buy anything major, but food, from Denmark. Even though this need was present, being aware of their short period of stay, they decided not to invest a lot of effort and time in personalizing the room.

While they did not purchase anything in Denmark, they still brought important objects from home. The need to bring more things from home is revealing a tendency among the participants. My premise that these standardized rooms can be personalized as an expression of students’ passion, along with their present and former interests, is confirmed. Self-expression through objects is present, as all the things that were photographed or mentioned

are full of meanings, often symbols that marked their independence or stand as constant reminders of where they came from and of their loved ones. This reinforces Blunts' (2005, cited in McCarthy 2013: 95) theory which suggests that "home is a sphere shaped by memories."

My thesis proposes that being constrained by the material aspect, students focused on maintaining some rituals such as consumption of coffee or traditional food. These rituals also indicate a powerful contribution to how their accommodation turns into a place that feels like home. A connection with Sixsmiths' (1986:285) theory is suggested by this finding, as "[...] a home is home depending on the extent to which it fulfils the person's requirements, their changing objectives and circumstances [...]."

This research also shows that there is a strong link between identity formation and recreating a feeling of home. Nevertheless, what is mostly creating a feeling of home is the interaction between each other, making friends, as well as participating in various events. Getting involved in different activities, such as traveling, cooking or painting seem to have a greater impact than consumption itself.

I expected to find that, particularly in times of change, as Cristoforetti et al. (2011:229) research revealed, "[...] objects for expression and consumption are essential for the maintenance of a sense of self". Consequently, my investigation suggests that the very choice of not buying more material goods indicates that students are aware of their changing status, as they know they will end up having to give them away when they leave Denmark.

My research pinpoints the relationship between consumption and identity as the participants are moving from their culture and home while identifying themselves within a new social context. Exploring this situation allowed me to illustrate how participants in an unfamiliar environment cope with the temporality of the situation, while maintaining a continuity of their self-perception through consumption. This opportunity fits with Hanssen and Danielsens' (2004) suggestion at the end of their study which was conducted in Denmark: that "studies of younger households for instance may be more indicative of future trends" (2004:26).

Considering all the above, a potential answer to my research question reflects that students' consumption choices are highly influenced by various constraints. On the other hand, these



choices would be different in other circumstances. Even if the need and desire to purchase more exist, all these contextual limitations lead to postponing fulfilling them. Instead, they are rather projected into the possibility of a "future home." Despite these constraints, students found other ways to stamp their temporally accommodations. Objects may have their utility, but the memories and meanings they carry are most significant. Perhaps, these transnationally mobile students do not know yet where they belong, but they make sure they are reminded where they come from. The feeling of home is recreated through these veritable symbols, which stand as constant reminders. Within the consumption choices, identity is preserved, as well as expressed. Nevertheless, what seemed to contribute significantly at recreating a sense of home, were the interactions and events within the place. We may "leave our hearts" in many places, but as we are meeting people, making friends and eventually, expanding our sphere of memories, we might always feel at home.

## 5.B. Methodological conclusions

Mack et. al (2005) hold the view that one of the advantages of qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher flexibility in elaborating consecutive questions and engaging the participants in further explanation of their initial answers. The use of qualitative methods allowed me to modify my investigation style according to the individual characters and styles of my participant, and ensured a rather spontaneous development of research.

Furthermore, this research exemplifies Bryman's (2012) suggestion that by using qualitative methods, the responses are inclined to be more complex and elaborated.

It appears that the use of participatory visual methodology improved the quality of the produced data and facilitated the process of obtaining it. Like in most of the cases studied, the suitability of visual methods was shown. For example, similar to McCarthy's (2013:98) research, "voice" was given to the participants as they created inspiring qualitative data.

Similar to Hjorth's (2007) and McCarthy's (2013) studies, my research also suggests that the use of auto-photography can diminish the potential distance between the researcher and the other students.

In his study, Noland (2006) argues that auto-photography can create more authentic data: participants share their view of the world as they select images they think are most representative. Consequently, the findings of my thesis suggest this authenticity.

Furthermore, Harpers' (2002) and McCarthy's (2013) projects showed that using auto-photography could make the students become more aware of their environment and give them new perspectives. My thesis outlines these advantages as it was revealed by my four student participants. The narratives that were built upon what they chose to photograph also seem to reveal the significance of such methods. Similar to Hjorths' (2007) study, my research reinforces the use of camera phone practices as new forms of storytelling. Also, much like Noland's (2006) research, my thesis is showing that auto-photography can be used efficiently in studying identity and other dimensions of culture and self.

### 5.C. Limitations

This research could bring some significant contributions to the study of transnationally mobile students in relation to the notions of consumption, home and identity. However, the main limitation of this project is the fact that it is an in-depth study of a single aspect of a rather complex phenomenon.

Thus, even though the findings from this study can offer interesting, relevant perspectives, it is limited by several facets. A more in-depth investigation would require a significant time commitment, and the present study was influenced by time constraint placed on the project. The meanings of the theoretical concepts included in this research were numerous and the methods used in the collection of the data were time consuming. Further different approaches could have resulted in a longer period of examination.

Another limitation could be represented by the choice of methods. The auto-photography task might have limited the participants in choosing what to capture. However, the follow-up questions were also meant to combat this potential restraint.

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## Appendix

### Transcripts

#### Celine-21-France

I: your name?

R1: Celine

I: how old are you?

R1:21

I: you are from?

R1: France

I: for how long will you be staying in Denmark?

R1: until summer, 10 months

I: So you took 5 photos, let's see the first one...

R: They are old letters that I received from my family, they are very important for me, because I always enjoy to receiving them and having some news from my family, mostly from my grandmother. I like this old fashion way to communicate with her, because she doesn't have internet and we go back to the old school manners and I like that.

I : Do you keep them somewhere hidden or...?

R: I keep them in sight.

I: Let's see the next one. What is this?

R: This is a t-shirt that my sister painted, she gave it to me for Christmas, I don't really wear it but I like to see it.

I: So you display it on the chair, so you can see it, it's quite nice. Oh, what do you have here?

R: These are the books that I receive for my birthday, they are pretty right there. This is a drawing from my cousin that I receive by letter too , and this is the name of my student's union in France which I was part before leaving.

I: What does it mean to you?

R: Just, mmm..... Kind of represents all my life in France, in my school and this is my family...

I: Ok, kind of reminds you of home, I guess... And here?

R: All my shoes, well, what I meant with this is that I like to don't feel is to not feel restrained by the stuff I have here. I like to have the choice, not feel like "okay I am going to wear this because I only have this" or " I am going to cook this because I only have this"

I: So you brought a lot of shoes from home?

R: Yes.

I: Okay, but did you buy anything in particular here?

R: Not a lot.

I: I think this is the last one, and what do we have here?

R: These are paintings that I made here, and also some small stuff, small things, that I have found out here and just keep them.

I: Like Post Cards and...?

R: Yes

I: I see you place them on the corner on the desk. Do you always keep them there?

R: Yes, it's always there. This is from a party that we had this semester, and this one from Christmas, the Christmas dinner that we made here, just reminds me of different things

I: Small memories? Oh, what is that?

R: This one is a present from a Chinese girl who lives around here, it was for Christmas. And this is something I found with my group mates in my University and they gave it to.

I: Small symbols. Yea, Yea, I think they are very nice, and the brushes, you buy them here or they are from home?

R: No, I took them from home.

I: Ok, I like it, now I'll like to ask you more questions about this, as I noticed many of the things you brought with you from home, but did you go shopping here, apart from food, stuff to make you feel more comfortable in this room, like at home?

R: Didn't buy a lot...a blanket, some stuff for the cooking, a shaker for milkshakes, small thing but not a lot.

I: Did you use to drink Milkshake often at home?

R: No.

I: So you don't have this impulsive shopping, like I have explain in the letter, did you go to Ikea?

R: No.

I: Okay, but how much of your background, of your personality do you think this room reflects right now? How much does it say the interior of this particular housing reflects who you are?

R: I think not a lot. When people see my room the only thing that they remark is the paintings, but otherwise is just a normal room. I'm only here for one year so I didn't invest myself in making it nice. At home I painted a wall and I made a big tag on it.

I: So knowing it's only temporary you decided not to express yourself so much? Would you have done it otherwise If you had stayed for a longer period of time or it just doesn't matter that much to you?

R: Here I don't really care; I'm more focusing on doing things cause I'm not focused at staying in this room so...

I: Ok, I will get to that, but I did noticed the red bed line you have arrangements, the choices of colours, it kinda still says something about you, you have the shoes and the paintings you showed me from the letter, but do you thing that the standard furniture we receive from the University affected your style or constrain you in any way to express yourself?

R: I don't really care. ....I don't know, the bed lines I have another set which are blue..so..

I: Ok, ok, do you know Danes spend 1/3 of their income on consumption related to housing, so I was thinking maybe this Danish stile influenced you, like buy more candles or...

R: Living here, noticing what kind of things I would want to have liked to have and what I want for my future house, so it makes me dreaming cause it is the first time I left my parent's house so it's the first time I'm facing this, I would have liked to have a big mirror. Right now I only have a small one in the bathroom, and it can't work for every day just having this small mirror or things like this...

I: So why did you decide not to buy one?

R: Because I'm only here for one year, and I can deal with it for one year.

I: Ok, then what would you say are the most essential aspects that constitute a home?

R: Uhmmm..what do you mean?

I: What does it mean for you. What does feeling at home mean?

R: Just being at ease, I remember the first days I wasn't really at ease here, I felt weird and a few days or a week after when I got home I just wanted to dress comfortable home. I needed some time to get used to the environment.

I: Do you think that starting to place the shirt from your sister or just you know making a little corner you have there, help you to feel more comfortable?

R: MM.... no, I didn't really think about it, I don't know. I just find a place where to place them, like this t-shirt, I don't want to wear it, I want to take care of it so I just put it there because I never use this chair.

I: So you told me it's your first time away from your parents, and how much possibility to personalize your room you had there, when living with your parents?

R: At home I could to whatever I wanted, I was impressed when I asked them if I can paint the walls and they were ok with it " go for it!".

I: Do you think your cultural background influenced your decision on personalizing or not personalizing your room?

R:No, I don't know.

I: How do you feel now in this place?

R: Good, good, I'm not sure if it's because of how my room is organized, it's because I'm getting to know my neighbours and, I think I enjoy living here because of the people around and what I do.

I: Do you usually invite them in the room? Have gatherings?

R: Not very often

I: I saw you have a big common place outside, with the possibility to cook there, even if you have your kitchen here, how much time you spend in your room?

R: Compare to other people leaving here, I spend a lot of time in here. I'm only out when I know I am going to meet someone or I'm going with someone to cook, so we do that in the common area, but If I'm alone I prefer to spend time here and cook inside.. I don't see the point of going out to cook because I have my kitchen here..

I: But still you told me having neighbours and meeting other students helps you creates a feeling of home not just a house, what do you think?

R: I need a location to go out, otherwise I prefer to stay here, if is just to watch a film on my computer I can do it here, I don't need to be outside with everyone around, it's just more comfortable to be in my room.

I: I understand, oh, I'm done with my questions, so now I'll stop the recorder, thank you very much.



## Sonja- 19- Germany

I: What photos did you take?

R: First one m....

I: So what do we have here?

R: That's my printer and my camera, because I have to take photos, is kind my hobby, I usually do it back home, like walking around and taking random photos, and yeah, I came with my car so, I decided ok, you can take photos but you can't print them so there you go ( bring my printer with me)

I: So this basically is your passion?

R: Yeah, yeah. I brought my coffee machine with me as well, because without coffee in the morning nothing works for me. So I decided, ok I take my coffee machine with me. I mean if you take your printer with you, you can bring a coffee machine and a cup, it reminds me of when I'm working for the church, it's a voluntary 3 weeks vacation in summer and if you are working as a voluntary you get a cup.

I: Oooh, okay...

R: Soo, I brought my cup from my last year to remind me of that time, it gives me that feeling of home because I am doing that with my friends there, so yes....

I: And at home do you also used to drink coffee? In the morning...

R: Yes Yes, it's like routine and I wanna keep that so I decided to bring both things

I: Awesome, and yea..

R: I wasn't sure if I can take a photo of Taylor Lautner half naked of my wall..... to be honest I'm not a huge fan of him

I: Yeah..?

R: But my sister and my family was visiting me a week ago and my sister, I was always Skyping with my sister and as you can see she always looks to that white wall and she told me "it's not going to stay like that". And so she just decided to bring me some of her favourite posters and there we go... So I decided to photograph the horse posters.

I: I guess it kinda reminds you more of your sister?

R: Yeah, I mean back home she usually had those posters on her wall, so now it kinda reminds me of my sister...so yeah, I have those posters here.

I: That's very nice. But you decided to take photos of the horses?

R: Yes, I tried to tape them on the wall, but my tape is not strong enough, so I have to figure out if somebody's able to give me something more permanent.

I: I have been in your position, looking for a good tape...

R: I don't wanna use this black tape, because that will look nasty on my wall. There is nothing I can put in the wall, like nail is not working. I mean there are some holes, somebody at least try to put something in the wall, but yeah...

I: I'll recommend you those things like sticky plasticize looking things and you put them on the wall, usually are for us students for posters. Why do you have horses, do you like horses?

R: I did some horse riding back home, so yeah it's like my favourite animal and I was doing horse riding twice a week.

I: So, it's also a vivid reminder of home?

R: Yes yes. I think that was the topic, right?

I: Yes, exactly, wow, and here in the next photo? It's a...? And tell me the story behind it

R: A candle. It is a present from my mom, she brought me this candle for Christmas, because back home my room is decorated in this purple or violet colours like my blanket, and as you can see my bedding sheets are like purple too. So I was looking for a violet candle of a long time, and I was unable to find one not smelling, I can't stand the smelly candles and wherever you go these cheap candles smells, like vanilla or apples. My candle is not supposed to smell, but give me a nice light, and my mom found one in this color and she told me "yeah, I've got it but now you are leaving" and I just decide to take it with me, so I'd have it here.

I: You also have like 3 small purple hearts I can see, and what is the other thing?

R: MM... I don't know how you call it, we have that in Germany, and basically it says good luck for the next year, and my Grandmother is always getting this little pigs for the whole family.

I: Ok, it's something you have back home like a tradition?

R: Yes, it's a tradition,

I: It's really nice, and the hearts came with the candle?

R: Yes, I mean I was thinking will look nicer so yes...

I: Do you know that Danes invest a lot in consumption related to housing, for example Candles, do you think that influenced you in a way? The things you saw here?

R: I wasn't buying that much here, because I was coming by car so I just decided to bring most of the stuff from back home, I like candles, so I decided to bring it here, I usually don't buy that many candles. Mostly my friends or my family buy candles for me, because I'm not a huge decorator, like my sister who is bringing me posters for my wall. I mean I could have bought some but...

I: Ok and the next photo what does it actually mean?

R: Some people eat on stuff like that. This it's produced in my town, this is my home town: Goslar, Germany. This is supposed to be like a nice map of my town. It was a present, there is a text on it, from the mother of my boyfriend who gave it to me, to remember home, she told me that when I have breakfast I can remember where I belong.

I: It's really interesting because it shows little house, also it's interesting that you decided to put a knife on it...

R: So you can remember what it is other ways it just looks like this ....

I: It's really nice! Ok, now I have some other few questions...

R: I hope I can answer to these...

I: I noticed you decided to take photos of mostly things you brought from home. But did you also go shopping here? Like Ikea or...

R: I didn't go to Ikea, I was thinking to go there, but I'm staying here 5 months, so it's not that long time, if I'll be staying here longer maybe I'll go somewhere and buy stuff, the only things I bought are groceries and some clothes. I was buying some clothes but nothing more...

I: So no impulsive shopping? Just passing by some shop and just...?

R: Just different food, that's the only different thing they have here

I: How much do you think right now that your room reflects your personality? How much it says about you?

R: MMM.... I think is hard, because I wouldn't choose these furnitures, because the first time I came in this room I was like "OOOOKKKK" I'm going to live here for 5 months, awesome, and I was looking at the

walls, I don't wanna say they depressed me, but sometimes it feels like that because everything look the same, wherever you go. Everybody here in this dorm, has the same room, the same furniture and that kina feels wrong. So I am really happy that I brought my own bedding sheets and a blanket and some other stuff, just to put things in this room, not everybody has. So I am lucky my coffee machine is standing over there, it really reminds me of home, because I am coffee drinker and this has been my coffee machine since I lived alone so that is kind of my personality I think.

I: Nice, so it's not the first time you leave your parental home? You have been away before?

R: Yes

I: Okay, I guess you are very similar to me, from what I wrote in the letter, you know when I got in the room and I saw the white walls...

R: Yea, the first moment you arrive it's so empty, there is nothing of your stuff here. So, I brought a lot of book and stuff like and I'm so happy that I did that because it was looking so empty.

I: And very similar to the others room, do you think you feel constrained that we get the standard furniture?

R: Lucky me that I brought my car so I put a lot of stuff in there.

I: As I explained I came by plane so I had a small suitcase.

R: I was thinking going by train and then I just figured if you are there you need something like showing your personality, making what you are, so I figured I can't go by train...I am not going to put everything I need in one stupid suitcase, it's not going to work out!

I: So what would be the essential things that constitute a home?

R: What home is for me?

I: Yeah, feeling at home...

R: Well for me home has a lot to do with routines, like drinking coffee in the morning, feeling comfortable. And is pretty hard if you don't have, I mean I didn't buy this furniture and gives me a weird feeling. I really love beds and this is the worse bed, really. I don't know like people wanna sleep in that thing, I can't figure it...I am not going to understand it. But still I have my own blanket and pillow and that's kinda nice.

I: I can see, you have this purple theme going on and the pillows... I also have many pillows...

R: I like that, back home I have like one side is full with pillows, and I just brought 2. For me, back at home I have a lot of photos I took on the walls, but I wasn't able to take them cause it's too hard, I was scared they would get damaged. And I can print that huge ones, I really miss that, so I'm lucky my sister brought me at least some stuff I can put on my walls, even if it's not my favourite one. I mean that's hot, you have to admit that!

I: Yes, I agree. So definitely some objects, some routines, and what else? This feeling at home?

R: I Brought some letters, post cards.

I: Yea?

R: You see my mom wrote me that one for example

I: What does it says?

R: You can buy cloths but not the style.

I: Oh, it's so cute!

R: Actually I also brought some books reminding me of home, this is something from my... it's full of photos and notes I took on that 3 summer holiday vacation , with all the younger students. So sometimes when I feel like I need something I just read it or look at the photos

I: Yea it's like a journal?

R: Yeah, it's kind of a journal, it's a good word for it. I look through all this things, that's reminding me of home, so I brought something like that. What else? Hmm... You know It's weird because nobody asked me why I brought these things here, they just tell me“ you brought a coffee machines here?! are you crazy?”Yeah, I brought some stuff for my studies; I mean that's kind of weird.

I: Do you think your cultural background influence your decisions on what you brought or how you arranged your room?

R: I don't know..?!? Are German coffee drinkers?!? Probably, yes. I think my family drinks a lot of coffee so that's probably the reason why. I brought my laptop, for sure most people do, it's kind of impossible without. I brought a lot of clothes. It's so hard to figure out what you could need.

I: I had German flatmates also and they were really into decorating the rooms, they wanted to make it feel cosy. Kitchen items were also important, like knives, good knives.

R: Yeah, I brought some knives and some other kitchen stuff, ok, that's probably German. I mean I brought my car, that's kind of my personality, because I am used to having the opportunity to drive wherever and whenever I want to, so I have my car here. That's like a huge impact.

I: And your car also had a huge impact on deciding how your room is going to look like, I guess?

R:Yeah.

I: But back home, how much possibility to express yourself you had, I mean when you were living with your parents?

R:Ok, uhmm, I am studying 30 km from my home town, it's not that far away, so on my weekends I was usually back at home with my family, but my room where I study in that town it has like 22 square meters, it's not that huge. But that room was completely empty so I had to chose what kind of furniture I would like to, and that was kind of nice, so I could like do whatever I want to that room, like put posters and pictures on the wall and that's pretty nice. I could even put a lamp on the wall, the guy renting that room was pretty nice and he sort of "do whatever you want just don't destroy anything. So I basically had the chance to do whatever I wanted.

I: Unlike here?

R:Yeah, it's more difficult I think.

I:Uhum, and how about the room where you grew up, with your parents?

R: Uhm...okay...like what I did to that room? For the first years of my life, I think my parents just managed what my room looked like, but when I started going to high school, I decided to paint my walls so they were in a light blue and I kinda feel not okay with that anymore. I painted like 3 walls in white and one in really aggressive orange, so it's still an orange because I like that colour, and I have a lot of photos because as I told you I like to take photos, and back at home I have the possibility to like print them in that size so that's pretty nice.

I: Yeah, you told me, I can picture it. So it's definitely not the first time when you change your place. For me it was my first time, moving away from the parental home. So you basically had one more...?

R:Yeah in like 5th or 6th grade I was allowed to change my room back at home so we got a new floor in the room so me and my sister were allowed to say something we would like to have and then we were

painting all the rooms in our house so we were allowed to paint our rooms like we want to. So this was like the first renovation, or like doing something new and then when I moved out.

I: So you were living in a separate room not with your sister?

R: Yeap, yeap.

I: OK, and how do you feel in this new place?

R: Ermmm...to be honest, first week was horrible. I was still unpacking stuff and I missed stuff and right now I feel comfortable because I am used to the size of the room and how it looks like and I like how I ordered things and now I have something on my wall and yeah, that's kinda making me more comfortable. Although, I still miss my home.

I: Yes, you definitely managed to give it...I feel very comfortable here and I can feel like a print, the purple, and the horses, you also have like purple bed line, the boxes are purple...

R: Yes, I like that colour, I don't why I choose that colour for my new home back at home.

I: So at home you also had purple?

R: Something I wanted to bring here, too.

I: And I noticed you have this huge space, common space, where you can have dinners...but still, do you invite people in your room?

R: Depending, yeah, sometimes I'm just sitting here with some people to talk, but the problem is the room is really not that huge, you know? That's kind of a problem, but yeah, sometimes we are sitting here, watching a movie in that rooms, that's nice too.

I: How much time do you spend here, in this room, in your room?

R: Uhm, that's a good question! I was never thinking about that. Erm...I think I really spent here most of my time, because I'm like the lone wolf, studying on my own. I mean sometimes it's nice staying out because I have this common area but they always play music and talk and I'm the type of student that can't stand any noises when I study, it needs to be silent. That's why I usually come back here to study and I am really lucky that I have such a huge window. This was one thing I feared, like okay, when you are sitting in that small room and...but it's fine, it's enough light. Yeah, I really think I spend most of my day here, that's kinda sad when I'm thinking about it. But I feel comfortable here. In the first weeks I tried to avoid staying here because it felt wired to me but right now it's fine.

I: Well, what made it feel fine now?

R: I think it's like this routine, I was able to copy and paste here from home. You know what I mean? You get used to it, you have half of your things here and it's looking more like home, even like this colours. They make me feel like, okay, you live here, this is your place, nobody else is here. I can have my coffee and print some other stuff that's kinda making me feel more happy with this room.

I: Even if it's temporary?

R: Yeah..yeah.

I: Okay, I guess I don't have any more questions. Thank you very much!

## Mitchel – 24- USA

I: And I'm gonna start with asking you your name again...

R2: My name is Mitchel Johnson..

I: Ok and how old are you?

R2: 24

I: And you are from...

R2: Tucson, Arizona, in the Southwestern United States

I: Thank you, and for how long are you going to stay here in Denmark?

R2: Just for the one semester from beginning in February to ending in June so I am living July

I: Ok, that's like in total of 6 months...ok, let's see what photos did you take, you told me that you didn't have so many things..

R2: Yeah, well you pack everything in 2 suitcases and a backpack so...

I: I sure know how it feels..Ok...what is here in this first picture

R2: It's a travel compass and a temperature gage in the empyreal system, actually it comes from my hiking backpack back home cause we have mountains, canyons, everything all over the place but I use to compass to kinda remember where I am and then of course the temperature and everything is in the imperial gage so it's not Celsius...

I: So what does it mean to you, why did you choose this?

R2: It reminds me of home because where I live I can get in my car and drive 5,10,15 minutes and be outside the city where I went to school before I came here and just be in the mountains and just hike and get away from things it's kinda something that reminds me of things that I used to be able to do which I mean...I can do the same thing to get away from Aalborg but I can't go hiking cause there's no mountains

I: Yes, that's true there are no mountains...so yeah..it's nice....ok next photo..what is this?

R2: My desk..I always keep my desk next to my window back home which is because I like that when it's a window next to it and then it's somewhat organized but I have to keep some paper work on my desk to feel like I'm actually using it. I leave my computer on it to charge and then maybe do some work but usually I'm sitting in a chair or my bed or at the university at the library or somewhere else working in homework so I cope up for making it feel like home cause I always had a desk in my room next to my window.

I: So it's not necessarily the desk itself but the way its placed...

R2: Yeah, the way it's placed...

I: ...and here...what does this mean?

R2: Those are caned hatched green chilies which you will not find in this country, I actually had my parents ship those to me from back home. It's only grown and hatched in Mexico and they are used in cooking of traditional Mexican foods so that's why I had my parents ship them for me, you can find all the spices, all the meats, but you can never find that green hatched chilies so I my parents offered to send me a care package and I put that on the list "hey, send these so I can make some traditional Mexican food from home"

I: A taste of home...literally!

R2: Basically, literally, a taste of home..

I: Yes, ok, and here...?

R2: It's gonna be a similar same thing, this is a cinnamon rice drink which is also very Mexican, southern Arizonan, United States area cause the Mexican culture influences where I live so heavily. It's part of what I am used to and I can do the really hard part of grinding the rice that is soaked for a week, then adding cinnamon, sugar and make it by hand if I wanted to, but this is what most people will find in restaurants or quick parties, unless you go to a real special party cause it takes forever to make Ouachita and it reminds me of hot summer days cause it's when you drink it when it's really hot summer day, with ice and everything. And a good bottle of Mexican tequila, I love Mexican tequila, not the crap that is made in Germany that is sold here, 100% fresh Tequila so I brought that with me to remind me, well I'm not going to find good tequila in Europe, so I am gonna bring the good stuff with me

I: And it's probably reminding you of the good stuff at home...

R2: Yes, a lot of parties, because where I am from tequila, well it's the traditional drink that it's always brought, especially if you go to Mexican friends or Latin descendants from Center or South America and tequila is just a part of the culture where I am from, even though I'm American, it's still a part of our culture, I mean I live one hour and a half from the border so it's a good thing to have and it just reminds me of home and it's good stuff to drink...

I: Yeah, oooh, what does this mean?

R2: So these 3 items in the photo are...the patch is actually a sheriff's uniform patch, cause my mother is a law enforcement officer back home and I brought a bunch of them over because I have some Danish friends that are in the military here and patches are a very big thing to trade and when I met up with them I also gave them some other things, Pinkham Sheriff 1865 and it was established then the seal of the county which is the star on the patch, I can give you the patch to take a closer photo if you would like, and then I have a lot of friends that are law enforcement officers, but that reminds me of both my parents, my parents are law enforcement officers. My dad is retired but those other things to in law enforcement aspect, my mom still is. Then, the folded American flag is something that I've always had with me since I left home, because when my father was in military police, he used to take that in all his departments, exercises, whenever he left home. It's been to Belgium, it's been all over the world! And whenever he went away from the family for a long period of time and then when I left for college he gave it to me so it's in a way connected to my father and it's also my country's flag so it reminds me of that and then the smaller flag it's my states flag, it's what we call a copper-bloom-gold so it signifies the horizon, the stars and then the rise of the sun coming up over the clouds, cause when the sun is setting you'll see the rise shooting up from the horizon through the clouds so that's what our flag signifies and it reminds me of Home.

I: Yeah, yeah, do you have them all placed there on the bookshelf?

R2: Yeah that's where I keep them, I never once unfolded the American flag since my father gave it to me six years ago, it's always been folded and whenever I travel or whenever I go to places for long periods of time I pack it in my suitcase...

I: It's symbol of home I guess, that both you and your father...

R2: It's just something to have but it does remind me of home and I might unfolded for the 4th of July cause I'm here and that's our independence day back home and I might put it up on a pole and be like "Yay Americaaaa" but it depends if I'm back from traveling or not but that's what I'll probably do with it

and then...Yup, just small little items, but like I said earlier it's kinda hard to come over here from the US, cause we have to pack everything in 2 suitcases and backpack.

I: Yeah, I have been in a similar situation as I wrote in the letter, just one suitcase and that was it...

R2: Yeah it's kinda funny how little you can fit in them isn't it?

I: But I guess they are small items which have a lot of meaning...

R2: They do, they do...

I: I guess that was for the photos but I have few more questions...I noticed that you brought all these things from home and how about shopping here, did you...?

R2: So like buying things to feel more home in here? Ummm..I really don't because: One, I'm really here for only 6 months and it's kind of a pain to get rid of the things or try to sell them off, but also stands for the way I grew up, I mean I grew up in a military family in the US and we moved on average once every six years until my father found a retirement. I lived in Tuscan, Arizona, Chama, Georgia, then after Tuscan Arizona where we are now when my father retired, so we've been Southern Arizona, Midwest, deep south and then all the way back of the entire US and for me just moving around and everything was just part of my daily life, I wouldn't call it daily life, but it's part of my life, I mean I adjust fairly well to going from one thing I am used to something that maybe is partially similar or some similarities but there are so many new things, but I can adjust very well. Like here, I've met a lot of internationals that have a hard time adjusting to the way Danes do things here. I would say I really did not have that problem, just because I'm so used to moving and having things done differently when I go to a different area but the states, so regardless of what I do, I'm just ok...that's how it's done here and I have to go by the way things are done here and I just change gears and go with the way it is here. I mean yeah, it takes a couple of weeks to a month to really fully understand everything but it hasn't bugged me the way I've seen it bug some of the other internationals where they just feel really, really uncomfortable or they can feel really, really uncomfortable and for me it's just normal, daily life.

I: So definitely we can say that your cultural background influenced the way you chose to personalize your room and....

R2: I mean, well, if I was here for 1 year or more I would probably gone out and bought some things and probably made a trip back to the US and everything over the summer and then come back and everything and then come back but I am only here for the 6 months and then I can do very well with minimalist living and everything and I'll still have fun, I'll enjoy it, but I can live with my computer, my backpack, my clothes, my bed and some little things to remind me of home and then of course, I'm going back home in 6 months so...

R2: Ok, but then could you tell me what does feeling at home mean for you?

I: Home is...well it's a cliché term but...it's where the heart is. Regardless of where I was in the world growing up whether was in China, Georgia, here in Denmark, where even though I was home in my state of Arizona, but I wasn't home in Tuscan, I was in Flagstaff Arizona which is 4 and half hour car drive away from where I live where I went to school. I always regarded Southern Arizona and Tuscan as my home, regardless of where I am and it will always be there for me, I can always see it again, I will always be able to go back to it and see it. Things will change, I mean things did change when I left in 2000 and then came back in 2004, things changed in the 4 and a half years that we were gone but it was always home I mean regardless of where I was "well yeah, I live in Georgia and that's home here, but Arizona it's still home cause that's where I'm from.



I: Yes, yes, I understand. And what would be the essential aspects that constitute the home?

R2: Hm, Arizona culture is probably the best way to describe that: very laid back, we will make fun of people that are not from our state, especially during the summer because they don't know how to react to the heat when our average summer temperature is 44 degrees Celsius or more, so it's very hot, very dry, we live in a desert, little rain, a desert with plants but a rough life, well depends what you, but you can find beauty in it. I mean regardless of where you are back home, and that's the thing about Arizona cultures, yes we live in cities or we live out in the middle of nowhere, it's hot during the summer, it can be extremely freezing cold during the winter, with a 1 meter or more of snow on the ground depending where you are in the state but you can always find something that you enjoy doing whether is the people, the different cultures, I mean we have Mexican, we have this very typical cowboy culture of ranch, the food, family, just the way things are done. Arizonans are extremely polite people, we love to help people who visit the state, we have the Grand Canyon so we always deal with what we call "tourists", like during the summer our state jumps in population by like a million or so people, just because of tourists, but it's whatever...I mean we help them, it's part of our culture, it's part of our economy, but that I guess you can define as the specifics of home. You can kinda define it, but it's very hard to finally describe it because when you grew up with it your entire life, you really have a hard time trying to fully detail describe it...

I: It's more like a feeling...?

R2: It's a feeling! Really it really is, it's like "oh well, I'm back home". It's like yeah, things are different or there is more people, maybe less people but I'm back home in Tuscan. It's like when I go home, for example when I would visit from school, on summer for couple of weeks before going to work and then I would visit friends that went to high school with and we were going to the university cause I didn't chose to go to the University where I lived, I wanted to go somewhere else. I made up with my friends that I went to high school with, we'll go out camping, hunting, fishing, whatever, have a bonfire, cook some stuff on grill, drink beer, have fun, joke around...It's creates a feeling of what we were used to, cause we were going to certain restaurants back home, cause there are certain restaurants you just grow up with, for examples: Nico's Taco Shop and Los Petos which are 2 fast food Mexican restaurants that sell just burritos, tacos, enchiladas, like really quick Mexican stuff, but it's when you grow up with it you get a breakfast burrito which is ham cheese eggs and potatoes and bacon with red chili or green chili sauce on...it's great...but yeah those are the things I do when I visit Tuscan, my home-home. Arizona is always my home state, regardless, but Tuscan is home home for me.

I: And...how about this current place, how much time do you usually spend in this room?

R2: Actually, I've spent more time in this room in the last week, than I have probably the entire semester, mainly because this is my last semester and when I go back home I'll have my degree, I'll start finding jobs so I've been looking for jobs and applying for jobs online from back home, so when I get back home in July, have a job waiting for me, which would be the ideal situation, but we'll see how that goes...

I: Good luck!

R2: Yeah, thank you. But beforehand, I've traveled I wanted to see the country, I took a flight south from Billund to Venice airport to visit some friends that I haven't seen in a long time and I had a great time exploring Venice and northern Italy and stuff, I've been to Copenhagen, I've taken 2 different trips to East and West coast to see the Baltic and the North Sea kind of thing, see the sunset over the North Sea,

that was fun to see. I try not to spend so much time in this room because I am here for 6 months. I mean yes, I take my school work seriously, I do my school work, stuff like that, but when you are exchange student, especially from the US, coming to Europe is big deal for us. If we wanna get anywhere else besides Canada or Mexico we have to take a plane. For me, I wanna go see things, I've been to Sweden, I'll probably be going to Norway just to see the other Nordic country, probably London. My parents are actually coming over to visit me, so we are going to take a road trip: Belgium, Luxembourg, London, France, Germany kind of thing. We will meet up with our Danish family friends, have a good time, have a party, so I try not to spend much time in my room, just because there is so much to do here, for Americans, I mean for me it's like Europe is exotic, it's not similar for us. If I go to the south of Tuscan, it's basically Mexico, in the US, it's basically Mexican culture, everybody speaks Spanish, we have very little English, everything is done the Mexican way, same thing with Canadian culture kind of thing. It's different cause North American culture is very mixed, whereas here when I've gone to Italy from Denmark, very distinct differences, when I went from Denmark to Sweden, yes, similarities with the Scandinavian culture but still very different than the cultures and things like that. But for us, it's like I can go to Canada or I can go to Mexico, neah, why bother, let's go somewhere else, let's go to Hawaii or Alaska which are considered other countries in the US because they are not connected with the main land.

I: Yeah, yeah so I guess it's a big opportunity to visit and travel as you said, but when you are here, let's say for studies, you have to be here in Aalborg, I noticed you have this big wide common space, where you can hang out and do you prefer to sit there or just...?

R2: I'm gonna sit there when I'm maybe doing some light work, taking care of emails for school or reading, I'll sit out there but when I really wanna work on writing a paper or writing something I need to do it in here to get away from distraction, I go to the library, in quiet rooms and just do it there just to get away from things, but it really depends on what it is. But yes I do like using the common area cause it's kinda nice though.

I: Do you usually invite people in your room?

R2: I've had one small party in here, but most of us, just because we have the common kitchen and the common area, I mean this Collegium is not like most Danish Collegiums were you have halls that have different rooms, and different colors. Here, the entire building has one so if you wanna use the oven, or if you wanna cook on the stove top, I mean yeah we have little stoves in our rooms but I haven't even bothered to try cook on one, I haven't used it yet. I mean I turned it on to make sure it worked but other than that I never messed with the thing because it's one, too small and I prefer cooking out in the common kitchen because I can talk to people, joke around and when we have parties, it's a lot easier to cook out there and host things out there. Yeah if we do something like a traditional dinner or something, for example one French guy that lives here hosted a traditional French dinner for myself and a couple of the other new internationals that just moved in when I first got here, he hosted in his room just because he could set up the table very nicely done and everything but this is the French style, instead of having it done in the common kitchen, tables and everything, where there are just a lot of people, moving in and around, where it's loud and noisy cause a lot of people are talking or can be, it's just easier to do. I have people here once in a while, some people have parties in their rooms more than others but it's kinda difficult for me in the same time cause I have so little with me that it's hard, I have 3 chairs, a bed and a table.

I: Yeah and the common room is nice...

R2: Yeah we have chairs, tables, we have a music system out there, we even have a TV room with the lounges as well, so it's fun to host parties in there as well.

I: Like a cinema as I understood, right?

R2: Yup a cinema room.

I: Do you usually go there?

R2: We all watch like Game of Thrones or movies in there Mondays and stuff, we'll watch it all in there, we'll host parties in there, at the lounge, because you have the cinema part with the seats and everything that are really nice seats and then we have the lounge with the couches and stuff where we will host parties in there and I am really glad I got the Internet with the Aalborg International Collegium here over say the other ones, cause I've talked with some of the other Americans that are here, that live in the other ones and they hate where they live. When myself and the other Americans moved here I guess there weren't any here last year that the other Americans that were here knew but we met them and we invited them to parties and they just come in here all the time just because it's open, everybody is friendly kind of thing.

I: Yeah, maybe they also feel like home, this gatherings could..

R2: Well it's...I've been to other collegiums to visit the other Americans and it's like I don't know if its the Danish culture or if its depending were you are from Europe but for Americans back home at universities for us, or just back home in general we had what we call bloc parties, I mean were we invite the whole neighborhood, would be people that live around us, that maybe that we see every couple of year, like 4th of July which is independence's day notorious to have big parties where everybody that lives there just gets together. Yeah, maybe you've talked to that person couple of times a year, but you get around, eat food, cook drink, have a good time, watch fireworks, all that kind of thing. So this kinda reminds me of that type of culture back home cause we all come out together, we all share, we all have a good time.

I: So you have your private room, but also...

R2: Yeah and then we also show each other our cultures, like the French guy had a traditional dinner and everything and in a couple of weeks I'll be cooking a very traditional Mexican dinner so I've created an event and I've invited everybody here so I know how much I have to cook kind of thing and it's all fun doing that...

I: It's international after all also, I guess it's part of the advantage to live in such a place...

R2: It is...

I: And speaking about cultures, you know that the Danes use almost a third of the income on consumption they do to housing. So I was wondering, for what you told me now I don't believe so but maybe some influence on you? You also have your Danish friends.

R2: I have my families Danish friends, very nice house and yeah they probably spent some money on some very nice things, I mean I do back home, but at the same time, just for the culture, Americans can and do spend a lot of money on household's consumption stuff like furniture and things like that but in general, a lot of us don't, we have TV, we have entertainment, we have things decorating the home, but we also do things very differently. Like the Danes, I've noticed, like for example on Facebook, there is the Aalborg Marked group or whatever it is and people put these adds up for these paintings or these pictures of like I saw one of women's high heels. Americans would look at that as "why would you spend your money on that?". It's a girl who posted it, fine whatever, but in American culture, why would you

spend money on that...the picture of women high heels. I'd much rather spend my money on a painting or a photo of the mountain, the Rocky mountains where I live, or the Catalina mountain range covered in snow or a photo that I took of some deer that I have professionally framed, I'd rather spend my money on that so..I guess you call it consumerism culture, but yeah back home and here I really don't spend money to decorate my room and stuff. I have photos back home but nothing what they have here.

I: Yeah, so even if you moved a lot and you changed your home[ the actual physical place], you missed decorating it, right? The pictures and...

R2: Yes, we have a lot of antiques, of old things, mainly from the family. My family has been in US for a very, very long time since 1638, well before the US was the US and a lot of antiques we have in our home are things from our family and my family owned a milk company at one time in the US and we have things left over from the company like the bottles, some of the pictures, vintage lamps, lights, radios, tools. It's just how things are done, we have the TV, we have where we keep our DVDs and stuff but in the glass cases we have photos of family, like really old photos going back to 1900, things that they owned like a pair of glasses, a camera, a couple of fishing poles in a corner. It's just a connection to the past and the family, but that's how my family does it.

I: How would you do it?

R2: I would do it the same way.

I: So if you would have had the possibility to bring more things with you...?

R2: I would have. I definitely would have, I'd probably would have brought up a lot of photos with me, I would have had some on my desk, hang them on the concrete walls.

I: I noticed you kept your walls quite white actually, not like most students, like I also said in my letter, we tend to glue or post like posters or pictures...

R2: Yeah, I've thought about bringing some posters of things that remind me of home like some of the landscapes or some of the photos that I've taken that I've had printed out in poster size back home. But I was like "It's more crap to pack in my suitcase and it's a lot of stuff". But it all comes back to how I grew up, I mean I was used to moving and then I also knew coming here that I would only be here for only 6 months.

I: So that basically stopped you from doing it here? Because I was wondering why didn't you print it here...

R2: 2 things..It's kinda minor how you print it off and it's expensive here, to get something professionally printed here, compared to back home is like 5-6 times the price..and I knew that coming over and I don't wanna ruin my nice prints that I had done back home so I don't wanna ruin what I have. I mean I can always get redone, so I can but at the same time I'm only here for six months so I can live without them, but that's just how I approach life, I mean, sometimes you just have to go without things...

I: I understand, yes, totally. I was looking around your room and I noticed something...like you have a small necklace...or?

R2: Yeah, that was the souvenir that I actually bought here, I went to the Viking burials grounds and I bought so I have to say, well I have something from Denmark and I figured I'd buy a Nordic symbol, a Viking symbol and ever since I bought I wore it a couple of times but I just hang it there because it was a hanger. So it's really the only thing that's probably decorating my walls. I mean it's cool, it's something

to have. It's gonna be a reminder of the trip when I'm gonna get back home that's for sure. I thought I could hang it here, I didn't wanna throw it on my desk, cause that's where I hang my keys at night.

I: It's important to have a place where you hang your keys I guess. But yeah, you told me about your family and your parents how they collect things...and how much possibility did you have when you were younger and you were living with your parents, how much possibility did you have to personalize your room.

R2: When I was younger, I always had my bookshelf with all my books, my models, I used to build a lot of scale models back home of cars, planes, things like that, I mean it was really all I had because I also lived in military housing back home, we lived on a military base so I really didn't have the opportunity to decorate because we also moved a lot too, so I've lived on military housing till I was six in Tucson, then we moved off to a place where our parents finally bought our own house and the room was a different painted color, we had some photos and stuff up in my room and everything but that was that and then we moved 4 years later to Cheyenne Wyoming, lived there for 1 year and a half and we didn't really decorate anything because it was military housing again and it was 1 year and a half.

I: And in this military housing you weren't allowed?

R2: Well you can, but again I was younger so I was more worried about other things, I hated being in my room as a kid. I preferred to be outside playing with my friends like playing football like soccer, American football, European football, baseball, tag, hide and go seek, shooting each other with water guns, doing that kind of stuff but that's because I was younger. And then when I was in Valdosta, Georgia, we repainted my room cause we lived there longer, we lived there for about 4 years, my parents bought a house there and I decorated, I put photos up, I had my book shelf with all my books and my models, we painted the room in colors I liked. When I went back home, when we finally left Georgia and my dad retired from the military and we moved back to Arizona, Tucson, I didn't repaint my room back home because I didn't feel like repainting my room this time, last time it took a week and it was pain so I don't wanna do it again. But I put up shelves for pictures, models again, books, hang some things from the ceiling. But the decorating for me for home is typically in the living room or the big area where you have parties and the dining room and stuff, where you can really decorate things just because that's where we've always put the stuff. In our rooms it's like ok we have some things but really not that much.

I: Why do you think it's like that, why the living room?

R2: A room's to sleep in like your bedroom, your living room is where you probably gonna be most of the day with family or friends if you are inside, so what would you rather decorate? Your room or your living room where you are going to spend time with people? That's probably the best way to describe it, I mean back home, when I was in college, I had some photos, on my desk I had a couple of photos for myself and then up on the wall when I was living in an apartment with 2 other guys and I was a college student so I watched what I've spent so I didn't go out and buy things I necessarily didn't need, so I only bought what I needed. It's how I was raised, when you are doing things at a college level and you are strapped for cash you only buy what you need and you save money so when you can do something you want, you have that. If that makes sense...Complicated answer....

I: Totally, yeah, it makes sense, I understand. I mean, we do have a special status as college students so I guess you would have done more if you had the ...I mean even in this particular space, there is no living room, I mean there is the common room, but it's different when you are a student, right?

R2: It is, it is, it really is and this is actually a nice place for me, it's big enough, it has my bed and if I want to I can sit at the desk or I can host a couple of people in here. I've hosted a party in here and it was fine, I had 6 people in here, but it was packed. I mean 6 people in this tiny place, I think it's a lot of people. Back home, it's nice to have the family room where everybody can gather...

I: That's true so I guess at some point when you will have your home-home how do you think it will be then? From what you tell me I understand you will invest in expressing yourself and probably have a living room...?

R2: I will, I will. Yeah I mean, when I'll get back home I'll be living with my parents for just a short amount of time, just because I'll have a place to go to but I'll be looking for my own place, my own apartment, hopefully a house at some point, I can buy a house.

I: You seem to have sort of ideal image, like what you would like?

R2: It's kinda like an ideal image but everything is always subject to change in my world. You can have a plan for one thing but things can always change, you can find something you didn't expect you like more, so that's kinda what it is. I'll live at home for probably like a month, maybe a couple trying to find a place to move in to, because you wanna find a place you enjoy, that it's nice, that you like it, it's something where it's close to things you like to do. Me, I love being in the mountains, so I wanna be close to the mountains...

I: Yeah, it must be hard for you here...no mountains...

R2: Going to Italy, Northern Italy was nice, I could walk out of my friends house and be like "oh my God it's the Alps, I actually have something that's obstructing my view". So yeah, it was nice to see something that reminded me of home.

I: And speaking of view...I noticed you keep your curtains closed. That's right now or?

R2: I had the window and everything opened earlier. Usually, during the day when I am in my room I'll have the window open when it's sunny but it's been cloudy all day so I just figured to leave the window and stuff closed.

I: And I think I have one last question for you. Right now how much of this interior of the room would you say reflects who you are?

R2: Well, depending on how you wanna describe me. If you looked at the room you'd be like "wow, he has no imagination! There is nothing on his walls.". In reality it's not a good representation of who I am. Back home, I try to make things that make me feel comfortable or cozy. I mean the Danish have a word for it "hygge". My version of it and everything back home, but here once again it goes back for the whole thing "I'm here for 6 months". Yeah, I have my own place, I bought some things to make it feel/remind me of home but I know that while yes, this is home for 6 months, this will never be home. After I leave it will never be home, so it's home until July 14th but after July 14th it's no longer home. It's a place I lived and visited.

I: Maybe the choice of not putting things on the walls says something about who you are, right?

R2: I'll have an attachment to this place because I've spent 6 months, I'll probably have more an attachment to Denmark because of the people I know. I'll be like "aw, I went to school in Aalborg for 6 months", but after that it's like nothing except that I was there and I now people in Denmark and I'll go visit them hopefully sometime in the future and they will come visit me kind of thing but I can guess you can say that after I'll leave I'm really not attached to say..the room...or putting things up to remind me of

or create a home feeling because it won't be home, in...it's really 2 and a half months now. But that's how I approach it just because I was used to moving all the time as a kid.

I: As you explained me, yeah, yeah. I guess this is it and thank you very much for your answers. I am going to stop the recorder now

[I turn the recorder on again]

I: Yes?

R2: So one of things that I always have on my person back home is pocket knife that I can open with one hand, that is about 10 cm or like a 10 cm blade on it and I always have it on me back home. Because it's always in my pocket. Now some people are like "why do you have a knife on you? is it because you are afraid or something?" No, I use it as a tool. The way I grew up, when I'm not hiking I always have a knife on me. I did bring a multi-tool with me. I always have a knife on me, but here I can't have the pocket knife that I am comfortable with. I had to bring a stupid little Swiss army knife \*it's like this big\*. This can't do nothing for me, it's got tweezers, a tooth pick and what do I need the tooth pick for?

I: Yeah it must be really funny for you, very different...

R2: Yeah I mean, back home it's as I was saying just something I have on me. You are out in the middle of nowhere in the US, so when I say I am in the middle of nowhere in the US, you are literally out in the middle of nowhere in the US. Here you can find places like that in Europe, but at some point you are in a little town or village cause there is people everywhere, but for me it's just certain things that even if I were to live in like Europe, some of the Asian countries, I won't be able to do certain things that I can in the US, like pocket knives, my firearms, things like that.

I: And as you told me when the recorder was off, it wouldn't be ...home?

R2: It doesn't allow me to have home. But you gotta go where the job is.

I: I guess so, you need to adapt, fast changing times, right?

R2: Very true, very true

I: Ok...

## John-21-USA

I: I would like to ask you your name?

R3: My name is John Wesley Strahlman

I: And your age?

R3: I am 21

I: You come from?

R3: The US

I: And for how long will you stay in Denmark?

R3: I'll be here for one semester, from the end of January until the end of June.

I: Ok let's see. I am really curious about the photos. What do I see in the first picture?

R3: Uhm, the first picture is my computer. My computer is how I keep in touch with everybody from home. It's how I entertain myself when I have nothing to do. Basically that's my connection between here and home.

I: Yes, okay. And next one. What do we have here?

R3: That's my TTU hoodie. It's basically, it has symbolic meaning cause it's the first piece of clothing that I bought myself, that my parents didn't actually pay for. I've had it for almost 5 years now and I've literally worn it every single winter for like 2-3 days in a week for the past 4-5 years.

I: Awesome, so it's a symbol of your independence maybe?

R3: A symbol of my independence, a symbol of home. It reminds me of just about where I come from and the school I've been to for the past couple of years.

I: And what is this?

R3: That is a symbolic street sign from New York. I mean it was super small so I was able to bring it with me. I got it when I was in New York, couple of years ago, so it kinda reminds me of home in a way. It was basically the only thing I brought with me.

I: Did you have it placed back home on your wall also?

R3: Yeah, back home, I have posters and pictures and everything. There is not a single wall that is not covered with everything, but that's the only thing that I brought with me.

I: Oh, when I walked in your room I noticed that you actually chose to keep your walls quite empty, but I saw the sign on the biggest wall you have in your room. So why not putting posters here also?

R3: Really, I didn't have any posters. I could have buy some and put them all over the place but I am here for only one semester so there is not much point for bringing a bunch of flags or posters or album art work from cities and putting them on the wall.

I: But if you would stay here for let's say one year or more?

R3: Oh yeah, I would have totally brought so many more things. If I would stay here for longer that entire wall would be covered, half of the space here, there would probably be things on the ceiling. I can show you a picture at some point of how my dorm looked like, going into my room.

I: Okay, let's see. What do I see here?

R3: That is a beanie that I had since I was a soft more in high school and that has gone with me to Jamaica, Ireland, Europe, New York, Washington DC, Pennsylvania, Boston, even places where it can



actually be too hot to use. That hat was one of the first hats that I thought actually looked good on me so I kept it for 7-8 years now and it's just absolutely fantastic, it reminds me of home.

I: It's clearly a connection with it, it's full of meaning for you, right? And here?

R3: Yeah. That's a picture of my family that I keep in my wallet. That was taken in my 7th grade year in middle school and I've kept it in my wallet ever since. It's extremely tattered but it's one of the only pictures that I have with my family and I keep it with me almost everywhere I go.

I: Yeah, ok. I guess I can move on to asking you a few other questions. I see that most of the things to photograph you brought from home. If you were to buy things, did you go to shopping, to Ikea or?

R3: No I haven't actually. And if I did I would have gotten anything major because it's something I would have had to get rid of at the end of the semester. I much rather would have brought something from home, than actually to throw something away when I was going back.

I: But if you were to live here longer, apart from bringing things from home do you think you would have also bought...?

R3: Yeah, I think it would be fun to have a Danish flag and put it on the wall for a little while. I will probably bring a Danish flag back or something similar.

I: Uhm, so no impulsive shopping like just passing by some shop and just buying something?

R3: I don't have enough income to just impulsively buy random things

I: I understand I am in a similar situation so yeah. But how much of your personality do you think this room reflects?

R3: Very little. The only thing really is the New York street sign and that's about it, I mean if you could see my walls back home at the University, I have music posters, I had posters of the declaration of independence, I have all my walls completely covered by everything. This is a very poor representation of what I usually do.

I: So you would have done it differently if you would have stayed for a longer time...

R3: Of course.

I: You know that the Danes use 1/3 of their income on consumption related to housing and I was wondering if maybe that could have influenced you in anyway? For me it was with the candles...

R3: Actually, I put candles in that little cup so...I have had candles, I don't have any right now, they are fun to keep around. But I don't have any extra money right now to spend on them.

I: Yeah, but it's something you used to do before coming here or do you think it's something you took from the culture?

R3: Mostly cultural, I don't really keep very many candles at home and I haven't for very long. So yeah, candles would be one of the things that I've picked up over an year.

I: I see what other things?

R3: Really, the flags. A lot of the Danes have flags in their room. And I'm considering getting one and displaying it in my room when I get back. Back at home most people don't have a State flag or an US flag, that's usually outside so, I think it would be fun to have a Danish flag in my room once I get back home.

I: From what I understand it's not your first time when you leave away from your parental home.

R3: No no, I haven't lived at home since I was 18. So I lived from the time I was 18 till the time I moved here in 9 different places.

I: Wow, 9 different places! And it was also for like temporary periods of time?

R3: Most of them were temporary. I lived in the halls at my University and they move you around quite a bit if you are in the position I was. I lived in 4 different buildings that are residence halls in the past 2 years and a half.

I: Was it different from the point of view of decorating?

R3: There I could just move everything around. I mean it's pretty easy to move something from the wall when it's stuck with wall and just move it to another room that is about the same size.

I: Okay, but back home when you were living with your parents how much possibility to personalize your room you had?

R3: Oh I had absolute possibility to change my room, I could change my room any color I wanted if I had the paint than I could do it. One of the walls in my room was a bright red and the rest of them were white. And I had this little cove right beside the window and I had all of the album and the artwork that comes in albums, like the little sheet that comes in the cover on one entire wall of music artwork.

I: That's awesome I can actually picture it. So basically you had freedom of expression, That's very nice. Do you think your cultural background influenced your decisions in personalizing your room?

R3: Not particularly. I would have liked to put up a lot more, but it's just a temporary place so. If I was gonna be here for longer I would have brought more stuff and if I found a random thing in the street, something super cheap or free I would totally hang it up on the wall but I didn't get the opportunity yet to find anything like that.

I: Maybe you will, you never know... But I guess it's really related to the period of time, being temporary...

R3: At home, it was super easy to move it, a couple of miles down the road or from one building to another. Here I had to take it on a 15-20 hour flight...

I: I only have probably maximum 2 suitcases. I only had one as I wrote in the letter. I think you know that feeling of putting your entire life in one suitcase...?

R3: Yeah, I agree, taking one suitcase.

I: I guess it's hard to choose what to take, maybe that also has an influence on your room right now. But what does feeling at home mean for you?

R3: I can feel at home almost anywhere I go as long as I had connections to my actual home. As long as I meet new people where I am I can feel at home anywhere that I've been. The most alone I've ever felt was actual living in the hotel for a month, because I was stationed there. Usually wherever I go I meet a tone of people but at the hotel I was in charge keeping track of college kids who didn't actually want to be at the hotel cause there were no spaces in the residence home, so none of them actually spent any time there but it was my job to stay there and make sure they needed help. That's where I felt most alone cause they weren't there all the time and I was only 20 min from home but I wasn't allowed to leave very often so...

I: I see, how about here? How much time do you spend in your room?

R3: Recently quite a bit, our classes are basically over and I am working on projects, so I spent a lot of time just sitting here or in the library, doing computer research, writing papers. But it's mostly working on things. I like to keep myself busy so I am always doing something.

I: But if it weren't for this particular period of exams. In general how much time would you say...?

R3: I would sleep in here, and for an hour or 2 in the evening I would sit and relax and that's it. I don't really spend very much time in my room over the year.

I: You do have the wonderful common space and the common kitchen, is there where you go or you stay?

R3: Uhm yeah, I could go to a friend's apartment or I could go to the common area or I can go on the campus to the library to talk to people, to the Student House, is not that far away, there is always people to talk to anywhere, so there's no really need to sit in here and be bored.

I: But right here in this collegium, do you feel more comfortable sitting in your room or just hanging out with your neighbors?

R3: I wouldn't call it comfortable. I mean I feel comfortable here, I feel comfortable outside, it's more of a matter of if there are people there and if I feel like socializing at the moment and I'm going there if no, than I'd rather sit here and be a hermit, not talk to anybody.

I: Still, do you usually invite people in your room?

R3: As you can tell there is not really that much space in here. If I am going to talk with people it's better to talk outside where you have a table where you can sit 10-12 people or go outside, when it's warm outside. You don't really keep too many people in your room, just 1 or 2 maybe. Unless, of course you are having a dinner, in case you can fit 10-15 people in here.

I: I guess you are lucky having that space. But how do you feel in this new place?

R3: I'm excited. I love meeting new people. I love being in new places. This past 2 and a half months have been absolutely fantastic so like I said before I can feel at home pretty much anywhere.

I: Was it difficult for you to adapt to this new room?

R3: This room is almost the same exact room as my previous room at home and with those I would share the space with another person, so this is actually more space than I am used to.

I: I see, okay. I guess I would like to ask you one more thing. What would you say are the essential aspects that constitute a home?

R3: Social interaction. You can't really have a home if you are the only person there. What constitutes a home is mostly the interactions between the people. I could go almost anywhere and feel at home as long as there are people that I can talk to and friends that I could have.

I: That's nice, is not only the physical place?

R3: Yeah, home is not a physical place. Home isn't something that pops up out of nowhere, you have to work at it. You aren't just gonna pop into a new place and be like "okay this is my home now!". It's about the interaction between other people, it's about how you feel about the place, how you decorate it, just everything in general.

I: Yes, okay. I don't have any more questions, so thank you very much!

R3: No problem

[I turn the recorder on again]

I: So you could repeat what you told me?

R3: One of the most interesting things about living here is that no one uses the kitchens that are in their room, they always use the common kitchen cause it's bigger and there is more space so no one uses these 2 small burners that are in the room.

I: Awesome, thank you.

## *"Home is where the heart is" or is it...?*

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My dear fellow student,

I'm Maria Cristina, an international student, just like you at Aalborg University and I am currently writing my Master thesis and with your help I am hoping for the best :)

When I first arrived in the standard given room from Aalborg University, with its white plane walls and some random "lonely" looking furniture, I wasn't sure if it was the echo in the room or the echo in my head, but I suddenly got the urge and feeling that something needs to be done:

"Ikea here I come..." I thought

One of the first things I did before unpacking the one suitcase I could bring with me was to put a picture my friends gave me as a gift on the almost scary empty white wall right above my bed.

One year and few months passed, I changed several rooms, burned a lot of candles from Ikea, glued a lot of tape, killed several plants, printed a lot of posters and carried my things around Aalborg, but each time with the same strange enthusiasm of having a new place that I can personalize myself but still wondering how will I make my new house... a home.

And here I am writing my master thesis about it!

I realized that we international students have a “special status”, as we challenge ourselves leaving home and as we are challenged as identities.

For some of us, like me, it might have been the first time leaving the parental home, our teenage bedrooms and transiting into a new form of control over our physical place.

Even if we wanted or not, we were faced with decisions to be made, things to be bought and perhaps with the need to express ourselves.

Because I study Culture, Communication and Globalization and my specialization will be in Marketing and Consumerism I can help but wonder...what did you do?

Would be wonderful if you could let me in your room so I could ask you few questions on this topic. [Please don't worry about me taking much of your time or tidying up- the more the room says about you the better!]

Plus, I promise to bring you some delicious chocolate cookies that (if you haven't by now) must try!

Also, would be great if you agree to take 5 photos( with my mobile phone) of things in your room that you tried to add to make it feel like home, that you feel they say "This is me"...

Of course, I can explain you more face to face.

But, if you have any questions though please do not hesitate to contact me on Facebook or on my email

**Thank you so much and hope to see you soon!**