

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: TRANSMIGRANCY EXPERIENCES OF EASTERN
AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN AU PAIRS IN THE
WASHINGTON D.C., METROPOLITAN AREA

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This dissertation explores transmigrancy experiences of au pairs by examining the processes of building and maintaining transnational mobilities among this population. These processes involve these women's motivations for becoming au pairs in the United States, settlement plans and strategies prior and subsequent to migration, and long-term incorporation patterns in the home and host countries. I employ intersectionality and transnational feminist frameworks of analysis in order to contextualize and scrutinize multidimensionality of women's transmigrancy experiences at multiple levels. At the individual level, I look at the extent of transmigrant women's agency in seeking their initial and long-term settlement plans. At the intermediate level, I examine the extent of their social networks in shaping their settlement and incorporation goals by analyzing formation, types, and sustenance of these networks at the local and transnational levels. At the structural level, I investigate the structural contexts their agency is embedded in, and how their transmigrancy experiences and practices relate to structural power relations of gender, social class, marital status, nationality, and immigration status.

The findings of this research draw on a three-year-long feminist ethnographic study of transmigrant women who originated from Eastern and Central European post-communist countries, entered the United States through au pair programs and were

residing in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area. I show that these women were primarily motivated to partake in au pair programs for non-economic goals such as cultural exchange, and planned short-term settlement. However, in the long-term, they sought to sustain double affiliation in their home countries and the United States for negotiating oppressive economic, cultural, and social structures intensified with post-communist transition in their home countries. In doing so, they managed to maintain a legal immigration status and ultimately planned to obtain permanent residency rights in the United States.

The empirical findings of the dissertation challenge overgeneralized assumptions on transmigrants' agency, social networks, settlement, and incorporation patterns in transnationalism scholarships. It also contributes a nuanced understanding of the dynamics and complexities of building and maintaining transnational mobilities among an under-researched population; namely, au pair transmigrants.

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AU PAIRS IN THE WASHINGTON D.C., METROPOLITAN AREA

By

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BAPAA: The British Au Pair Agencies Association

CAHTEH: The Committee on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings

CDMG: European Committee on Migration

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States

CDCS: The European Committee for Social Cohesion

CDMG: European Committee on Migration

EEA: European Economic Area

IAPA: The International Au Pair Association

PACE: The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly

SAP: Structural Adjustment Programs

UFAAP: The French Union of Au Pair Agencies

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Au Pair Transmigrants in the United States

In fall 2009, I met Nadia, a twenty-seven-year-old Ukrainian au pair, in a middle-class neighborhood of Washington, D.C., for a pilot interview. I was very excited to finally meet a Ukrainian au pair for the first time in my life, because I could not imagine that Eastern European women would come as au pairs to the United States. For me, au pairs were Western European young women, who travel across European countries for cultural exchange, and meanwhile, stay with host families and teach their native languages to the children of these families. This perception traced back to my part-time babysitting experience for upper-middle class Turkish families in İstanbul in the early 2000s when I was a college student. These families usually recruited English or French speaking au pairs for their children at the ages of three to four. When their children started secondary school, they replaced their au pairs with well-educated Turkish nannies, like myself, who could help their children with their homework and recover their Turkish language fluency.

While I accompanied the children under my care to their playdates, I observed a hierarchical division of domestic labor among foreign women working in their friends' households: Women from the post-communist countries were hired as manual laborers for cleaning and cooking, Western au pairs were watching the children, and Turkish nannies were caring for the children when au pairs were in their off-hours. When I met these women, I got curious about why post-Soviet women were mopping Turkish

people's floors, when working-class Turkish women, who had migrated from rural areas to İstanbul, had traditionally been performing this kind of domestic labor in Turkish households. My curiosity initiated long conversations with them, which in the long-term turned into a Masters' thesis project, based on ethnographic research of post-Soviet domestic women workers in Turkey. In this project, I explored more into the reason that due to geographical proximity and the low cost of transportation, post-Soviet women were migrating to Turkey and working as undocumented domestic workers for the survival of their families after the demise of the Soviet regime, which created high rates of poverty and unemployment in the newly independent states. For this reason, almost ten years later, when I met the first Eastern European au pair in my life, I was perplexed to see a Ukrainian woman, who traveled thousands of miles away from her home to work as an "au pair" in the United States.

Put simply, au pairs are "temporary migrants" (Geserick 2012). *Au pair* is a French word, meaning "on par" or "equal to." In the context of au pair exchange, it denotes that an au pair is to be treated as a family member by the host family. The earliest form of au pair exchange (the so-called *Welschlandjahr*) took place in 19th century Europe. German-speaking young Swiss women stayed temporarily with French-speaking families in order to improve their French language competency in return for providing housework (Geserick 2012:52). Ethnographers Miller and Burikova (2010:2) explained that "the institution of au pair" had started as an egalitarian tradition with German and English middle-class families sending their daughters to French and Swiss families, where they could improve their French. Today, the au pair institution has become a large, international industry "compromised of a network of organizations that meet and lobby

governments to establish specific regulations and terms of au pair exchanges.” (Yodanis and Lauer 2005:47)

The first au pair program regulation was established in Europe in 1969 and in 1985 in the United States, and these programs were classified as “cultural exchange programs.” These programs were only open to young Western European women and were established for the purpose of giving these people the opportunity to be immersed in the home and lifestyles of the citizens and practice the native language of the host country. While the selection of au pairs had become a more complex procedure across European countries in last four decades, in 1996, the United States began recruiting young foreigners on a “worldwide basis.”

Every year, hundreds of thousands of young foreigners, motivated by various personal goals, but primarily by the promise of cultural exchange, leave their home countries to live temporarily with foreign host parents. During their stay, which varies in duration from three months to two years worldwide, they are expected to be welcomed as family members by host families, share familial duties and provide childcare services and light housework in return for free accommodation, food and a weekly stipend. Meanwhile, they attend language schools and participate in the daily lives of the host families.

Nadia had arrived in the United States in January 2007, and when we met, she was approaching her third year of stay in the country—the maximum length of stay for an au pair is two years in the United States. The first question I asked to Nadia was what she was doing in the United States, and she replied, “I came here to improve my English, not for money, because I am a financial analyst in an international company. I was

planning to stay one year and then return to my job and my family, but things turned out to be different. Let me tell you my long, interesting story.”

After this conversation, between 2009 and 2012, I conducted 29 more interviews with young women in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area, who originated from post-communist societies and came to the United States through au pair placement programs, and were currently residing in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area. Some of these women had arrived to the country as early as 2005; some were still enrolled in the au pair programs for over six months, while others had newly arrived. Like Nadia, many were motivated to participate in the au pair programs for the purposes of practicing their English skills, and thus, improving their employability and competitiveness in the domestic labor markets. Yet, 90% of these individuals extended their short settlement in the country after completing the au pair programs through various means or simply by exiting the programs and obtaining a student visa. Given the wage differentials and vast income inequalities between their home countries and the United States, strictness of the U.S. immigration laws, and the fact that these women had never lost their legal immigration statuses during their stays, I was struck by seeing how they could afford to stay in the country for so long.

My astonishment also stemmed from limited research on transnational mobility of au pairs. Literature on au pairs typically has focused on working and living conditions of au pairs in the host countries, primarily in European countries. In addition, these studies either investigated the motivations of young women for becoming au pairs (Cox and Narula 2003) and the similarities of au pairs' working and living conditions to that of immigrant domestic workers (MacDonald 2001; Sollund 2010; Swai 2007; Wrigley

1995); challenged the notion that au pairs were treated like “one-of-the-family” (Cox 2007; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Mellini, Yodanis and Godenzi 2007; Yodanis and Lauer 2005) or reported violation of au pair program regulations by the host families and au pair recruitment agencies (Epstein 1998; Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007; Stenum 2010). The research on au pairs in the United States was even more limited because au pairs were not studied as a distinct group different than childcare workers. As such, two studies by Wrigley (1995) and Macdonald (1998; 2001) focused on the relationship between employers and childcare workers, where au pairs were a subgroup of these workers. One recent study by Geserick (2012) demonstrated the motivations of young women to become au pairs in the United States and another study by Hess and Puckhaber (2004) investigated German au pairs’ work arrangements and relationships with their American host families. In addition, these scholars solely included Western European au pairs in their study populations.

Au pairs’ relationships with their employers and working conditions, due to the nature of the labor they performed, somewhat resemble that of typical live-in childcare providers (Hess and Puckhaber 2004). Yet, au pairs are different from other types of childcare providers in a number of ways. First, although they are required to provide childcare services and light housework, hosting states and au pair agencies strictly avoid defining au pairs as “childcare workers” or “employees.” Rather, they are defined as “cultural exchange students,” “family members,” “big sisters,” or “foreign visitors” (Cox 2007; Yodanis and Lauer 2005). While in Europe au pairs are not defined as employees and were exempt from the minimum wage requirements, in 1994 the U.S. government

categorized au pairs as “employees” and required payment of a minimum wage to au pairs.

Second, not everybody can partake in au pair programs. While the eligibility criteria for the program vary slightly worldwide, such as whether or not having prior childcare experience or driving competency is prerequisite, the cultural component of the program is ensured by allowing only young foreigners to join the au pair programs who are usually between 18 to 30 years old. Speaking the native language of the hosting country with proficiency and holding a post-secondary educational degree are also required (Yodanis and Lauer 2005).

Au pairs are, as Wrigley (1995:67) stated, “class peers” with the host family, “as they come from same broadly defined cultural background as the [host] parents.” Unlike typical childcare providers, au pairs are not required to have substantive formal childcare training. In addition, the selection of au pairs was determined by gender, socioeconomic status, and nationalities of the au pairs. Although au pair programs are open to both genders, in the United States, women are more likely to participate in the program than are men (Geserick 2012). In Europe, while the number of male au pairs has been increasing, it is still lower than that of female au pairs (Burikova and Miller 2010). High unemployment rates, increased cost of living, and financial crises in the countries of origin are the push factors that motivate both genders to take one year off to improve their language skills and save some money to spend on higher education or career-related plans when they return home (Burikova and Miller 2010; Murray-West 2012).

The eligibility of nationalities for au pair placement is decided by hosting countries’ governments. In general, au pairs came from countries that match host

countries' wealth and culture (Mellini et al. 2007). By matching au pairs from culturally and socioeconomically similar countries, these policies further ensured that au pairs had similar socioeconomic and cultural background as the hosting families (Yodanis and Lauer 2005:47). Third, unlike typical childcare providers, au pairs usually¹ do not have the flexibility to find and change employment by themselves. The placement of au pairs takes place in a highly regulated industry, where states and international au pair agencies and organizations have important roles. States, through their immigration laws, have the sole power to define which individuals can and cannot be granted permits and visas to work as an au pair in their territories. In the au pair placement process, international au pair agencies intermediately place au pairs worldwide by matching host families with au pairs. In doing so, they follow the guidelines set by international and national au pair organizations. The International Au Pair Association (IAPA), for example, sets international guidelines for the au pair exchange programs. IAPA, founded in 1994 as a non-profit organization, recently has more than 170 member organizations in 45 countries worldwide (IAPA 2012). In addition, in countries that host large numbers of au pairs, national-level associations provide similar services to that of IAPA, such as the French Union of Au Pair Agencies (UFAAP) in France, the Au-pair Society in Germany, and the British Au Pair Agencies Association (BAPAA) in the United Kingdom.

Finally, unlike other childcare workers, young women were not fully aware of the kind of work arrangements they would have in their host families' houses. Since the au pairs programs are marketed as cultural exchange programs with the basic premise that

¹ As I explain in section 1.6.1, in some European Union member states, after E.U. Enlargement in 2004, au pairs have gained more freedom to find and change their host families.

au pairs would be treated as family members, young women were motivated to partake in the programs in order to take one year off from their work or school routine with the purpose of traveling, practicing a foreign language, and exploring new cultures. In addition, host families and au pairs generally do not read the program regulations when they sign placement contracts (Burikova and Miller 2010). As a result, as Mellini et al. (2007:44) addressed, “the role, or expectations for behavior of au pairs is full of contradictions”: host parents are usually interested in this kind of childcare arrangement because services provided by and recruitment of au pairs cost less than other childcare workers. Au pairs, on the other hand, are uninformed that their childcare service was a pivotal need for their host parents. Consequently, mismatch of both parties’ interests in participating in au pairs programs lead to tension, and among au pairs, to physical and emotional exhaustion, disappointment, and social isolation. Especially for young women who completed high academic degrees and/or held full-time professional jobs in their home countries, au pair placement leads to downward social mobility, given that domestic labor is not culturally valued and has deskilling labor components.

Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of educated, middle-class, young women are partaking in au pair programs and work as au pairs in the middle-class households of industrialized societies. Although au pairs’ transnational movements constitute a new form of transmigration, these movements have not been considered much by transnationalism scholarship. This gap could be explained by the fact that Western European au pairs were returning home after completing au pair programs given that economic, social and cultural conditions in their countries were not less desirable than that of host countries. However, these conditions were more contradictory between post-

communist countries and the United States, which lead au pairs from these countries to reevaluate their initial settlement plans in the United States and perform long-term settlement patterns. As such, in dissertation, I explore how and why au pairs from post-communist countries build and maintain transnational mobilities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this dissertation study I seek to examine transmigrancy experiences of Eastern and Central European au pairs in the United States by using transnationalism and social networks scholarships. In this effort, I problematize three major shortcomings of transnationalism and social networks theories.

First of all, although transnational movements of au pairs constitute a form of transmigrancy, their transmigrancy experiences are under-studied in transnationalism scholarship. Schiller, Basch and Blanc (1997:48) defined transmigrants as “immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.” These scholars urged us not to confuse transmigrants with sojourners because unlike sojourners, “transmigrants settle and become incorporated in the economy of and political institutions, localities, and patterns of daily life in which they reside.” (ibid) In contrast, Tsuda (1991:1) provided a more general description of transmigrants by stating that transmigrants are “short-term, temporary sojourners” whose migration does not necessarily involve a long-term commitment to the host countries, because transmigrants can return home “at a moment’s notice.”

I classify au pairs as transmigrants for three reasons. First, modern high-tech telecommunication systems and reduced-cost transportation technologies have allowed

for the intensification of transnational connections, practices and mobility (Vertovec 2007). Therefore, these technologies enable au pairs, like other contemporary temporary or permanent migrants, to build and maintain transnational ties, engage in transnational transactions and activities, and thus, hold double affiliation and incorporate themselves in the daily lives of their home countries. Second, Schiller et al. describe a monolithic understanding of transmigrants' settlement and incorporation patterns. Yet, I argue that settlement and incorporation patterns are more multifaceted and dynamic processes—from the moment individuals decide to leave their countries to the moment they permanently settle down in the host societies, and reasons for transnational migration are critical determinants of these processes. Individuals are motivated for transnational migration for different reasons and set settlement plans in varying lengths. However, transnationalism theorists exclusively focus on transmigrancy experiences of migrant workers, particularly male transmigrants, who are motivated for economic gains because they explain that contemporary transnational movements stem from unstable and insecure economic conditions created by the uneven forces global capital restructuring on less industrialized societies (Schiller, Basch and Szanton 1995; Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994; Castles 2002; Faist 2000; Guarnizo and Smith 1998). As such, transmigrancy experiences of au pair, whose transnational migration did not derive from economic reasons, are under-researched and under-theorized.

Second, the extent of transmigrant agency is under-theorized in transnationalism scholarship. Transnationalism scholars argued that building transnational mobility is an empowering process for migrants, who exercise their agencies to negotiate economic, social, political and cultural constraints in home and host societies by engaging in

transnational networks, practices and activities, and upholding double affiliation in host and home countries. In doing so, they maintain family, economic, political and cultural links to their home societies at the same time as they developed ties within their host countries (Bruneau 2010). However, Mahler (1998) stated that in transnationalism scholarship liberating power of transmigrant agency is overemphasized. Indeed, the extent of transmigrants' agencies and social networks are shaped by their social locations and contextual factors in the host societies. As such, Mahler suggested that ethnographic methods and comparative studies of ethnic migrants would provide contextualized and comprehensive understanding of the extent of transmigrant agencies.

Finally, extent of social networks and their non-economic aspects during transmigrancy are under-theorized in social networks scholarship. Network theorists explain that migrants' social networks function as social capital during migration processes by channeling instrumental information to migrants and thus facilitate their social and economic adjustment in host countries. However, I argue that formation of these networks, type of networks transmigrants have access to, and dynamics of these networks over time are multifaceted, and determined by individual biographies of transmigrants and contextual factors. In addition, I claim that non-economic aspects of migrants' social networks for au pair transmigrants have influential roles in shaping transmigrants' incorporation and settlement patterns.

Alternatively, I propose that integrating intersectionality and transnational feminist framework analyses into transnationalism and social networks theories can provide critical and ample perspectives for exploring the extent of transmigrant agency

and roles of social networks in the processes of building and maintaining transnational mobilities among transmigrant women.

1.3 Research Questions

The central question of this dissertation is: How and why do au pair transmigrants build and maintain social mobilities? More specifically:

- What type of social networks do transmigrant women participate in in their daily lives? Why do transmigrant women build certain types of networks while others do not?
- What types of settlement strategies do transmigrant women pursue? Why and how do some transmigrant women establish long-term settlements while others do not?
- How do transmigrant women's social networks influence their incorporation to the countries of origin and destination?
- What is the extent of transmigrant women's agency in building and maintaining transnational mobilities?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a three-year long feminist ethnographic research of Eastern and Central European transmigrants, who entered the United States through au pair programs and resided in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area. In this research, I employed in-depth interviewing, participant observation, and focus groups conversations as the data collection methods.

1.4 Chapter Outline

In the second section of this chapter, I first overview gendered outcomes of post-Communist transition by presenting the impacts of transition to market economies on households and women's socioeconomic statuses. Thus, this section contextualizes and historicizes the motivations of study participants for partaking in au pair programs, and how in the long term they influence their settlement and incorporation patterns. Then, I

describe the history, eligibility, and regulations of au pair programs in Europe and the United States, current state of these programs, and relevant literature findings.

In Chapter 2, I present two theoretical approaches, social network analysis and migrant transnationalism, and discuss intersectionality and transnational feminism as alternative frameworks of analysis for theorizing transmigrant women's agency and social networks. I argue that intersectionality is a suitable framework of analysis for exploring how intersections of age, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, marital status, and social class determine transmigrant au pairs' access to social networks, and types of social networks that they engage in in their daily lives. In addition, I claim that for theorizing extent of transmigrant women's agency, transnational feminist framework of analysis can stipulate a critical understanding for contextualizing and historicizing the gendered outcomes of post-Communist transition, exploring resistance strategies of au pairs to oppressive and exploitative practices of host parents, and understanding the extent of their agency in building and maintaining transnational mobilities.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology, data collection methods, data sources, and data analysis procedures, and present study participants' profiles.

In Chapter 4, I explore how study participants were motivated to participate in the au pair programs in the United States, the roles of networks in this process, their initial settlement plans and the experiences of the matching process with host families. In this chapter, I classify two types of transmigrants: goal-oriented transmigrants and explorer/escapee transmigrants, based on the initial settlement plans of the study participants. Then, I discuss that in the lack of access to transnational networks with au pairs in the United States, study participants solely relied on the information provided

about the programs by the agencies, which prevented them from getting a realistic understanding of the au pair placement.

In Chapter 5, I first present the working and living conditions, employer-employee relationships between au pairs and their host families, and explain how intersections of domesticity, class position, ethnicity and immigrant status created asymmetrical power relations between both parties. Then, I explain the resistance and coping strategies of au pairs and the roles of their social networks in dealing with the trauma of downward mobility and abusive and exploitative practices of their employers.

In Chapter 6, I describe transmigrant women's settlement strategies, patterns, and reasons for extending their settlement after their au pair visas terminated. I first explain that transmigrant women's agency was largely constrained by the U.S. immigration law and their economic resources in extending their stays. However, I show that access to social networks with older/former au pairs, whom were role models and sources of instrumental information for them, was influential information sources for developing strategies for executing their settlement strategies. In respect to their settlement plans, I classify three types of settlers, namely, persuaded settlers, unsure/hopeful settlers, and permanent settlers, and describe how these settlers developed different strategies to extend their stays in the United States.

In Chapter 7, I show the determinants of how study participants form and sustain social and transnational networks in the later stages of their settlement in the United States, and the influence of these networks in their social, cultural, and economic incorporation patterns in host and home societies. I describe that due to downward social mobility and new class positioning they faced as a result of the manner of entry into the

country, and complex intersections of race, ethnicity, domesticity and class, and immigrant status, transmigrant women developed a distinct networking behavior, *discouraged networker phenomenon*, when networking with Americans and other co-nationals. Their social networks with fellow au pairs, however, had showed more dynamic characteristics. These networks formed social support among transmigrant women; yet, they did not significantly translate into economic capital. Economic incorporation of study participants was “temporarily” blocked by immigration law, and thus, relegated all settlers, except permanent settlers, to babysitting jobs. However, I show that by maintaining transnational mobilities, transmigrant women are empowered from oppressive social, cultural, and economic structures, and improve their quality of lives, social status, and form more desirable marriages in the United States.

In Chapter 8, I present an overview of findings, discuss theoretical contributions and implications of the study, and suggest emerging questions for further research.

SECTION II. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.5 Women and Post-Communist Transition in Eastern and Central Europe

In this subsection, I overview gendered outcomes of post-Communist transition by presenting the fall of communism and transition to market economies in the Eastern and Central European countries, women's socioeconomic status before and after the demise of communist regime in their countries, immediate impacts of post-communist transition on households and women's employment, and emergence of feminization of migration in these countries. By doing so, I provide contextual and historical information for understanding the motivations of young Eastern and Central European women for building and maintaining transnational mobilities.

1.5.1 Fall of Communism and Transition to a Market Economy

When you build a new house, you usually live in your old one while the new one is still under construction... They had torn down the old house (communism) before the new one (capitalism) was ready. Everyone was now forced to live on the streets.
(Narration of a Bulgarian taxi driver by Ghodsee 2011:13)

The communist system was founded on a wholly politically determined structure, wherein economic, social, legal, aesthetic, and religious spheres were “subordinated to political criteria, regardless of appropriateness, in the name of an ideologically derived goal.” (Schopflin 1990:4) As the distribution of power was one-sided, any significant degree of social autonomy, particularly in any organized form, was rejected and consistently destroyed by the rulers. Throughout the 1980s, economic deprivation, criticism from intellectuals, popular demonstrations and divisions within the communist party leadership contributed to the fall of the system in Eastern and Central European

communist states (ibid).

Roberts et al. (2001:3-4) traced the end of communism to the reform movements that started in the 1980s initially in Central Europe (Solidarity in Poland and Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia), which later “mushroomed” into many Soviet republics between 1981 and 1991. They stated that these reform movements were mostly supported by young people and students and “sought to arrest the economic decline virtually everywhere since the 1970s.” (ibid) Demand for reforming the economy and replacing the existing elites with more effective, democratic governments “which could be more representative and respond to the people’s will” and environment issues (post-Chernobyl) shaped the agenda of reforms. Given the widespread support for reforms across the Eastern and Central European nations, Roberts et al. (2001:4) noted, “reform became a necessity rather than a choice” in the communist states. In the Soviet Union, the failure of Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika* (restructuring) reforms of the Soviet system in politics and economy fueled nationalist movements and ethnic disputes in 1986 and led to the 1989 revolutions, which led to the dissolution of the Union in December 26, 1991, and the resignation of Gorbachev.

Ethnographer Kristen Ghodsee (2011:12) was travelling across the former-communist countries right after the collapse of the Soviet regime. She noted that she, along with Eastern Europeans, were celebrating the end of an era and the beginning of one “filled with peace and prosperity for all”:

The ugliness and brutality of the East European totalitarian regimes were finally gone. Where there had been dictatorship, there would be now democratic elections. Where there had been one state-controlled media, there would now be freedom of the press. Where there had been secret police and persecution, there would now be freedom of speech and assembly. Where there had been exit visas,

there would now be freedom of travel. Where there had been shortages of basic goods, there would now be an endless consumer bonanza.

Although people gained new freedoms as the state relinquished its monopoly over all spheres of life, Roberts, Fagan, and Tholen (2001:1) wrote that, in the beginning of the new millennium, “most people in former communist countries [were] still net losers” because “in terms of living standards, post-communism [was] still delivering less than communism.” They further explained that these countries are usually described as “in transition” because “this is the preferred view of their situations in the West and inside the countries themselves where neither the authorities nor the people wish to believe that they have reached their ultimate destinations.” (ibid) Similarly, during her trip after the fall, Ghodsee observed, “although most people were still glad that communism was gone and agreed that the totalitarian past was best put behind them, the promises of democracy had not been realized.” (2011:13) People who lived through the communist regime were disappointed with the rapid and unexpected outcomes of transition in their households and professions. They were yearning for safety, security and prosperity of the Communist times, wherein “they knew they would get a pension they could live off, prices were stable, and they couldn't lose their flats or jobs.” (Todorova 2010:7)

Immediate outcomes of the demise of the “Iron Curtain” and command economies created a “shock-therapy effect,” primarily with the withdrawal of subsidies from state enterprises, sharp declines in output, and resulting dismantling of trading relationships. In comparison to other communist states in the region, these effects were particularly more severe for the former members of the Soviet Union, now known as the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which “were the most integrated to the Soviet Union.” As such, the CIS had no pre-communist histories to

resume, having been populated by peasants, and their economies were modernized by communism. In contrast, in Central European states, communism “may appear to have put a brief interlude in their modern histories.” (Roberts et al. 2000:2) The economic transition from a central planning to an open economy was followed by severe reductions in formal sector employment with the closure of unproductive and overstaffed industrial enterprises, which resulted in increased unemployment rates, high levels of poverty, substantial decreases in real income, and development of an unregulated, informal labor market (Aslanbeigui et al. 1994; HRW 2003; Roberts et al. 2000). Demographically, the transition led to worsening of health, high mortality rates, declining birth rates, and rapid emigration. Ukraine’s population, for example, decreased by 3.7 million between 1993 and 2001 (HRW 2003).

Although there was universal support among protesters for reforming private enterprise, this support reflected only a demand for importing and selling Western goods and opening private enterprises. This support also “did not usually envisage any enterprise of their own becoming subject to new commercial laws and taxation” and “their countries becoming part of equal partners with, not subordinate to, the West.” (Roberts et al. 2000:6) While a majority of citizens were aspiring to enjoy a “Western way of life” through reforms, few approved of “the privatizations that have transformed old communists into the new bourgeoisie, or their countries’ transformation from being among the world’s most equal societies to being among its most unequal.” (ibid:7)

With the economic transition to market economy, centrally planned state economies collapsed and in-state economies became increasingly dependent on capitalist subsidizers, such as the global lending institutions such as the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Farr 2005). Between 1992 and 1997, among 15 countries including the Baltics, Russia and the republics of the former Soviet Union, fourteen adopted IMF-supported *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAPs) (Valdivieso 1999). Established in 1989 with the purpose of providing assistance to low-income countries, SAP was defined as a “process of market-oriented reform in policies and institutions, with the goals of restoring a sustainable balance of payments reducing inflation, and creating the conditions for sustainable growth in per capital income.” (Corbo and Fisher cited in Zawalinska 2004:5) In post-communist economies, the rationale for offering SAPs was to remove the government failures, which manifested themselves over the socialistic period through various economic imbalances and deficiencies. The major government failures in communist governments were 1) “badly-defined property rights, which caused improper *incentives* in the economies”; 2) “excessive centralization of the economy,” which led to “various types of information problems” in “insufficiency, asymmetry, lags, and fallacy”; 3) “lack of competition in the country” due to autarkic economy founded on arbitrary price and quantity systems; and finally, 4) “lack of innovation and adaptability” in socialist economies, which led to system failure; the “system failed to properly react to changes in its endogenous conditions and those which occurred elsewhere.” (ibid)

SAP-receiving countries were required to take certain economic measures in order to implement structural adjustment in their economies. These measures included: 1) restoring the current account and fiscal balances through “reducing public sector deficit” (cutting public expenditures and increasing taxes) and “reduction of monetary financing of the government spending that used to cause inflation”; 2) liberalization of prices in

order to restore “price system *information* and market based *incentives*”; 3) liberalization of trade for the purposes of increasing *competition* and encouraging inflow of foreign savings; and 4) privatization in order to “accurately define property rights and improve efficiency and profitability of economy” (Zawalinska 2004). These measures, in the long-term, would restore macroeconomic balances, prepare economies for the global competition, and increase the role of markets and create institutions capable of achieving these goals (Corbo and Fisher 1995 cited in Zawalinska 2004).

In the short-term, however, households were hit hard by the implementation of these measures in SAP-receiving countries. Zawalinska (2004:10) asserted that high and persistent unemployment resulting from restructuring and privatization processes was the “most painful effect of SAPs.” SAP-receiving countries experienced massive layoffs with the closure of traditional sectors, and thus, a jump in unemployment rates from 0-20% resulted over the first five years with privatization. Reductions in public expenditures reduced households’ resources and lowered their purchasing power, and thus, contributed to an increase of poverty. Similarly, immediate and direct effects of price liberalization increased the prices of goods and services, and reduced the purchasing power of households, which again contributed to increasing levels of poverty in households (ibid).

The short-term outcomes of implementation of SAPs in the formerly communist states were vastly different from other SAP-receiving low-income countries. As addressed by Roberts et al. (2001), Zawalinska (2004:3) stated that these unpredicted, immediate and direct outcomes in the economies and households of transition countries can be explained by these countries’ different, political, economic and social conditions and rules governing social and economic conventions, property rights, enforcement of

contracts, all of which “had to be defined from scratch” in the formerly communist states. On the other hand, when other low-income countries, which were not governed by communist regime, received SAPs, at least they had had an infrastructure of rules, regulations and practices, which were “inherited from the colonial period and provided ground for the market economy, although it was not perfect.” (ibid:4)

1.5.2 Women’s Socioeconomic Status Before and After the Collapse

Numerous reports compiled by international non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), and academic studies, reported that women were disproportionately affected by the post-Communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe (Bloch 2010; Einhorn 1993; HRW 2003; Funk and Mueller 1993; Gal and Kligman 2000; Johnson and Robinson 2007; Kay 2007; Lyon 2007; Morokvasic 2004; Pollert 2003; UNDP 2003) Although women’s experiences of transition cannot be generalized because the countries in this region had different contextual dynamics, there is a consensus that women’s socioeconomic status worsened more than men’s with the demise of communism.

In order to understand why women were hurt more than men in the transition societies, the politics of gender in the communist context should be scrutinized. Johnson and Robinson (2007:7) asserted that communist states held “an almost complete monopoly over the politics of gender construction both because of the authoritarian institutions and practices of state socialism and because of the way that gender was veiled by the ‘woman’s question.’” The core of the gender politics lied in how communist states approached the woman’s question. Gender was assumed to be the innate sexual differences between women and men. Accordingly, women’s primarily responsibilities

were perceived to be motherhood and wifehood while men were seen as breadwinners, protectors and public figures (Rimashevskaja 1993). Because the validity of gender differences had never been challenged in the communist context, the terminology of gender did not emerge:

The Soviets by 1930s believed that there were essential and innate differences between women and men. They framed the woman's question not about how to restructure social values and society to make it less patriarchal or sexist, but rather as how to accommodate women's innate differences to the ideal of the New Soviet Man. ” (Johnson and Robinson 2007:7)

Women were manipulated through the representation of “ideal womanhood” in official discourse to fulfill certain roles, which suited the political goals of the time (Kay 1997:77). The “worker-mother state policy” of communist systems put a double, even triple-burden, on the shoulders of women with the expectation of balancing their productive labor as workers, reproductive labor as mothers and wives, and as political activists (Lyon 2007).

Although women were expected to be active in politics and economy, they were “encouraged by the state to remain primarily responsible for the private sphere” through “a state-endorsed emphasis on women's ‘natural propensity’ for child care and domestic labor, increased maternity leave, time off for children's sickness, the encouragement of part-time work.” (Phizacklea, Pilkington and Rai 1992:5) As such, “an egalitarian socialist family was encouraged in rhetoric,” Pollert (2003:334) wrote, given that “women's natural responsibilities for reproduction and the family permeated public discourse.”

In the Soviet Union, women's paid work and domestic labor consisted of 76.8 hours a week, compared to 59.4 hours for men (Rimashevskaja 1993). When compared to their Western European counterparts, according to UNICEF's "Women in Transition Report: (1999), during communist regime Central Eastern European women's total weekly workload was 15 hours longer, with a total of 70 hours of weekly workload. Therefore, women were exploited as "producers and reproducers" and were not equals with men:

"Their official glorification, represented in propaganda and the numerous statues of strong women proletarians standing beside their male counterparts, unfortunately, did not reflect the reality of women's lives." (LaFont 2001:205)

Although the patriarchal ideals of "men as the breadwinner and the head of the family" were alive during the Communist era, women were less dependent on men's income "because of wage leveling, their own working status, and the growing state support offered to women and children." Thus, Lyon (2007:28) explained, "men's roles were undermined in both material and symbolic terms by the dominant role of the state in both public and private spheres, while women consistently retained a measure of influence, power and legitimacy in their homes." Indeed, the Soviet Union had one of the highest rates of female employment in the world (Rimashevskaja 1993). Despite a more equal labor force participation that was present in the workplace as women were principally seen as "workers," not as "gendered bodies," this was not translated into a gender discrimination-free workplace during communism: in large part, occupational sex segregation, glass-ceilings and gendered wage gaps were among the most common problems that communist women workers faced.

In terms of occupational segregation, Pollart (2003) showed that Central and Eastern European women were predominantly concentrated in a limited range of sectors and occupations such as light manufacturing, the services and caring professions. By 1989, Soviet women were employed in feminized sectors and industries such as commerce and public catering (87%), health care, physical culture and social security (81%); information and computing (81%); public education (81%); culture (75%); clothing (89%); textiles (89%); and bakery (70%). On the other hand, “newly created, mechanized and automated” heavy industry and construction industry occupations, which offered higher pay and status, were exclusively reserved for men. In addition, employment in government, foreign affairs and high-technology industries were “practically closed to women” (Rimashevskaja 1993). Regarding wages, women were earning 70-80% less than men’s wages across communist nations.

These discriminatory practices, however, were also observed in the capitalist countries of that era. The significant differences between those nations and communist countries, nonetheless, were reflected in women’s professional work and in higher education. Despite occupational sex segregation, communist women could enter gender-atypical and qualified occupations through obtaining university degrees in majors such as accounting, business and economics, pharmacology, and agriculture. This difference was explained by the fact that communist women’s exclusion from heavy industry sector jobs and progressive education policies led them to seek higher educational degrees in order to acquire higher qualifications, and thus, get access to higher positions. However, these positions were paid less than the ones in the male-type positions in the industrial sector. In addition, the glass-ceiling barrier prevented women from getting into high positions.

Indeed, women's share of managerial positions was small and women were represented at the bottom of job hierarchies due to "deeply structured processes of female subordination" (Rimashevskaja 1993).

1.5.3 Impacts of Transition to Market Economies on Households and Women's Employment

In communist states, compulsory education persisted for nine years, and the education system was used to prepare the citizens for their careers through secondary and vocation school curriculum. In the centrally planned economies, employment was planned and "there was supposed to be no unemployment," as the state departments, plants and mines systematically generated shortages of labor. Rather, Roberts et al. (2000:29) explained, "People had a legal obligation to work to support themselves."

In the Soviet model, "female emancipation came about through the collectivization of daily family commitments and the introduction of benefits for working mothers." (UN 2003:28) Thus, women's participation in the labor market was close to 100%. However, Soviet policies could only spread "a thin veneer of quality over entrenched patriarchy—patriarchal culture reemerged "virtually unscathed after 1991." (Lyon 2007:26) Immediate gendered affects of transition to a market economy in the labor markets were devastating:

Of those in the NIS [Newly Independent States] who lost their jobs in the first years following the Soviet breakup, an estimated 80% were women. In Russia between 1990 and 1995, 7.6 million jobs held by women were eliminated, a loss of about 20%. During the same period, the number of male-held jobs declined by only 1.6%. Women's share of unemployment in the NIS was also far greater than that of men. As of 1999, women accounted for 60% of the unemployment, and 90% of the newly unemployed in Ukraine. In Russia, by the late 1990s, women

accounted for over 70% of the officially unemployed...At the end of the 1980s, women's wages were some 20% to 30% below those of men. Wage differentials between women and men widened as the republics gained independence and adopted market economies, or at least in privatized parts of their economies. (Farr 2005:11)

Eviction of women from labor markets was an outcome of the collapse of social infrastructure, which provided social services and state benefits for women workers as a part of "worker-mother" state policy. In some countries, such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, extended maternity leave and sick child leave continued. However, they became "the pretext for employers to discriminate against women as "expensive, unreliable, and poorly attached to the labor market." (Pollert 2003:337). As full-time work remained the norm in transition economies, women had to work longer hours and felt pressured to continue to do so because of the fear of losing their jobs. Trade unionism was passé; therefore, women had to enforce their rights as individuals, and again, they were deterred from doing so because of the fear of losing their jobs (ibid).

Re-familization policies in post-communist states emphasized women's primarily responsibilities as mothers and carers. As addressed by Johnson and Robinson and Pollert (2003), Soxenberg and Sirovátka (2006:288) explained that while communist governments encouraged mothers to participate in the labor force through familist policies, "no measures were undertaken to encourage fathers to share in the child-raising and household responsibilities and parental leaves were designed to strengthen the mother's role as the sole carer." Because, unlike with Western women, female labor participation was imposed as a duty during communism and not a right they had fought for, they [women of post-communist states] did not perceive their work as part of a 'liberation process.'" (ibid)

Employers also relied on familial discourse in their hiring practices. By 2003, in Ukraine, the level of employment for both men and women was highest among 25- to 49-year-olds. However, for women, the highest level of employment was among 40- to 44-year-olds, compared with 35-39 year-olds among men. This difference is explained by the fact that women between the ages of 20 and 29 are in their childbearing stage; and, with the lack of affordable childcare options, they were principally deemed to be responsible for household labor and caregiving. Indeed, women of communist countries were likely to get married at an early age (region-wise, the mean age of marriage was 23 for women) and have their first child born immediately after marriage (LaFont 2001). When their children grew up, they could return to the workforce for full-time jobs. In addition, Ukrainian women have equal or higher levels of educational attainment in comparison to their male counterparts. However, the level of unemployment for women with high education attainment is higher in comparison to men with the same level of educational attainment (UN 2003).

Another reason why women disappeared from the workplace was the lack of vacancies in their professions, which led to de-professionalization of women. With the demise of command economies, many occupations that were valued in the communist economy either degraded or disappeared. Roberts et al. (2001:35) explained that the public sector “remained a major if not the dominant source of regular employment” in transition societies. However, it was not secure sources of employment; nor did it offer fringe benefits and good pay. Indeed, the wages in public sector employment were lower, in comparison to newly opened private sector jobs. Starting in the early 1990s, Western firms opened sites in post-communist countries, which mostly attracted well-educated

and skilled workforce. In comparison to public sector jobs, Western-based or -linked firms in the private sector demanded heavier workloads, yet, offered higher rewards to their employees. “They were among the best jobs that young people could aspire to”; however, they “were extremely scarce in all areas of study.” (ibid)

In transition countries, service sector jobs in trade, hotels, restaurants, banking, finance and insurance industries experienced the fastest growth. As female-typed sectors, they attracted many young women into these newly opened positions. According to the International Labor Office (ILO), in Central and South Eastern Europe –which were not members of the European Union–and the CIS, between 1999 and 2008, women’s employment in agriculture and industry sectors dropped by 11.3% and 3.3% respectively, and increased by 14.4% in the service sector. By 2008, the distribution of women’s employment by sector was 19.3% in agriculture, 16.1% in industry and 64.6% in the service sector (ILO 2010).

As Trapido (2006) asserted, availability of new jobs in the service sector during the recession created a “cushion-effect,” which lessened the impact of economic shock on women, who were already trained and worked in these sectors during communism. The service industry had been stagnated for decades in communist societies; the hospitality sector was especially undeveloped due to travel restrictions across the communist states. With the removal of restrictions on movement of people, urban areas and the capital cities of transition countries started to attract tourists, which led to the opening of new businesses in hospitality (Roberts et al. 2001). However, the service sector paid the lowest, was more likely to offer temporary and part-time forms of employment, and women workers were disproportionately located in the status hierarchy in these new

market economies (Trapido 2006).

Occupational sex segregation and gender discrimination in hiring practices, nearly after two decades of transition, were still prevalent in post-communist states. Intersecting inequalities of age and gender particularly put young women in a more vulnerable status in the labor market. Roberts et al. (2001) explained that newly graduated young women in transition countries had to compete with their male counterparts in the job market, where hiring employers favored male workers over females and led to a pool of unemployed newly graduated women. The competition was higher, especially for professions such as law, medicine, management, and politics, which were seen as highly prestigious professions.

One way that the employers discriminate against women is with gender-specific job vacancy announcements. In Ukraine, although gender discrimination in employment is prohibited by law, these practices are widespread: “Job announcements specifying gender appear in newspapers, employment magazines, and on Internet employment sites, as well as in private recruiting firms and job-placement agencies, and at state employment centers.” (HRW 2003:18) Such advertisements do not only reproduce gender stereotypes, but also “impair equality of opportunity in employment” and discourage women who have the desired education and training, from applying for the positions (ibid).

Another way gender discrimination was experienced by women is sexual harassment. According to the survey on “Basic Protection of the Ukrainian Population” (May 2002), 79.8% of female and 20.2% of male participants reported that they had been subjected to sexual discrimination at their workplaces (UNDP 2003:28).

Young women were also influenced disproportionately by the global economic crisis of 2009. The unemployment rates increased more rapidly for men than for women, at least in the beginning of the crisis, as male-dominated sectors such as construction, manufacturing mining, and quarrying were severely hit. The impact of the crisis later spilled over to female-dominated sectors, namely, the service economy. According to the OECD Factbook (2011), between 2008 and 2009, female unemployment increased from 6.1% (6.6% for men) to 7.9% (9% for men) in the Russian Federation, 5.6% (3.5% for men) to 7.7% (5.9% for men) in the Czech Republic; 8% (7.7% for men) to 9.7% (10.3% for men) in Hungary and 8% (6.5% for men) to 8.7% (7.8% for men) in Poland. While women's unemployment decreased back to 7% in the Russian Federation by the end of 2010, it escalated in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to 8.5%, 10.7% and 10%, respectively.

Among all post-communist countries, Georgia had the least growth in female employment between 1980 and 2011, the highest gendered wage gap (50% by 2011) and experienced the highest female unemployment rate during and after the global economic crisis. Also, women's employment was the lowest in service sector jobs and the highest in agriculture (Sattar 2012).

Finally, women were blocked from fair labor force participation by high rates of corruption. Systemic corruption was a "pervasive legacy of the Soviet rule." (Stefes 2007:2) Paternalistic government led to bribery and corruption at large in the Soviet republics, which is still very prevalent today. According to the 2012 Corruption

Perception Index², Ukraine and Russia were highly corrupted countries with corruption scores of 26 and 28, respectively, whereas Poland was the least corrupted country with a corruption index score of 41, followed by Georgia (score of 52), the Czech Republic (score of 49), and Hungary (score of 55).

1.5.4 Feminization of Migration in Post-Communist Countries

Citizens of formerly communist states were motivated to migrate abroad due to ruptures in economic, social, and political stability during the transition—such as flight from wars, ethnic cleansing, nationalism, and economic crisis—for seeking temporary or permanent residence, asylum, or immigration to the Western countries, including the United States. (Funk 2007) Yet, women migrants from post-communist countries outnumbered men in global migrations. Except in Georgia, where women composed 34% of total emigrants, women composed more than 50% of all emigrants from Eastern and Central Europe, and their share was the highest in Poland (59.9%), and in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (57.8%) in 2005 (UN 2005). By mid-year of 2000, the total number of women migrants from the former USSR and Eastern European countries was estimated to be 16,888,077, which accounted for approximately 20% of total estimated number of women migrants in the world (UN 2006).

² The corruption Perception Index is prepared by the Transparency International (<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/#myAnchor1>). The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. A country or territory's score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 100 means it is perceived as very clean.

International migration of Eastern and Central European women derived not only from economic downfall, but also major social and demographic transformations, befell in their countries. First of all, marriage patterns changed dramatically. While the age of marriage for women remained still at 22, the divorce rates had increased due to boosted alcoholism among men, and resulting domestic violence against women (Kalmijn 2007). In addition, stress from unemployment, suicide, homicide, violence and alcohol abuse led to high mortality rates among men (Kalmijn 2007). As such, many women had become the primary breadwinners of their families. (Cvajner 2012) Cutbacks in benefits such as state-sponsored health care and daycare, and privatization of education encumbered married women—and also single women whose parents were unemployed—and led them to seek foreign employment as a family survival strategy. In other words, feminization of poverty led to “feminization of survival,” which was founded on “feminization of migration” (Sassen 2000) in post-communist states. Moreover, with the removal of restrictions on traveling abroad, which was imposed during the communist era, women gained increased freedom of mobility. As a result, they pursued new economic opportunities abroad in order to maintain the standards of living they used to have during the communist era (Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002).

They took on domestic service jobs in the neighboring countries such as Turkey (Akalm 2007, Çelik 2007; 2011, Keough 2004; 2006, Kümbetoğlu 2005, Suter 2003) and Southern and Western European countries (Bettio 2006; Cvajner 2012; Hellermann 2006; Sagebiel and Rerrich 2010). These women also became major labor suppliers for sex industry and entertainment industries in these countries, as they could earn comparatively higher wages in these industries. For example, the number of Eastern and Central

European sex workers comprised half of the sex workers in in the United Kingdom (Platt, Grenfell, Bonell, Creighton, Wellings, Parry, and Rhodes 2011) and was also high in Turkey (Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002).

In addition, seeking transnational marriages with—mostly Western—men in affluent countries had become a survival strategy for single Eastern and Central European women (Patico 2010; Taraban 2007). In her research with Ukrainian Internet brides, Taraban (2007) explained that worsening of economic conditions, the absence of legitimate local opportunities to pursue meaningful careers, and large-scale deprofessionalization of During the post-communist transition, Ukrainian women had suffered direct consequences, which caused many to turn to the Internet bride market. Ukrainian woman perceived transnational marriages as an opportunity “to restore a lost sense of financial security and improve her material condition.” (Taraban 2007:112)

Women of Eastern and Central Europe also generated income through shuttle trading, also known as suitcase trading, between their home and neighboring countries (Yükseker 2007; Morokvasic 2009). This kind of migration is called “circular migration,” given that shuttle traders frequently commuted between the host and home countries for the purposes of buying and selling goods. In Turkey, for example, these trading relationships started with Polish suitcase traders in 1980s, and by the 1990s, its value amounted to between \$5-10 million (Keyder 1999).

However, some women, who sought help from smugglers to cross the borders or were deceived by smugglers who introduced themselves as recruiters for foreign jobs, were trafficked into prostitution (Corrin 2005; Farr 2005; Hughes 2000; 2004). Statistics showed that total number of women who were trafficked for sexual exploitation range

from 4 million globally and annually to 500,000 annually from Eastern to Western Europe alone (Tavcer 2006). Among all, Moldova is a prime country of origination due to diminished women's rights, the feminization of poverty, corruption and government hesitation to commit to prevention, and legal and prosecution reform. (ibid).

Employment in domestic service jobs, sex work and the entertainment industry led to negative public representations of Eastern and Central European women by the media. In Turkey, these women were represented as “hot, passionate, blond bombshells who were available and willing for any sexual acts required of them” and were equated with prostitution, regardless of whether they worked in the sex industry or not (Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002: 414). Indeed, they were given a special name—Natasha—which in Turkish language means “a sex worker from the former Soviet Union and is often used as a generic name for all women from these countries” (Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002: 414). Similarly, the common European stereotype for Eastern European women immigrants portrayed these women immoral, promiscuous, and cheap women (Lemish 2000; Cvajner 2011).

Strict immigrant reception policies in Western and Southern European countries limited these women's mobility between the home and host societies. The majority of Eastern and Central European migrants migrated on tourist visas, and if were not shuttle-traders, overstayed their visas, and thus, became undocumented workers and residents. Some underwent false marriages with local men in order to obtain citizenship. Bulgarian women, for example, could engage in more frequent commutes, given that Bulgaria became a European Union member state in 2007. As the families become more dependent on migrant remittances, women immigrants' length of stay extends, which

accumulates visas overstay fees. In Turkey, for example, undocumented domestic workers could not see their families for long periods of time due to the difficulty of paying their visa overstay fees.

1.5.5 Conclusion

Unlike the citizens of formerly communist countries had anticipated, the collapse of communist regimes did not start a new era “filled with peace and prosperity for all.” Immediate financial impacts of the collapse on the economy, labor markets, and the societies at large were unprecedented across communist nations. These impacts were particularly harsher in the former republic of Soviet Union, given that these newly independent states were “unprepared” to adapt to the forces of open markets, as they had had no history of modern economy prior to communist economic system. Without a doubt, the transition hurt women and the households disproportionately.

Although, in official discourse, communist women were depicted as ideal women who could balance paid labor, political activism, and their familial responsibilities simultaneously; in reality, the worker-mother policy of the communist regime put a triple burden on the shoulders of women. In comparison to their non-communist contemporaries, the communist women’s labor force participation was exceedingly high. However, women’s emancipation through (state-enforced) employment did not necessarily translate into gender-egalitarian labor market experiences in the communist societies. In the labor markets, women were highly concentrated in female-type occupations, were located at the bottom of job hierarchies and paid less, and were excluded from certain occupations, which usually were more prestigious and paid higher. The gender inequalities women faced at work were the reflections of gender-blind

communist states and the suppressed patriarchal culture, which reemerged stronger after the fall: Women were the first to be laid off as the jobs were reduced and unemployment raised, and their relegation to the private sphere was legitimized by the employers and the governments on the basis of priority of natural roles as mother and wives.

As a result, undesirable working conditions and insecure unstable market conditions coupled with removal of travel restrictions led women of countries in post-communist transition to seek economic opportunities abroad. As illustrated in the case studies, these women found employment in domestic service and sex and work industry, involved in cross-border shuttle-trading activities, and also became vulnerable to traffickers. Their employment in au pair programs, however, was understudied, which I explore in this dissertation.

1.6 Au Pair Programs

In this section, I describe the history, eligibility and placement requirements of au pairs programs in Europe and the United States, explain the current state of these programs, and present literature review on au pairs' experiences.

1.6.1 History, Eligibility and Placement Regulations in Europe

An influx of thousands of au pairs into Europe in 1960s led to increased regulation of the international migration of young foreigners, and necessitated definitive standards for the regulation of au pair placement, in order to protect au pairs and host countries (Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007). The first treaty of au pair placement, named the European Agreement on Au Pair Placement, was signed in 1969. It became effective in

1971; however, it was not ratified by all member states³. In this agreement, the au pair replacement was defined as “the temporary reception by families, in exchange for certain services, of young foreigners who come to improve their linguistic and possibly professional knowledge as well as their general culture by acquiring a better knowledge of the country where they are received.” (Council of Europe Treaty Office 1969) These foreigners were addressed as female Europeans, who were young women willing to go abroad, aged between 17-30, and were allowed to reside in host countries initially for one year, and could extend their stay to a maximum of two years. Certain services to be provided by the au pairs were described as “consisting in participation in day-to-day family duties,” namely, light housework and childcare, which generally should not be more than five hours per day (ibid). In this agreement, the status of the au pairs was denoted as “distinctive” because they “belong neither to the student category nor to the worker category but to a special category which has features of both.” Therefore, the European Council made “appropriate arrangements,” which are listed below, regarding their placement and work:

- “The person placed ‘au pair’ shall receive board and lodging from the receiving family and, where possible, shall occupy a separate room.
- The person placed ‘au pair’ shall be given adequate time to attend language courses as well as for cultural and professional improvement; every facility as regards the arrangement of working hours shall be accorded to this end.

3 By 2007, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Switzerland, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, and Norway signed this agreement while Ireland, the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Finland, and Luxembourg (which currently denounced the treaty) were among the non-signatories (Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007).

- The person placed ‘au pair’ shall have at least one full free day per week, not less than one such free day in every month being a Sunday, and shall have full opportunity to take part in religious worship.
- The person placed ‘au pair’ shall receive a certain sum of money, as pocket money, the amount of which and the intervals at which it is paid shall be determined by the agreement.”

In addition, it was stated that au pairs should have “a medical certificate, established less than three months before placement, declaring that person's general state of health” and should receive health insurance from the national security legislation or other official schemes. In circumstances that these forms of insurance are not provided, host families should pay the half amount of private care. Further, this agreement required host parents and au pairs should be informed about their rights and obligations as defined in this agreement, which “shall be the subject of an agreement in writing to be concluded between the parties in question, in the form of a single document or of an exchange of letters, preferably before the person placed "au pair" leaves the country in which that person was resident and at latest during the first week of the placement.” (ibid)

Although few member states signed this agreement, in practice, they use the placement standards set by this agreement in their own international regulations of au pair placement. These standards involve the definition of an au pair, minimum age requirement, the visa and health insurance requirements, written agreement between au pairs and host families, and rights and obligations of an au pair and a host family (Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007).

On April 19, 2004, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men presented a recommendation draft to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) regarding employment of domestic workers, including au pairs. They claimed

that specific provisions of the 1971 European Agreement on Au Pair Placement were no longer adequate, and were inapplicable in cases where au pairs were subject to domestic slavery (Council of Europe 2001). In the report, they presented studies conducted by the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS), which found that au pairs had to work in slavery-like working conditions, were subjected to sexual abuse and physical violence, and were not provided with health insurance, adequate accommodation, and payments. They explained that the isolated work environment in private households, combined with the age of au pairs, made these individuals vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by their host families. The CDCS was critical of the booming au pair industry's lack of regulation, given that it was in the hands of online international agencies. As such, they recommended an accreditation system, wherein agencies were committed to ensuring adequate living and working standards and social protection for the au pair, and conduct background checks for host families and au pairs. Finally, they proposed:

The Committee of Ministers should elaborate a charter of rights for domestic workers and issue guidelines to member states which would ensure that the distinctive status of au pairs (neither students nor workers) is recognized and safeguarded, their working conditions and social cover are fixed and that the au pair industry is appropriately regulated on the national and international level (PACE 2004).

On January 17, 2005, the PACE Committee of Ministers responded to the recommendations with comments from the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS), European Committee on Migration (CDMG), and Committee on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (CAHTEH). CDCS, as the responsible committee for au pair placement, commented that five member states who ratified the European Agreement on Au Pair Placement showed little interest in revising this agreement. After discussing

with IAPA field workers and government representatives, CDCS also decided that there was no urgent need to revise this agreement.

Today, eligible nationalities for au pair placement in Europe are largely determined by sending countries' membership to the European Economic Area (EEA). The accession of ten new countries to the European Union on May 1, 2004 (the A8⁴ nationals; the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, plus Cyprus and Malta) has been particularly decisive in determining immigration requirements for au pair placement. After enlargement, Sweden, Ireland and the United Kingdom were the first members who "granted A8 nationals free access to the labor market immediately upon enlargement." (Burikova and Miller 2010; Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly, Spencer and 2007) The citizens of A8 countries were required by the government to register their employment through a "Workers' Registration Scheme" (WRS). Because au pairs were not counted as workers, they were exempt from this requirement.

Two studies (Anderson et al. 2006; Burikova and Miller 2010) investigating the employment experiences of nationals in the United Kingdom found that the E.U. enlargement provided more flexibility to au pairs who originated from A8 countries. As long as they held valid passports, they were able to pursue au pair jobs in the United Kingdom. However, it was also noted that, because of limited pocket money, these au pairs were more likely to take several extra jobs. Their retention rate was higher in comparison to au pairs originating from non-E.U. members states. Anderson et al.

4 Among ten countries that joined the E.U., A8 countries refer to the countries of Eastern Europe. Unlike Malta and Cyprus, these countries are low-income countries.

(2006:85) found that British host families were more willing to hire Romanians, Turkish, or Bulgarian au pairs because “they can’t legally ‘run off’ as au pairs from A8 countries.” Therefore, while the E.U. Enlargement provided au pairs more control over their living and working conditions (Burikova and Miller 2010), host families were hesitant to hire au pairs from A8 countries. One host parent stated: “I worry that an au pair will come and use us as a base to find a job and accommodation and then leave us in the lurch.” (ibid)

Among the EEA member countries, the United Kingdom has the strictest immigration policy regarding the eligibility of nationalities. In November 2008, the United Kingdom introduced a “Point-Based Application system” (PBA) for young people aged between eighteen to thirty years seeking temporary employment in the United Kingdom. By PBA, “au pair scheme has been closed and au pairs (together with other temporary workers, students on gap years and voluntary workers) fall under the more general Youth Mobility Scheme of Tier 5 of the PBS.” (Burikova and Miller 2010:186) Foreign citizens should score a certain number of points calculated by their age, available cash funds (£1,800), and be sponsored by their government in order to secure a work visa or permit (Burikova and Miller 2010; The United Kingdom Border Agency 2012). With these revisions to temporary immigrant employment policy, the eligible nationalities for au pair jobs were limited with 25 European Economic Area citizens (without any restrictions such as age, pocket money, duration of stay, and so on), Romania and Bulgaria (do not need a visa but they do need an accession worker card from the U.K. Border Agency before taking up an au pair placement), Australia, New Zealand, Canada,

Japan, Monaco, Taiwan, and Republic of Korea (need to apply for a visa)⁵. Other nationalities, on the other hand, such as Turkey, Croatia, Macedonia, Andorra, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and so on, who previously had arrangements with the U.K. government “under the old au pair scheme,” are no longer eligible to apply for au pair placement (Burikova and Miller 2010).

Similar to the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain accept au pairs from the European Economic Area (EEA) without visas. Citizens of countries that are not members of EEA are required to obtain work visas or permits, and also prove that they have sufficient funds to cover the expenses of their entire trip.

Even though the E.U. enlargement allowed E.U. citizens to work and live in EEA countries, enlargement has also negatively influenced the regulation of au pair program placement in that au pairs are not required to register or take work permits. For example, Burikova and Miller (2010:172) showed that in the United Kingdom au pairs’ working and living conditions were not controlled “whether with respect to immigration policy, by a governmental body, or even by an NGO.” In addition, au pair agencies did not provide accurate and sufficient information regarding au pair placement regulations neither to au pairs nor to host parents.

While the European Agreement on Au pair Placement set “objective aspects of au pair arrangement” such as minimum monthly wage, room, board, and tuition for language courses (Mellini et al. 2007), participating states differ in their own practices regarding

⁵ EEA member states have bilateral agreements with certain countries that allow young people aged 18 to 30 to travel and work for up to 12 months in host countries with “Working holiday visas.”

the working arrangements such as working hours and days, duration of stay, and whether the language courses are to be paid by the au pairs or their host parents, specific “familial” duties to be performed in the chores. For example, currently in the United Kingdom, au pairs are expected to work 25 hours a week if they are from Bulgaria or Romania, or 25-35 hours weekly if they are from an EEA member country; in Germany, Italy and France, their weekly workload is limited with maximum 30 hours. The minimum “pocket money” should be £70 per week for 25 hours in the United Kingdom, and this amount varies in other European countries between £65 and £75 per week.

Unlike in the United States, au pairs in Europe also pay their own travel and educational expenses, which makes au pair programs more expensive for applicants. In France, au pairs have to pay for their own transportation and language study expenses (UFAAP 2013). They are advised to have personal health insurance. If not, they have access to basic health and accident insurance through the French Social Security System. They can work a maximum of 30 hours a week (not more than five hours a day, have one day off a week and one Sunday off a month), babysit two nights a week, and must be paid a minimum of £75 weekly. Their duties involve providing childcare and light housework involving vacuuming, ironing, doing laundry, and cleaning (excluding Spring cleaning). In the United Kingdom, components of light housework duties are listed in detail at the web site of British Au Pair Agencies Organization. In addition to the duties listed above, au pairs are also responsible for dusting, emptying trash bins, walking and feeding pets, washing dishes (including loading and unloading dishwasher), and keeping kitchen tidy and clean, including sweeping and mopping floors.

Several studies conducted in European states showed that pairs are treated like cheap domestic workers or maids rather than cultural exchange students, and are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (Burikova and Miller 2010; Calleman 2010; Cox 2007; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Lutz 2002; Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007; Williams and Balaz 2004). Primarily two reasons are shown in explaining why au pairs were subject to maltreatment.

First, the ambiguity of au pair's role makes them vulnerable. Mellini et al. (2007:44) argued that the role of au pair, as outlined in the 1969 Council of Europe's European Agreement on au pair placement, is unclear. While au pairs are expected to be treated as members of the host family, host families pay for their services. The roles of au pairs are contradictory as they are "not simply child caregivers. Rather, they are paid workers who are not employees. They are family members who are not members of the family." Yodanis and Lauer (2005:41) further explained that defining au pairs not as employees but rather as "foreign visitors, exchange students, or family members" is "used as a strategy in the development of policies to ensure that a sufficient and affordable supply of childcare is available on the market" as well as to "bypass restriction on immigration" and "circumvent compliance with labor regulations." (ibid:46)

Because au pairs are defined as family members, "the regulation of au pair treatment is affected by the special treatment in law of family matters" and the status of au pairs "usually do not consist of public legislation." (Calleman 2010:69-70) As a result, lack of formal regulations governing au pair placement in host countries make au pairs invisible and give host parents the control the type and amount of work to be performed (Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Williams and Balaz 2004; Anderson 2004). For example, as

stated in the 1969 agreement, au pairs are expected to do “light housework”. However, the content of what is meant by light housework is not clarified. Therefore, au pairs are routinely treated as domestic workers, and perform all manner of housework. As explained by Cox (2007:294), host parents take advantage of the lack of clarity in duties and responsibilities of au pairs and “seldom treat their au pairs as equal nor do they stick to the working hours and conditions set out by the scheme, yet rarely will they be confronted by this reality.” (Cox 2007:294)

Second, au pairs are not well informed about regulations of the au pair programs, and their rights. Because their working conditions are not controlled by formal regulations, au pairs are “in a weak bargaining position” when it comes to negotiating working conditions with their host families (Hess and Puckhaber 2004:70). When they need any kind of help or protection, they simply do not know where to go. Au pairs could consult with au pair agencies for assistance, but these agencies also share the interest of state; “securing affordable childcare for families” (Yodanis and Lauer 2005:47). Because these agencies “place greater emphasis on the quantity, rather than quality of their placements” (Hess and Puckhaber 2004:70), they are unhelpful, and even can be exploitative rather than protective of au pairs (Burikova and Miller 2010; Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007). In their ethnographic work with Slavic au pairs in the United Kingdom, Burikova and Miller (2010) stated that they were “shocked” to find out that even the au pair agencies affiliated with internal and international au pair organizations were not following the regulations, and thus, were not helpful for au pairs when they needed help.

Against all these drawbacks, Oosterbeek-Latoza (2007:2) argued that au pair programs are still valuable cultural exchange programs for the young people. Therefore,

responsible bodies should take necessary steps to ensure that the programs meet their objective of cultural exchange. She offered that the first step towards this goal should be creating a “concrete system for monitoring, and penalizing abuses by au pair agencies and host families.” (ibid:2) In addition, Burikova and Miller (2010) proposed that existing au pair legislation should be amended in order to clarify the duties and maximum working hours of au pairs, and give more responsibilities to the au pair agencies in regulating the placement process by interviewing both parties before au pair’s arrival, and ensuring fair treatment of au pairs by regularly contacting au pairs and their host parents. They also suggested that information about the au pair program legislation should be provided in native language of the au pairs, and important information regarding the culture of host society and general facilities such as medical care should be provided to au pairs on well-publicized web sites. Furthermore, by pointing that au pairs simply do not know where to go when they needed help or protection, Burikova and Miller (2010:181) recommended establishment of the institution of ombudsman at both E.U. and national level and this institution to be “a well-publicized office where au pairs and families can take their grievances in the hope of finding adjudication and redress.”

1.6.2 Au Pair Program in the United States: History, Eligibility and Placement Regulations

The au pair programs in the United States were established using the au pair program in Europe as a model. However, the types of the programs available, costs, benefits, regulations, and responsibilities and duties of au pairs, host parents, and sponsoring agencies, reveal significant differences.

In 1985, the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) and the Experiment in International Living (EIL) applied to the United States Information Agency (USIA) to implement an au pair program under the Fulbright-Hays authority. This program targeted young people from Western Europe. Its objective was to encourage “young people, referred to as au pairs, to come to the United States to live and be immersed in the home life of a typical American family.” (Epstein 1998:2) In 1986, the USIA worked with two private sponsoring agencies in New England (AIFS and EIL) for piloting the program with au pairs who were aged between 18 to 25 years old. The trial program was 13 months long and allowed the au pairs to live in the United States for a period of 13 months under J exchange visitor visa. During their stay, au pairs would provide childcare services for a maximum of 45 hours a week in exchange for room, board, a weekly stipend in the amount of \$100, and \$300 credit to be spent for six-credits of language study courses (ibid).

Initially, objections to the operation of the au pair program under the Exchange Visitor Program and the use of the J visa came from non-USIA government officials. A U.S. immigration commissioner and an interagency panel review recommended the program be discontinued, claiming that the au pair program “resembled an employment program” rather than a cultural exchange, and “did not fall within the framework of a cultural exchange activity and should not be continued under the J-visa.” (Epstein 1998:2) Later, upon completion of a two-year trial period with 200 au pairs, the USIA decided not to grant permanent designation of the trial program as “the programs were outside the Agency's statutory authority to oversee educational and cultural exchange activities.” (Federal Register 1994) However, representatives of these programs brought

their proposal for the continuation of the au pair programs to Congress, and secured a special legislation (namely, Public Law 100-461). This legislation mandated the USIA to continue implementing the au pair program with six additional organizations, or “sponsor agencies” and required the General Accounting Office (GAO) to examine the use of the J-visa program administered by the USIA (ibid).

In a report presented on February 16, 1990, to the Congress, USIA and other interested parties, GAO explained the purpose of the J visa as follows:

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 was enacted to promote foreign policy objectives of mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through educational and cultural activities. To enable nonimmigrant aliens to enter the United States to participate in educational and cultural activities, the act established the J visa.

In accordance with this definition, non-immigrants who can apply for J visas must fall into the categories described in the act, which are “a bona fide student, scholar, trainee, teacher, professor, research assistant, specialist, or leader in a specialized knowledge or skill, or other person of similar description.” The purpose of these participants to come to the United States must be “teaching, instructing or lecturing, studying, observing, conducting research, consulting, demonstrating special skills, or receiving training.” Activities of summer student/work travel, international camp counselors and au pairs, however, were not found to fit into these prescribed categories. Therefore, the GAO report concluded: “Authorizing J visas for participants and activities that are not clearly for educational and cultural purposes as specified in the act dilutes the integrity of the J visa and obscures the distinction between the J visa and other visas granted for work purposes.” (GAO, 1990)

Despite the fact that the GAO found au pair programs ineligible for the issuance of J visas, and that the USIA sought legislation for shifting the program to a more suitable government agency, in October 1990, Congress passed Public Law 101-454, stating: “the au pair program would continue as currently constructed, that there will not be an expansion of new sponsors, and that the number of J-visas being processed will not increase above the current level.” (Epstein 1998:4) Consequently, the USIA was given the authority, not only to oversee, but also to regulate the au pair program until September 30, 1995 with the passage of Technical Amendments to the State Basic Authority Act (Public Law 103-415) in October 1994.

On December 14, 1994, the USIA published interim final regulations governing the au pair program that were “both consistent with the provisions of the Fulbright-Hays Act and provided safeguards for au pair participants and the American host families with whom they are placed,” and opened up these interim regulations for public comment (Federal Agency 1995). During the comment period, 3,000 American families responded. Most criticized the Agency’s proposed changes for reducing weekly work hours from 45 to 30 hours, raising the weekly wage or stipend paid to au pairs, and requiring that au pairs taking care of children under the age of two to be at least 21 years of age (ibid). After considering the interests of au pairs, host families, and the sponsor agencies, the Agency modified the initial draft and passed the new regulations on February 15, 1995. Amended regulations were comprised of the following guidelines:

- Educational component: Au pair participants were required to pursue six semester hours (or its equivalent) of academic coursework at an accredited post-secondary institution, as the minimum programmatic component necessary to comply with the

provisions of the Fulbright-Hays Act. Host families must pay the cost of academic work in an amount not to exceed \$500.

- Selection, Training and Screening: Due to high profile incidents in 1994⁶ and evidence that au pairs were mistreated by their host parents, the Agency required that au pairs undergo a thorough personal profile and criminal record check and receive eight hours of childcare instruction prior to placement. It was also amended that au pairs placed with families having children under the age of two must have at least six months of documented childcare experience.
- Finally, the requirement that all family members residing in the home be fluent in English was changed in order to read “host parents” rather than “all family members.”
- Placement and Orientation: This regulation required that the au pair and host family have signed a written agreement that outlines the au pair’s obligation to provide not more than 45 hours of childcare services per week. The maximum daily work hours, previously set as 9 hours a day, was replaced with “‘reasonable’ number of hours per day,” which left the decision to be arranged by host family and au pair.
- Au Pair Employment Status: After examining the Fair Labor Standards Act and taking guidance from the Department of Labor on the matter of whether au pairs are can be categorized as “employees,” the Agency determined that the relationship between the au pairs and host parents “clearly reveals an employment relationship.” Accordingly, the criteria to categorize the au pair employment status are: a) the au pairs are economically dependent on their host parents as they receive “pocket money” in return for their childcare services, which constitutes an “economic reality” as set

⁶ In 1992, Swiss au pair (aged 20) Olivia Riner was charged with second-degree murder and arson in the death of a three-month-old girl in her care in Westchester County, NY. In 1994, a German male au pair Stefan Kahl pleaded guilty to molesting an eight-year-old child in his care and taking pornographic pictures of another boy in Massachusetts. The same year, a Dutch au pair Anna Corina Peeze (aged 19) was pleaded guilty to child abuse in Virginia in the death by shaking of her host family's eight-week-old baby.

forth in the *Rutherford and Bartels* decision; b) as explained by the *Goldberg* decision, the employers (host parents) exert control over the au pairs by setting the hours of work, methods of performing the work, break times, uniforms, and the designation of actual duties, which is an indicative of employment relationship. Therefore, an au pair is an *employee*.

- **Au Pair Wages:** The weekly stipend to be paid to the au pairs for the childcare services they performed was determined to be no less than \$115. The weekly wage or stipend was calculated based on a formula provided by the Department of Labor, which deducted room-and-board costs from minimum wages to be paid to the au pairs. Also, it was decided that au pairs should receive a minimum of one and a half days off per week in addition to one complete weekend off each month, and two weeks of paid vacation annually.
- **Other Statutory Considerations:** Previously, agencies were reimbursing \$500 program enrollment fee to au pairs upon completion of the program. The agency canceled this refund policy.

On December 23, 1995, Public Law 104–72 removed the “programmatic limitation,” which allowed only young people of Western European to participate in au pair programs by “directing the Agency to oversee au pair activities conducted on a worldwide basis. In addition, the Agency limited the number of au pairs not to be more than 27,720 (Federal Agency 1996).

In September 5, 1997, the USIA amended the regulations regarding the educational component of the program, working hours of the au pair, and placement and orientation of au pair participants. By this amendment, the au pairs were required to “actually attend rather than merely enroll for six hours of academic credit.” (Federal Register 1997b) As Epstein (1998:5) stated, these amended regulations “have re-emphasized the program’s original objective which is first and foremost to be a cultural exchange program, to facilitate the spread of information about the culture and life in the

United States.” In addition, with this amendment, the number of hours that au pairs may provide childcare services was limited to no more than ten hours per day and forty-five hours in any given week (Federal Register 1997b). Regarding the selection and placement of au pair participants, the Agency required “au pair participants to successfully pass a personal profile based on a psychometric test that measures the differences in characteristics among applicants against those characteristics considered most important to successfully participate in the au pair program.” (Federal Register 1997a:34632) Further, the Agency required more detailed orientation of au pairs with child safety and development instructions:

Au pairs will continue to receive not less than eight hours of child safety instruction and not less than twenty-four hours of child development instruction. The Agency is, however, amending this requirement to specifically require that not less than four hours of the child safety instruction be infant related and that not less than four of the twenty-four hours of child development instruction be devoted to training for the care of children under the age of two. Child safety instruction shall be provided by the American Red Cross or other recognized experts in the field of safety instruction. The child development instruction is expected to include topics such as stress management and Shaken Baby Syndrome.⁷ (ibid)

7 Louise Woodward’ case had been decisive in preparation of these amendments regarding childcare safety instructions. In Newton, Massachusetts, eighteen-year-old British au pair Louise Woodward was convicted with involuntary manslaughter of eight-month-old infant as a result of Shaken Baby Syndrome in February 1997. Woodward was initially charged with second-degree murder. At post-conviction relief hearing the conviction was reduced to involuntary manslaughter when Judge Zobel ruled, "the circumstances in which Defendant acted were characterized by confusion, inexperience, frustration, immaturity and some anger, but not malice (in the legal sense) supporting a conviction for second degree murder. Frustrated by her inability to quiet the crying child, she was "a little rough with him," under circumstances where another, perhaps wiser, person would have sought to restrain the physical impulse." (BBC News 1997)

Later, with Public Law 105-48 signed on October 1, 1997, au pair programs were no longer implemented on a temporary basis and had to be reauthorized by the Congress every one or two years. The U.S. government was given the permanent authority to administer the program permanently (ibid).

Perhaps the most important amendment to the regulations regarding au pair placement was a definition of au pair participants' status as employees. Unlike European host countries, the United States government defines au pairs as employees and equally acknowledges the cultural component of the program. However, au pair sponsoring agencies were not creating a realistic representation of the program to host families and potential au pairs. In the amended regulations, passed in 1995, the USIA pointed out the discrepancy between families' and au pairs' expectations by stating the au pair program was portrayed to young potential au pairs as a chance to see the United States, whereas, to host families, it was presented as a childcare program. Similarly, in a Congressional Research Service Report, Epstein (1998:6), a specialist in Foreign Policy and Trade, examined the history of au pair regulations in the United States, and suggested that comparable expectations for au pairs and host families needed to be established:

Host families participating in the program must be informed of their educational and cultural responsibilities to the au pair. They should be forewarned that the au pair program is not for parents who cannot take on the added responsibility of being an ambassador for America in addition to working and raising a family. At the same time, au pairs must understand the seriousness of their childcare responsibilities; they are not in the program to have a subsidized vacation in America.

She also pointed out the fact that the brochure given to both parties were setting different expectations for the au pairs and the host families by "highlighting child care to

American families, while highlighting America's national parks to the au pairs." (ibid) Therefore, she suggested that identical brochure should be provided for both parties.

Accordingly, in order to promote a better understanding of the program in both parties, on April 7, 1999, the USIA proposed a set of rules regarding the selection and orientation of both host parents and au pair participants (Federal Register 1999). With these rules, which became effective on October 5, 1999, au pair program sponsoring agencies were required to provide au pairs and the host parents a copy of a) all operating procedures, rules and regulations that govern the au pair's participation in the exchange program, and b) the Agency's written statement and brochure regarding the program. In addition, host families and au pairs were required to sign an agreement detailing the au pair's obligation to provide childcare prior to the au pair's placement in the host family's home. Regarding the au pair placement regulation, the Agency amended that au pair program sponsoring agencies should not place an au pair a) in a host family having a child less than three months old unless a parent or other responsible adult is present in the home, b) in a host family having a child under the age of two unless the au pair has at least two-hundred hours of documented childcare experience, and c) in a family having a special needs child unless the au pair has prior experience, training or skills in the care of special needs children.

In August 2001, the Department of State created a subcategory of au pair exchange program called *EduCare*. The Department's goal was "to provide an opportunity for participation by foreign nationals who wish to pursue academic studies more vigorously." (Federal Agency, 2001) Under this subcategory, au pair exchange participants could provide fewer hours of childcare for the host family (maximum 30

hours a week; no longer than 10 hours a day) and complete a minimum of 12 hours of academic credit or its equivalent during the program year. The host family is required to provide (up to) the first \$1,000 toward the cost of the Au Pair's required academic coursework. EduCare participants could be placed with host families that need before- and after-school childcare services for their school-aged children, and with host families with pre-school children only if the family has other alternative, full-time childcare arrangements.

As a response to the au pair community's request, on June 10, 2006, the Department of State amended the regulation regarding the length of stay of au pair participants. With this amendment, au pairs who successfully completed their original twelve-month period of program participation could request a one-time extension of six, nine or twelve months (Federal Register 2006). In its 20th year of operation, the Department was asked to increase the age eligibility from 26 to 30 years old and to allow au pairs to repeat the program. Although, during the open public comment period, a positive response was received regarding the age eligibility, the Department has not yet changed the age eligibility. However, repeat requests led to an amendment of program regulations on the grounds that:

An au pair who has previously participated is likely to be more familiar with the American culture (thereby quickly overcoming cultural challenges), is a proven successful caretaker, and will be able to build on the skills previously acquired (Federal Register 2008:34861).

Thus, former au pairs who resided outside of the United States for a period of at least two years were eligible to repeat au pair program participation in the United States.

Currently, there are three types of au pair programs in the United States: Au Pair, EduCare and Extraordinaire. The first two programs still hold the same eligibility and placement terms as described in the previous section, and weekly cost of these programs for host families are \$350 and \$277, respectively (by 2013). Extraordinaire is offered as an option for families with one or more children who require 45 hours of weekly care and are looking for specialized qualifications. Eligibility terms of this program for au pairs are being at least 20 years old and having two years of full-time experience as a nanny, childcare provider or nursery school teacher. The average weekly cost for this program is \$427 and au pair's pocket money is \$250. All study participants came under a standard au pair program to the United States. Therefore, this section will focus solely on this type of au pair program.

The Department of State defines the au pair program as “a mutually rewarding, intercultural opportunity” where “participants can continue their education while experiencing everyday life with an American family, and hosts receive reliable and responsible childcare from individuals who become part of the family.” (Department of State 2013) The responsibilities of au pairs, host families, and agencies are set in the web site of Department of State as follows:

Au Pairs

- Host Family Stay: Live with a family for 12 months, with the option to extend 6, 9, or 12 more months.
- Professional Training: Receive a minimum of 32 hours of childcare training before you start.
- Childcare Experience: Provide up to 10 hours a day/45 hours a week of childcare.
- School Credit: Complete at least six hours of academic credit or equivalent at an accredited U.S. post-secondary educational institution.

- Financial Value: Receive up to \$500 toward the cost of required academic course work. Room and board plus compensation for childcare work. (Department of State 2013)

In addition, the benefits listed by au pair agencies are flights to and from the United States plus onward travel to a host family, four-day orientation program with meals and accommodation in New York City upon arrival to the United States, a 13-month J-1 Visitor Exchange Visa with the option to extend for a further 12 months (12 months for work and one month for traveling upon completing the program); a two-week paid vacation during the first 12 months and medical and liability insurance (Au Pair in America 2013). Medical insurance provided by the program only covers accident and sickness medical expenses and excludes routine physicals, immunizations, or other examinations.

In order to apply for the program, applicants first submit a profile photo and 4-6 family and childcare photos, at least 3 references, a medical form, a criminal record check certificate, and copies of latest academic and/or vocational certificates or diplomas, full driving license, and their passports. Upon taking confirmation from the sponsoring agency, applicants then create their online profile and communicate with potential host families who contact them. In this process, interested potential host parents contact applicants via phone for an interview. Once both parties agree to a match, the sponsoring agency starts the placement process, which takes from one to two months.

Au pair program participants pay about a \$400-500 program participation fee once they are matched with a family. In some cases, intermediary agencies charge extra fees for preparing application documents on behalf of the applicants. For instance, one Georgian study participant reported that she paid \$2,000 to an agency, which was shut

down recently. Additional program participant costs are fees for visa processing (SEVIS fee of \$35 and visa application fee to paid to the Embassy), their local interviewer, a criminal record check, and medical form.

Unlike their counterparts in Europe, au pairs in the United States are not expected to do light housework, such as doing laundry of family members and vacuuming, or any other chores unrelated to children under their care. Rather, they are responsible for preparing meals for the children, tidying up after them, making their beds and washing their clothes, driving them to and from school or to other activities, and babysitting in the evenings when the parents are out (Au Pair in America 2013). In addition, their current weekly stipend, in accord with minimum wage requirement, is \$195.75 for 45 hours of childcare service. When compared to au pair programs in Europe, American au pair programs offer slightly better wages (\$4.35 per hour versus \$3.37 in Europe); more free benefits, such as language courses and travel expenses paid for by host families. The EduCare au pair program is more similar to au pair programs in Europe, as it requires less hours of childcare service (30 hours), but still pays higher (\$146.81 weekly, \$4.89 hourly rate) than au pair programs in Europe.

Host Families

- Paying up to \$500 toward the cost of the au pair's required academic course work;
- Providing an appropriate private room and three meals a day for the au pair;
- Paying a weekly minimum stipend based on the program option selected;
- Giving the au pair one complete weekend off each month (Friday evening to Monday morning);
- Facilitating the care provider's requirement to enroll in and attend an accredited post-secondary institution to fulfill her Educational Component requirement;

- Providing a minimum of two weeks' paid vacation for each 12 month exchange term, in addition to regular weekly/monthly time off; and
- Including the au pair whenever possible in family meals, outings, holidays and other events.

Once a host family applies online to have an au pair, the sponsoring agency sends a local counselor to perform an interview and home inspection. When approved by the agency for participation in the program, the host family signs a contract with the sponsoring agency, which lists the responsibilities above, and also the childcare arrangement issues, such as not placing the au pair with a child under three months of age unless a parent or other responsible adult will be present at all times. Host families are also required by the state to sign a mutual contract with au pairs upon their arrival and file a copy of it to their sponsor agency. Sponsoring agencies also organize host family workshops weekly, and require the families to attending an annual workshop.

The weekly cost of hiring an au pair for a one-year period ranges between \$336-\$355, which is calculated and posted by sponsoring agencies in their web sites. For example, Au Pair in America calculates the weekly cost as \$351. This amount is calculated by dividing total cost of the following items by 51 weeks: Match fee (\$400), annual program fee (\$7495), and weekly stipend (\$195.75). Program fee does not include the \$350 nonrefundable program application fee, or the \$500 of education allowance, which are extra costs for host families. The Extraordinaire program costs more (\$427 weekly), as host parents hire more experienced childcare providers while EduCare program costs less (\$278) per week, as au pairs work less hours for the families in this program option. Sponsoring agencies offer payment plans and also for the host families who continue and make new contracts, they provide fee discounts.

Au Pair Program Sponsors

Sponsoring agencies that were designated by the State Department are A.P.EX. American Professional Exchange, LLC (ProAuPair); Agent Au Pair; American Cultural Exchange, LLC (goAuPair); American Institute For Foreign Study (Au Pair in America); Au Pair Foundation, Inc.; Au Pair International, Inc.; AuPairCare, Inc.; Cultural Care Au Pair; Cultural Homestay International; EUR Au Pair Intercultural Child Care Programs; Expert Group International Inc. (Expert AuPair); InterExchange Au Pair USA; USAuPair, Inc.; and Member Synergy, LLC (The International Au Pair Exchange). The Department of States listed their responsibilities as:

- Screening and selecting both host families and au pairs as program participants according to selection criteria stated in the regulations;
- Providing au pairs with training in child development and child safety prior to their placement with a host family; and
- Providing au pairs with specific orientation and program information prior to departure from their home countries for the United States.

In addition, program sponsors should ensure that program participants meet eligibility requirements, follow the regulations regarding work hours, have childcare experience, and get financial compensation. Most importantly, they regulate matching of and provide assistance for both parties during the time they participate in the program.

1.6.3 Conclusion

When compared to its European model, in the United States the responsible governmental bodies have established more formal placement regulations and provided more specific information regarding the rights and duties of au pair programs participants, host parents, and the sponsoring agencies. In Europe, on the other hand, the 1969

European Agreement on au pair placement is still the only regulation providing guidelines, yet inadequately, for the host countries. Internal au pair organizations and IAPA have established placement guidelines, however, as Burikova and Miller (2010) showed, even au pair agencies that were affiliated with BAPAA and IAPA were malfunctioning in the United Kingdom.

The 1969 agreement did not only lack clarification of working conditions of au pairs, it also classified au pairs in an ambiguous status. By failing to define au pairs as employees, this agreement also denied au pairs from fair payments that would be adjusted based on minimum wage requirements. The lack of monitoring and formal regulation of au pair programs, in addition to state's declined control over recruitment of au pairs with the removal of work permits for the E.U. citizens after E.U. enlargement, left au pairs programs highly unregulated, or simply regulated in accord with the interests of au pair agencies and host families. Although au pair programs in Europe required less hours of childcare work than the standard au pair program in the United States, studies showed that au pairs were treated like domestic workers, worked longer hours, and were vulnerable to abuse.

In contrast to European member states, the United States has gradually taken progressive steps through the history of the au pair programs in order to ensure provision of accurate and effective guidelines for informing program participants and intermediary agencies and safeguarding au pairs and their host parents. Unlike in Europe, American au pair programs have also expanded the inclusion of participating nationalities by opening the program on a worldwide basis. This expansion, however, also might have led to negative outcomes, as the program does not necessarily match host parents with their

“class-peers”, as I will describe in the case of recruitment of Eastern and Central European young women as au pairs in American host families.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIZING TRANSMIGRANTS WOMEN'S SOCIAL NETWORKS AND AGENCY

In this chapter, I present existing theoretical approaches and analytical frameworks for theorizing roles of transmigrant women's social networks and agency in building transnational mobilities. Two theoretical approaches are relevant to this attempt: networks theory and migrant transnationalism scholarship. Network theory explains that migrants' social networks are critical determinants of migrants' decisions to move; it functions as social capital and acts as resourceful channels before and after migration. As such, I open the first section by briefly explaining the link between social capital and social networks. Then, I describe the roles of networks in migrants' incorporation and settlement in the host countries and argue that network theory disregards the non-economic functions and negative aspects of migrants' social networks. Further, I illustrate that more attention needs to be paid for theorizing how access to and extent of these networks can be determined, by examining the characteristics (strong versus weak ties) and dynamics (changes in networks over time) of these networks in relation to social locations of migrants and contextual factors in the societies of reception.

In section two, I present theoretical perspectives offered by transnationalism scholarship in relation to transmigrants' agency, networks, incorporation, transnational activities, practices and communities, and settlement patterns. In aligning with criticism posed by transnationalism, particularly by feminist transnationalism scholars, I argue that existing transnationalism scholarship is insensitive to gendered aspects of immigrant transnationalism, reproduces powerless images of migrant women by employing a binary

understanding of resistance and domination in accounting for their experience of transnationalism, overgeneralizes experiences of migrant groups by ignoring demographics of group members, and thus, does not address intragroup dynamics of group members, and finally, that it lacks a textured and comprehensive understanding of transnationalism without comparing experiences of different migrant groups.

Alternatively, I claim that intersectionality and transnational feminism can be powerful analytical tools in theorizing women's experiences of migrant transnationalism. In section three, I first explain that the intersectionality framework can provide critical perspectives on women's experiences of transmigrancy, by contextualizing their social location within intersecting and interlocking systems of power hierarchies, which shape their access to and extent and limitation of their social networks. An intersectionality framework also can provide a more textualized understanding of transmigrant women's resistance to oppression and subordination by subverting the binary logic of subordination and domination. Transnational feminism, on the other hand, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of transmigrant women's agency because it frames women's agency within systematic relations of domination by situating their experiences in relation to current processes of cross-border movements and global economy. In that sense, employing a transnational feminist framework can provide more contextualized and historicized accounts of women's agency in building and maintaining transnational mobilities and their settlement strategies.

2. 1 Social Network Analysis

In this section, I present Social Capital Theory and Network Theory, and explain the characteristics of social networks, dynamics of social networks over time, and

noneconomic aspects of social networks.

2.1.1 Social Capital Theory

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:119) defined social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by the virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquisition and recognition.” Social capital, according to Bourdieu, is convertible into other forms of capital such as cultural capital (Coleman 1998; Zhou and Bankston III 1994) and economic capital, and in the migration literature, “notably financial capital” (Massey 1999:43) such as migrant remittances and foreign salaries. According to Coleman (1988), social capital also generates human capital through ties between enough people to create trust, obligations, and expectations in family and community relationships⁸. Coleman (1988:104) stated, “an important form of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations,” and added, “information is important in providing a basis for action.” The immigration scholars of social networks also emphasize the positive aspects of access to social capital through social networks and argued that social networks are mechanisms for upward mobility, particularly among disadvantaged immigrants (Cranford 2005).

Interpersonal ties of migrants operate at various levels and shape the migration experiences of migrants before and after arrival to the host countries. These social

⁸In his research on educational outcomes of students in public and private Catholic high schools, Coleman found that minority students who attended private Catholic schools had better educational outcomes than their peers in public high schools. He concluded that the powerful social networks of parent-child relations, home-school ties, and a strong faith community led to creation of a strong community of shared norms and values which fostered adherence to educational achievement, and thus, decreased the drop out rates among students.

networks are based on “family/household, kind, friendship and community (ethnic) ties and relationship.” (Boyd 1989:639) Social networks have been at the loci of migration scholarship in over the last few decades (Aguilera and Massey 2003; Boyd 1989; Castles 2002; Castles and Miller 2003; Chavez 1991; Fawcett 1989; Gold 2007; Hagan 1994, 1998; Hellermann 2006; Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1993; Parrenas 2001; Pessar 1997, 1999; Piore 1979; Portes 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Sanders 2007). According to the Network Theory, as the conduits of information, social networks are particularly important in two subjects of migration scholarship: the decision-making process and migrant adaptation—settlement and incorporation.

2.1.2 Network Theory

The network theory informs us that international migration is institutionalized through the formation and development of migrant networks. According to this approach, migrant networks are “sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through the ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin.” (Massey et al. 1993) These network connections constitute a form of “social capital,” and people gain access to social capital through “membership in interpersonal networks and social institutions” (Palloni, Massey, Ceballos, Espinosa, and Spittel 2001:1263). Potential emigrants, through these networks, obtain information about “legal and illegal pathways” into targeted countries (Alba and Nee 2003), assistance for travel arrangement, employment opportunities and labor market conditions in the destination countries. Because these networks organize their departure, travel, and settlement abroad, “the network itself emerges as an actor in the migration process.” (Light, Bhachu and Karageorgis 1989:1)

The network hypothesis of social capital theory offers that “people who are socially related to current or former migrants have access to social capital that significantly increases the likelihood that they, themselves, will migrate.” (Palloni et al. 2001:1263) In analyzing the causal mechanisms of international migration, Massey (1990: 20) employed Myrdal’s “theory of cumulative causation,” which proposed “the causation of migration becomes cumulative because each act of migration alters the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, thus increasing the likelihood of additional migration.” Once these networks are firmly established, they help to “sustain and transform migration when the original cause of a movement is removed.” (Castles 2002:1150) By lowering the cost of transportation and the risks associated with migration and channelizing information about employment opportunities in destination countries prior to migration, social capital converts into economic capital for emigrants who have access to migrant networks (Alba and Nee 2003; Boyd 1989; Aguilera and Massey 2003; Phillips and Massey 2000).

During post-migration, social networks show adaptive functions as “reservoirs of, and conduits for, the investment of social and cultural capital for social and economic adjustment” (Pessar 1999:55). In terms of its economic roles, social networks facilitate ethnic entrepreneurship and other personal finance trends (Light 1972; Min 1984); ethnic self-employment (Bates 1997; Kim 1999; Sanders and Nee 1996), and ethnic recruitment (Lee 1998; Waldinger 1996). Access to social networks can also improve working conditions of migrants in that migrants can gain access to better wages (Aguilera and Massey 2003) and quit undesirable working conditions for better employment opportunities (Akalin 2007; Çelik 2007; Kümbetoğlu 2005) through their resourceful

networks. Finally, social networks are also crucial links for circulating goods, services and information between host and home countries (Castles and Miller 2003; Vertovec 2002). Migrants remit, send letters, gifts and consumption goods to their families left behind through their social networks. In this respect, social networks construct and maintain transactions and ties between home and host societies, which sustain, primarily, financial wellbeing of their families (Fawcett 1989; Gonzalez 2000).

Although migration networks scholars have mostly emphasized the positive aspects immigrants' social ties, some also showed that networks do not necessarily provide solidarity and mutual aid between co-ethnics but can function as "negative social capital." (Portes 1998) Portes (1998:15) delineated four negative consequences of social capital: exclusion of outsiders (ethnic groups establishing monopolies for economic advance), excess claims on group members (disproportionate access of group members to the same resources), restrictions on individual freedoms (intense community life and strong enforcement of local norms, which reduce the privacy and the autonomy of individuals), and downward leveling forms (outside discrimination blocking the mobility of groups). In addition, Pessar (1997) reported that for the Dominican immigrants in New York, strong solidarity among co-ethnics can delimit their solidarity with other ethnic groups.

Several studies have shown that social ties between co-ethnics can lead to inequality and exploitation (Aldrich and Waldinger; Cranford 2005; Mahler 1995; Sanders and Nee 1987; Tilly [1986]1990; Zhou 1992). One "downside" of social capital within migrant communities is that "it creates dependencies, and, on a different level, a certain commodification of social relationships among migrants, particularly between

newcomers and longer established migrants who act as providers of ‘services,’ sources of information and access to jobs, accommodation, documents, medical help and social resources.” Experienced immigrants make money, “even fortunes,” by providing services to newcomers, which in return creates new hierarchies within immigrant communities (Hellermann 2006:1144). In the context of the United States, for instance, newcomers, who are not well aware of their labor rights and familiar with the social and economic conditions and have poor English skills, are more likely to be exploited by their co-ethnics (Mahler 1995; Zhou 1992).

However, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:189) stated that immigrant social networks are “highly contested social resources, and they are not always shared.” As such, migrants can have limited or no access to social networks. For example, in the case of labor immigrants, whose goal is to maximize income, “competition over the accumulation of capital” limits immigrants’ active participation in social networks (Parreñas 2001:213). In her study with immigrant domestic workers in Italy, Parreñas (ibid) found that domestic workers consider their stay in the host societies temporary, and seek to extract the optimum financial gains through overbooking their work schedules and lowballing their hourly rates rather than sharing employment information with other migrant women who were in need of jobs. She further explained that many domestic workers felt like victims of competition by their co-ethnics, who charged fees for job referrals or did not share information about the jobs that they could not maintain. In addition, limited or no access to networks may not create solidarity but “anomie” (Parreñas 2001) among migrants due to disappointment of being denied participation to networks, and being exploited by trusting individuals (Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman,

and Soutter 2000).

Migrants' social networks are neither monolithic, nor static. Therefore, theorizing dimensions of migrants' social networks requires a closer investigation of forms, formation and sustenance of these networks (effects of network dynamics over time), which I explain in the following sections.

2.1.3 Characteristics of Networks: Strong versus Weak Ties

Prominent network theorist Mark Granovetter (1973; 1983) argued that the strength of ties is crucial in terms of the kinds of opportunities they can provide for the individuals. The "strength" of an interpersonal tie "is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie." (1973:1361) As such, "strong ties" are small, well-defined groups composed of an immediate circle of family members and close friends, and "weak ties" consisting of acquaintanceships. Weak ties, according to Granovetter 1983:209, "provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle" whereas strong ties generate trust and "have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available." Because weak ties connect individuals to a wider set of social networks, they are "indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities." On the contrary, strong ties breed local cohesion, and thus, lead to overall fragmentation." (Granovetter 1973:1360)

Revisiting his theory after ten years (1983), Granovetter stated that in the cases of economic insecurity or lack of social services, people rely more on strong ties to get support. Therefore, specific needs of individuals also influence what types of ties can be

more resourceful to meet their ends. In accord with this statement, Light (1984) and Parreñas (2001) showed that through their strong ties, migrants form rotating credit associations to create a pooled income, which are particularly vital for the newcomers without employment and also would be used by immigrants in immediate need of money.

The strength of a tie also pertains to the degree of diversity in the network. Diversity of weak ties in a group can be determined by socioeconomic status. In lower socioeconomic groups, “weak ties are often not bridges but rather represent friends' or relatives' acquaintances; the information they provide would then not constitute a real broadening of opportunity.” In contrast, “high-status individuals” can have more connections through their weak ties and thus, provide more valuable information (Granovetter 1983:209). Therefore, weak ties can have positive effects on low socioeconomic individuals, such as occupational mobility, if they are linked to high socioeconomic individuals (Lin 1999).

In addition, contextual factors shape the diversity and functions of social ties. Cranford argued that the characteristics of immigrants' networks are shaped by economic, political, and industrial contexts, and influence who benefits from immigrant social networks, to what degree, and in which contexts. In her study with Mexican and Central American undocumented immigrants in the Los Angeles janitorial industry, which is a highly decentralized industry, Cranford (2005:379) found that immigrant workers who entered the janitor industry through their weak networks experienced more exploitation and control over their labor than the ones who were hired through strong ties. Therefore, Cranford did not only show that weak ties can “become the mechanisms for downgrading” when contextual factors are considered, but also called for attention to further analyze

where the “link between social capital and social network” should be for problematized (ibid: 395).

Furthermore, individual factors such as age, social class, gender, marital status, and immigrant status interact with contextual factors and shape the formation and character of migrant networks. In terms of labor migrants, the nature of working arrangement interacts with gender and influences the access of female and male migrants’ access to different types of social ties. When comparing male and female undocumented Guatemalan immigrants in Houston, Hagan (1998) found that immigrant women in paid domestic work “settle[d] into a limited network structure” due to their isolated work conditions, in that they interact with their employers during the weekdays and their close friends or family members on the weekend. Because they work outside of public homes, men, on the other side, were “embedded in more social networks enabling them to take advantage of resources and information passed via these abundant networks.” (ibid: 68) Married immigrant women, because of their family responsibilities, are more likely to form and maintain strong ties (kinship networks) in comparison to their male counterparts who develop more relationships outside the family with coworkers. In a study with foreign-born Mexicans residing in Los Angeles County, Granberry and Marcelli (2007) also found variations among male and female immigrants that pertained to the marital status. They explained, “Men and women have equal access to family relationships theoretically, but women develop more relationships with kin.” This divergence was explained by the fact that “men develop more relationships outside the family and neighborhood and include more coworkers,” while women, because they were “delimited by their familial responsibilities” had restricted access to the labor market and other

extra-household social groups.” (ibid: 591)

The immigration scholarship has been focused more on married immigrant women because their international movement stems from family unification or family survival strategy (Bagchi 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001, 2005; Pena 2007; Sassen 2000; Segura 2007). However, the number of single women participating to contemporary migration flows is not negligible (Bagnoli 2009; Burikova and Miller 2010; Cox 2007; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Geserick 2012; Morokvasic 2002, 2004; Ortiz 2007; Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007; Sassen 2000, Swai 2007; Yodanis and Lauer 2005). As their motivations for migration might be different than married migrants, the kind of networks they build conceivably would differ as well.

The characteristics of social ties also are differentiated by intersection of age and the marital status of women immigrants. In my study (Çelik 2011) with Eastern European domestic workers in Ankara and İstanbul, I found that young, single women were more likely to develop a wide range of weak ties in comparison to their married and older counterparts. This was partly due to the fact that they are at a different stage of life course. Single, young migrant women reported that they did not have any interest in marrying co-ethnic men at home due high unemployment rates among this group. Because they perceived marrying Turkish men and settling in Turkey as a step for upward mobility, they were seeking to be more socially active outside of their workplaces. Thus, besides networking with their co-nationals, they formed weak ties with Turkish citizens. Their married and older counterparts, on the other hand, were more concerned with their families left behind and were more willing to return home once they accumulated enough money. Thus, married immigrants were less interested and actively involved in

developing weak ties and rather forming strong ties with a small group of other women migrant as well as native domestic workers.

As Boyd (1989:656) emphasized, “little systematic attention is paid to gender in the development and persistence of networks across time and space.” Although limited in number, migrant studies on women’s networks presented here reveals that the characteristics of social ties and the relationship between networks and social capital needs further analysis that should be framed by an intersectionality approach in order to explore the interplay of contextual and individual-level factors in these processes.

2.1.3 Dynamics of Social Networks Over Time

Migrants’ social networks are “dynamic, and open-ended, and over time they make available opportunities to a wider audience, so that as these networks mature, evolve, and extend themselves” as more individuals are involved in migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:93). Yet, social networks do not automatically emerge or strengthen and extent of individuals’ networks varies.

Boyd explained that (1989:652) immigrants’ personal network resources change with the length or residency in the host societies. When the settlement in the receiving society grows, family unification is more likely to happen, and thus, family, kin and ethnic based networks (strong ties) increase. In addition, migrants’ engagement in ethnic and non-ethnic based voluntary organizations increases (Portes and Bach 1985; Massey Alarcón, González, and Durand 1987). In contrast, Wong (2006) explained that the stage of settlement in the host society changes the kind of support needed by immigrants, and thus, the type of networks they engage in. In a longitudinal qualitative study with Mainland Chinese immigrant women, Wong found that, in the initial stages of settlement,

immigrant women relied more on instrumental and informational support from family members and kin to resolve survival issues such as finances, housing and childcare. In later stages, their need for instrumental support declined while it increased for emotional support, which was provided by fellow immigrant women.

The extent of networks is also shaped by new class positioning of the individuals after migration. Immigrants who experience downward mobility might prefer to engage in, what O'Connor (1990:88) called "horizontal networks (networks are among people of approximately equal status and possessing approximately equal power) rather than "vertical networks" (networks that exist among people of unequal status and power). Parreñas' study (2001) with highly educated Filipina domestic workers in Italy and the United States exemplify this condition. She reported that Filipina domestic workers, whose skills are incongruent with the labor they performed, avoided participating to ethnic gatherings with other Filipina immigrants who held higher social status and more prestigious jobs in the receiving societies. Their reluctance was explained by the "contradictory class status," in which the presence of middle-class Filipina migrants "not only intensifies their decline in status, [but] the absence of support from the middle class also heightens the discomfort of domestic workers over their downward mobility." (ibid: 239)

Contradictory findings on formation, extension and sustenance of migrant networks proved the need for further analysis of network formations and dimensions of networks over time. Stating that there is still little done for understanding the dynamics of migration networks, in further studies, Boyd (1989:655) determined two questions to be answered: first, why and when do personal networks fail to emerge; and second, under

what conditions do networks weaken and/or disappear.

2.1.4 Noneconomic Aspects of Social Networks

Migrant networks scholars underscore the “economic” aspects of social networks and tend to underestimate the “non-economic” aspects of networks in providing emotional support, and thus, improving social well-being of immigrants. This is partially due to the assumption that migrants are solely economic actors who seek to maximize their financial gains by migrating for foreign employment. There is little known about how migrants’ emotional well-being is associated with the access to migrant networks, particularly in the times of personal crisis, and thus, this influences their settlement and incorporation to the receiving societies.

Leaving one’s homeland to settle in new lands stands as a significant “network disruption” and is a stressful transition, “requiring a substantial reestablishment of networks, including friendships and intimate relationships.” (Jerusalem, Hahn and Schwarzer 1996:30) “Integrating into an unfamiliar community and foreign society can be considered as a stressful experience that adds other stressors such as unemployment, financial insecurity, and lack of housing.” (ibid: 241) In terms of newly arrived immigrants, individual experiences of pain of family separation, feelings of loneliness, social exclusion and isolation add up to stress of migrants (Raijman and Schammah-Gesse 2003; Parreñas 2001; Chavez 1991; Çelik 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997).

The mental health scholarship establishes that social networks are essential for the physical and emotional well-being of individuals (Jerusalem et al. 1996; House 1981; Pugliesi and Shook 1998). In their research with East German refugees in West Berlin,

Jerusalem and his colleagues (1996:241) found out that friendship networks “can have beneficial effects on psychosocial adaptation, wellbeing, and health” of the refugees. Yet, in the migration scholarship, the relationship between social networks and emotional well-being of migrants is under-theorized, because migration scholarship tends to focus more on migrants’ work-related experiences.

Migrants’ settlement and incorporation, which are emotionally challenging processes, are facilitated by support and care mechanisms of social networks (Aranda 2003; Boyd 1989). For migrants, “networks of family and friends act as support systems, by nurturing emotional needs and providing care and support.” (Aranda 2003:614) Strong ties, in this sense, create “a feeling of being cared and belonging,” which helps migrants in their adjustment and incorporation to the host societies.

Migrants’ needs and concerns throughout their settlement and incorporation stages are also shaped by individual-level factors (age, marital status, gender, immigrant status, race, nationality, class, and so on) and contextual factors (structural conditions in the receiving countries such as immigration policies, labor market structure, bilateral treaties and labor recruitment, and so on). Regarding migrant adaptation, Chavez (1991:272) argued that for undocumented immigrants, “feeling themselves a part of the community is related to how well they have overcome feelings of isolation, developed a network of family and friends in the local community, acquired local cultural knowledge, and reconciled themselves to the possible threat of deportation.” In investigating psychological adjustment Latin American female immigrants’ in the United States, (Freidenberg, Imperiale and Skovron 1988) found that Latino women’s well-being was worse than that of men’s. The changes in work status, disruption of networks with

migration, and for women who migrated with children, loss of informal support with children and household care, were the possible stressors for women migrants. For further studies, Freidenberg and her colleagues recommended that whether these results would differ in terms of marital status of women given that never-married women would be more negatively influenced by migration given that disruption of social networks would be more dramatic for single women.

Given that emotional well-being of migrants influences their functioning in their every day lives and shapes their settlement and incorporation patterns, a further investigation of the non-economic aspects of migrants' social networks from an intersectionality framework is crucial for the migration scholarship.

2.2 Migrant Transnationalism

Migrant transnationalism is defined as “the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlements. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated as ‘transmigrants.’” (Schiller et al. 1992:1) Transnationalism is not a new phenomenon (Basch, Schiller, and Black 1992; Foner 2005). Many transnationalism scholars also urge us not to confuse “internationalism” with “transnationalism” and international migration with transnational migration (Barkan 2004; Castles 2002; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002; Schiller et al. 1992; Smith 1998b; Waldinger 2008) Many transnational patterns and sources of transnationalism have a long history. However, “much is distinctive about transnationalism today,” as Foner (2005:63) explained, “is about not only because earlier patterns have been intensified but also because new processes and dynamics involved.” The intensification of transnational patterns and new processes and dynamics of

transnationalism pertain to the characteristics of the contemporary global capitalist economy and developments in communication and transportation technologies in the contemporary world. On the other hand, transmigrants denote “new forms of migrant existence.” (Schiller et al. 1992:48).

The most fundamental difference between classical immigrants and transmigrants are their settlement strategies and incorporation patterns. While earlier generations of migrants “left their homelands to settle abroad permanently,” transmigrants seek more “short-term, temporary sojourns.” (Tsuda 1991:1) As such, for transmigrants, migration does not involve a long-term commitment to the host countries:

Although today’s sojourners still end up settling in the host country, the initial intention is to remain abroad only temporarily has a significant impact on their willingness to migrate. Because many contemporary migrants can return home at a moment’s notice—as long as they have money for the necessary transportation. (ibid)

Also, the intensity and frequency of transnational practices, activities, and transactions that transnational immigrants engage in differentiates them from international migrants. Indeed, the advancements in transportation and communication technologies and declining real costs of transportation and communication capacitated migrants to have more rapid transportation and more frequent communication with their home countries (Barkan 2004; Castles 2002; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002; Schiller, Basch and Blanc 1992; Smith 1998b; Schuerkens 2005; Waldinger 2008). However, cheaper and more accessible travel and communications are not the reasons or motivations for transnational migration; rather, they are “contributing mechanisms for it.” (Goldring 1998:166)

Schiller et al. (1995:50) outlined “three conjoining potent forces in the global economy” as the reasons that lead migrants to “settle in countries that are centers of global capitalism, but to live transnational lives:

- (1) A global restructuring of capital based on changing forms of capital accumulation has led to deteriorating social and economic conditions in both labor sending and labor receiving countries with no location a secure terrain of settlement;
- (2) racism in both the U.S. and Europe contributes to the economic and political insecurity of the newcomers and their descend-ants;
- and (3) the nation building projects of both home and host society build political loyalties among immigrants to each nation-state in which they maintain social ties.

This description locates the transnational individuals at the “economically peripheral states” or less-industrialized states whose economies largely depend on the countries of foreign investment that were harshly influenced by “intensive penetration of foreign capital” and produced “massive growth of indebtedness and economic retrenchment” with the forces of global economic restructuring (Schiller et al. 1995:50). Consequently, “faced with wide-spread deterioration in their standards of living, professionals, skilled workers, unskilled workers, merchants, and agricultural producers all have fled to global cities or to countries such as the U.S. that still play central roles in capital accumulation.” (ibid)

Schiller et al.’s description of reasons behind transnational migration also exclusively is concerned with individuals who seek it primarily for economic reasons. As Cheng and Gusrang (2008) identified, transnational people can also be individuals who belong to a network of activists working together as part of a socialist movement in order to promote artistic, social, environmental, and technological projects and thus advance a specific social movement. In addition, transnational individuals can be composed of

forced migrants such as deportees, exiles, refugees, and asylum seekers, whose geographical dislocations can be exemplified as involuntary transnational movements (Golash-Boza 2013; Nolin 2006; Shemak 2011). Furthermore, work and travel program participants, international students and au pairs, who seek to increase their human capital abroad, also can be grouped under transnational migrants (Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Waters 2008). For these groups, transnational migration opens the door for the accumulation of human capital through acquisition of education, foreign language studies, and training abroad, which translates into higher social mobility, and economic capital and social recognition (Massey et al. 1994; Portes 1998; Waters 2008; Williams and Baláz 2005).

Despite these variations in the reasons behind their transnational migration, what different groups of transnational individuals have in common is their effort to construct transnational agencies and belongings.

2.2.1 Transmigrant Agency

Transmigrant agency refers to immigrants' resistance to the economic, social, political, and cultural forces of domination they faced in the home and receiving countries through negotiating their identities, engaging in transnational ties and practices and the creating of "new social spaces that span at least two nations (Mahler 1998:67). These social spaces, what Faist (2000:4) defined as *transnational spaces*, "denote relatively stable, enduring and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states."

The embeddedness of "a dialectic of domination and resistance" in the every day lives of transmigrants is explained in reference to two concepts: *transnationalism from*

above and *transnationalism from below*. Transnationalism from above refers to the transnational activities of macro-level structures such as multinational corporations and media processes such as commodification, that are dominated by powerful elites “who seek, although not necessarily find, political, economic and social dominance in the works.” (Mahler 1998:66-7) In “contradistinction” to the dominating forces of transnationalism from above, transnationalism from below “generates multiple and counter-hegemonic powers among non-elites” (ibid: 67) Therefore, transnationalism from below is the creation of transnational social spaces “that is fundamentally grounded in the daily lives, activities, and social relationships’ of quotidian actors.” (Schiller et al. 1992:5) Through “transnational social spaces,” everyday people can create change, though this is much less frequently recognized than the powers enjoyed by the macro-structural forces such as capitalist expansion, mass media, and patriarchy.” (Mahler 1998:67) As such, through transnational processes transmigrants “can generate creole identities and agencies that challenge multiple level[s] of structural control: local, regional, national, and global.” (ibid:68) As Mahler (1998:69) stated, the transnationalism from below vision is profoundly a democratic, liberating and empowering process as it is depicted as “a balm for those who see the world as hopelessly headed for homogeneity imposed by Western cultural and economic imperialism.”

2.2.2 Transnational Networks

Transnational networks are the “the overlapping and contested material, cultural and political flows and circuits that bind different places together through differentiated relations of power.” (Featherstone, Phillips, and Waters 2007:386) Transnationalism scholars emphasized numerous roles of these networks from facilitating migrants’

economic, social and political incorporation in the host societies (Batnitzky, McDodell, and Dyer 2008; Featherstone, Phillips, and Waters 2007; Freedman and Tarr 2000) to maintaining political, national, and social membership of migrants in their home societies, which can intervene in the daily lives of non-migrants in these societies (Smart and Smart 1998; Smith 1998).

In addition, transnational networks show instrumental functions prior to migration, which overlap with the social networks of migrants. In her study, for example, Morokvasic (2004:13) reported that more than half of the Eastern European transmigrants, who were short-term commuter laborers and suitcase traders, relied on “transnational networks of friends, formed on the basis of shared experiences of working in the target country, traveling the same distances, investing in the same spaces and dealing with the same intermediaries (travel agents, guides, recruiters, lodgers, train attendants, borderguards, customs officers, shop owners).” For these reasons, transnational networks can be categorized as a subset of migrant networks that span across borders and connect migrants with non-migrants, migrants or potential migrants. Subsequent to migration, transnational networks have pivotal roles for the migrants in coping with the forces of assimilation and incorporation, the formation of *transnational communities* and sustenance of transnational practices.

2.2.3 Transmigrants’ Incorporation Patterns

Through engaging in transnational ties and practices, transmigrants keep their ties with their home countries. For this reason, “transnational perspectives of migration,” Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997:539) wrote, have challenged [the assumptions of] the “typical assimilationist model,” which assumes that once migrants enter a new country,

they break the ties with their country of origin and engage in the processes of acculturation and assimilation (Barkan 2004; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002).

Transmigrants, on the other hand, do not necessarily break their ties with the home country but “redefine” them. While transmigrants “gain dual embeddedness through which they simultaneously function in sending and receiving countries” (Milutinovic 2008: 93), they are not fully immersed in both societies. Indeed, “people who think and live transnationally may thwart the forces of assimilation, build ethnic identities that were problematic if not possible to sustain within one nation-state and challenge the power of states to control their movements and interests.” (Mahler 1998:85)

Transmigrants’ sociocultural and economic incorporation into host societies is shaped by interplay of individual- and structural-level factors. Marrow (2005) stated that that residential location, intergroup contacts, intermarriage rates, and ethnic identification and feelings of “social distance” measure immigrants’ sociocultural incorporation. Maxwell (2008) also explained that immigrants’ expectations for incorporation and attitudes towards incorporation are interrelated. As such, “when migrants with high expectations face incorporation difficulties, they will be more likely to develop pessimistic attitudes” toward incorporating to the host societies (ibid: 387). Regarding transmigrants’ sociocultural incorporation, Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002:772) claimed that the more an immigrant perceives his or her experience in the country of reception in negative terms—such as racial discrimination and social segregation— the stronger identification s/he will have with the country of origin and engage in transnational practices. As the end, negative perception of social and cultural interactions in the host societies would lead transmigrants to be less socioculturally incorporated into host

societies than into their home countries.

Economic incorporation of transmigrants is shaped by interplay of several factors pertaining to the social locations of migrants, institutional forces and contextual factors such as immigration policies. Ong's (1999) Asian elites, for example, were enabled by their class positions and economic capital to perform flexible citizenship strategies. While they maintained a stable identification with their cultures, they were mentally and physically mobile. Basch et al. (1994:150) also explained that building transnational personal networks is a reaction to economic and legal insecurity and racial exclusion in host countries and helps transmigrants "maintain or improve their economic circumstances, reinforce or raise their social standing, and validate their self-esteem." The female Latina domestic workers in Israel in Rajjman and Schammah-Gesse's study (2003:732), for example, were disabled by their undocumented status and lack of economic capital to perform such mobilities. The researchers observed that these women were engaged in frequent religious activities, which served as a "compensatory mechanism to counter marginalization, thus opening an alternative path for social mobility in an unfriendly environment."

2.2.4 Transnational Activities, Practices and Communities

Transnational networks are also vital for the formation and maintenance of transnational communities as well as performance of transnational activities and practices. Transnational communities are defined as strong, interpersonal networks "across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition." (Schmalzbauer 2008:330) These networks "strengthen and spread, and develop into larger communities of individuals who are more loosely tied to one another."

(Levitt 1999)

The transnational activities are “a normative path of adaptation” for certain immigrants, where the path is “reinforced by technologies that facilitate rapid displacement across long distances and instant communication.” (Portes 1997:813)

Transnational activities are diverse and operate at different levels (individual, institutional, and so on). They can be manifested as mundane activities (communicating with home, following news, and so on) as well as more structured, comprehensive involvements at the political (homeland political engagement through migrant organization), economic (migrant remittances and investments in their home countries), social, or religious levels (Ong 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen 2004; Portes 1997, 2001; Vertovec 2009). The types of transnational activities migrants engage also reflect the life stages of the actors, “whether satellite television viewing among elderly refugees or instant messaging among young Internet-literate migrants.” (Burrell 2009:35)

Investigating the content of transnational activities in transnational social fields, Mahler (1998:82) argued that most research has focused on a limited set of transnational and practices and also did not provide “a clear picture of the breadth of the social field, nor of the or intensity of players’ participation in all the activities people engage in.” Referring to the ethnographic study of Basch et al. (1992), which reported transnational activities of political campaigns and voluntary associations, she asked “how representative of the social field are these activities, and how representative of the entire migrant population are the participants in these activities” are unanswered.” (ibid)

Consequently, Mahler (1998: 81) stated that a set of basic research questions, listed below, should be investigated for a systematic evaluation of migrants’ transnational

activities:

First step is to cast a wide net and document all the ways individuals, groups, and institutions foster and maintain relations across borders...Typical activities identifies will include remittances, communications (letters, tapes, telephone calls, videos, e-mails), travel home, for local festivals, business enterprises, hometown association projects, cultural movements, government initiatives, cultural exchanges and political movements. Then, I suggest grouping these activities by participants. Which are performed by most immigrants? Which by select individuals or groups? Of the select activities, would participants like to perform them, and are they precluded by certain constraints (legal, economic, etc.), or, do they choose not to participate?

These research questions would not only help identify patterns in actors and identities, but also stipulate “an understanding of the existence of barriers/aids that structure transnational activities” (ibid:82) and how transmigrants’ agency can be constrained or enabled by these barriers and/or aids.

2.2.5 Transnational Mobilities: Transmigrants’ Settlement Patterns

Although transmigrants are defined as temporary sojourners, some tend to settle down longer than they planned or permanently in the countries of reception. Transnational migrants, particularly the ones motivated for economic advancement, “begin as target earners” (Piore 1979), “seeking to earn as much money as possible in order to recoup their initial investment, attain a predetermined income goal, and return home and parent.” (Massey et al. 1994:1498). However, “each act of migration generates a set of irreversible changes in individual motivations, social structures, and cultural values that alter the context within which future migration decisions are made.” (Massey et al. 1994:1498) Once the primary targets are met, migrants may not return home due to changes in their tastes and motivations, which might create new ambitions for upward

mobility (Piore 1979; Massey et al. 1994). In addition, if economic hardship in their home economies does not improve, economic transmigrants tend to overstay due to economic dependency of their household members on their foreign salaries (Çelik 2011; Raijman and Schammah-Gesser 2003).

In addition, there can be multiple forms of transnational mobilities, and the extent of immigrants' mobilities is shaped by social locations of the immigrants (social class, gender, immigration status, and so on) as well as the immigration policies of the host countries. Undocumented immigrant workers are blocked from performing frequent physical movements as a result of fear of deportation and their lack of resources to afford traveling home (Bagchi 2001; Çelik 2011; Raijman and Schammah-Gesser 2003) whereas transnational highly skilled professionals and businessmen undoubtedly perform greater levels of mobility, and thus, diverse settlement patterns, as they are not limited by such barriers (Bühlmeier, Goetzke and Salvo 2011; Nowicka 2006; Ong 1999). Indeed, Morokvasic (2002:9) criticized transnational migration scholars for theorizing one form of transnational mobility, long-term mobility, because they “overwhelmingly focus on durability and sustainability of transnational links over time” which “leaves little room to capture the phenomena of short-term transnational mobility.” (ibid:8) In her study with Polish shuttle traders, who travel across on tourist visas, she found out that short-term transnational mobility became a strategy not primarily for economic survival, but also for maintaining their middle-class status through “consum[ing] goods which otherwise would be inaccessible: housing, housing equipment, cars and fashionable clothing.” (ibid:15) These transmigrant traders “tend to settle within mobility” “rather than trying to immigrate and settle”; in her terms, they were “settled-in-mobility,” which means

“staying mobile as long as they can in order to improve or maintain the quality of life at home.” (ibid:8)

2.3 Theorizing Transmigrants’ Agency, Networks and Practices

For network theory and transnationalism scholarship, social networks, whether operating at the local or at the transnational levels, are key to understand everyday experiences and activities of transmigrants. Both literatures tend to take an understanding of these networks in terms of their functionality in being the sources of social capital, affecting migrants’ transmigration experiences positively. While networks theory underestimates non-economic outcomes of these networks, transnationalism scholarship overemphasizes the importance of these networks in terms of empowering and liberating transmigrants. However, as shown in several transnational ethnographic studies and (Morokvasic 2007:69) argued, “migrants are situated within power hierarchies – which shape the ways people think and act - that they have not themselves constructed (class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, immigrant status, etc.). But, they also develop different types of agency vis-à-vis these hierarchies from their different social locations within structural conditions that are both constraining and enabling.” Thus, there are several unanswered questions or overlooked analyses in existing transnationalism scholarship that needs to be investigated for theorizing transmigrants’ agencies, networks and practices.

First, transnational migration, studies provide a gender-blind framework, or simply treat gender as a categorical variable, rather than “as a construct that organizes social life.” (Pessar and Mahler 2003) Although women outnumbered men in migration contemporaneously, migration is still treated as a gender-neutral process (Alicea 1997;

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mahler 1998; Morokvasic 2007; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Vertovec 1999). Participation into transnational network, practices, and communities and daily experience of transmigrants are largely gendered. For instance, women face gender discrimination and oppression in the host societies, and their transnational practices and strategies (to cope with their loss of social status in segregated labor markets, with the experience of illegality, with the disruption of family life for those mothers who leave their children behind, and so on) are patterned along gender lines (Raijman and Schammah-Gesser 2003; Pessar 1999, Tastsoglou and Miedema 2003).

Indeed, Boyle (2002:535) argued that women and men experience transnational migration differently and “transnational migration itself impacts upon gender relations and, more specifically, the social reproduction of gender in transnational spaces.” Many migration scholars reported positive outcomes of international migration for empowerment of women because it allows women to escape discrimination and oppression structures they face in their gendered lives, and gives them the opportunity to have more independent lives and to restore self-respect (Freedman and Tarr 2000; Kofman 2000). At the same time, women enter new gender hierarchies in the receiving countries. Women immigrants can transform or affirm existing gender hierarchies and relationships through the experience of transnationalism (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Mahler 1996; Menjivar 1999). For that reason, it is important to ask how, then, women redefine their gender identity and negotiate the gender expectations and oppression they face in host and home societies through engaging in transnational mobilities.

Second, although transnationalism scholarship emphasized the agency of migrants in building and maintaining transnational lives, some scholars (Bailey, Wright, Mounts, and Miyares 2002; Castles 2002) argued that “theorization of agency” is still, in Freedman and Tarr’s (2000:5) words, “a blind spot” in transnationalism scholarship. Particularly, women are “still represented as victims, trapped in traditional lifestyles and unable to express their agency” (ibid), partly because their experiences are perceived mostly “in simplistic dualistic terms of domination/subordination.”(Silverman 1992:13) Indeed, Predelli (2004:474) argued that women migrants “can become marginalized in some areas, but they may gain ability and power to act in other areas.”

Third, immigrants are seen as “unified homogenous cultures,” when in fact there are vast differences of transnationalism experiences across different, and even within the same, immigrant communities. These differences, which are structured by their social locations, dramatically shape their involvement in transnational activities and networks (Boyle 2002; Lutz 1992; Silverman 1992; Wihtol de Wenden 1998). In addition to gender, Mahler (1998) argued that in order to avoid essentializing and homogenizing diverse experiences of migrants, new research should consider how race, ethnicity, generation, mobility, race, ethnicity, national origin, regionality, and religion structure their experiences.

Finally, the bulk of the studies of transnational migration have focused on one particular migrant group, such as Asians or Mexicans, which limits our understanding of how nationality and/or ethnicity shape the transmigration experience (Anthias 1012; Castles 2002; Mahler 1998). Mahler (1998:86) argued that regionality plays an important role in transnationalism because “some migrant groups can be larger and may differ

significantly from others along demographic lines; some are older and have more established institutions and so on. Consequently, the transnational linkages these subpopulations form are also likely to vary.” As such, she offered that introducing comparative studies of different migrant groups would “yield both a more textured comprehension of transnationalism (i.e., its depth as well as its breadth) and insight into the roles that demographic variables play in the building and reproduction of transnational social fields.” (ibid: 87)

The limitations in transnationalism research regarding transmigrant women’s experiences posed by transnationalism scholars motivated me to employ intersectionality and transnational feminism theoretical frameworks as the core theoretical frameworks in my ethnographic study.

2.3.1 Analytical Contributions of Intersectionality Intersectional Framework of Analysis

The intersectionality framework is a powerful tool for exploring how interlocking and intersecting systems of power shape multiple dimensions of women’s experiences of transmigrancy and their everyday strategies to cope with discriminatory practices and social exclusion. In my research, employing an intersectionality framework enables me to explore how social location and contextual factors shape transnationalism experiences of au pairs as well as their access to and extent of their social networks.

Intersectionality, as a theoretical approach, has emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in critical race studies. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) is the critical race scholar who first used the term “intersectionality,” which implied that race and gender as social divisions interact to shape multiple dimensions of Black women’s lived experiences,

particularly their oppression.

Similarly, Black feminists enunciated the intersection of race and gender in shaping women's lives and criticized White Western feminists' deployment of category of women as a "unified" category, which assumes the universality of womanhood, and thus, neglects diversity of women's identities and historical context of gender and class oppression (hooks 1984; Collins 1990). As such, Black feminists, though, drew attention to the importance of "social location" in shaping women's lives. Patricia Hill Collins (1990:59) coined the term "matrix of domination," which informs the "connections among systems of oppression" that influence individuals' everyday experiences across specific locations.

As the intersectionality has been centered in the Black feminist standpoint, it soon was adopted by several women on color feminist movements such as Chicana, post-colonial, and Third World feminisms (Anzaldúa [1987]1996; Brown 1997; Roth 2004; Mohanty 2003; Sandoval 2000; Zavella 1997). One of the problems with theorizing differences of women's experiences, according to these feminist movements, is the tendency to naturalizing the differences between women, because difference of non-Western and non-White women is constructed through an explicit opposition to Western and White women through "negation and repression." (Scott 1988)

The intersectionality approach, as explained by Collins (1991), informs us that the everyday life experiences of individuals are shaped by social and material locations (unique biographies) and group membership of individuals. At the individual level, as Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman (2005:530) stated, "identities of ethnicity, gender, race and class, among other, interconnect" and "individuals suffer exclusions on the basis

of race and gender, or any other combination.” At the group level, individuals’ everyday life experiences are shaped by their shared experiences and histories.

However, intersectionality framework acknowledges for us that constraints of many social structures creates both opportunities to and oppression of marginalized groups (Dill and Zambrana 2009). Because these social categories are socially constructed, “they are not reducible to immutable personality traits or other seemingly permanent characteristics.” (Weber 1999:24) “Almost all of us occupy both dominant and subordinate positions and experience both advantage and disadvantage in these hierarchies”, therefore, “there are no pure oppressors or oppressed in our society.” (ibid:24) Despite their subordinated social position and lack of institutional power, “subordinate group members,” Weber wrote (1999:21), “can and do use other forms of personal power and collective action to resist unfair treatment and to struggle for group power.” These ‘daily acts of resistances’ “can range from the individual psychological process of rejecting negative group images and affirming positive group images to group activities designed to produce social change.” (ibid:21)

Nash (2008:2) articulated that intersectionality serves three main theoretical and political purposes: (1) it subverts binary categorizations “in the service of theorizing identity in a more complex fashion”; (2) it highlights the intra-group differences; and, (3) it invites scholars to hear the voices of multiply marginalized subjects from their accounts, who have been long excluded from feminist and anti-racial scholarship.

Accordingly, I suggest that integrating an intersectionality framework of analysis to network theory and transnationalism scholarship for exploring how social networks shape transmigration experiences of women is indispensable. As such, in this study I

employ an intersectionality framework analysis for investigating how intersections of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, marital status, and social class determine au pairs' access to and their extent of social networks in the United States among the same migrant groups and across different migrant groups. Second, I use this framework to investigate au pairs' social status in the American host families and in the United States in general because like women domestic migrants, their status are shaped in terms of their lower racial, ethnic, social class position in negation primarily to their female employers (Glenn 1992), and then to the citizens of the host society, whose gender-, race-, ethnicity-, and social class statuses puts them into privileged positions.

2.3.2 Analytical Contributions of Transnational Feminist Framework of Analysis

As stated earlier, “agency” of immigrants is under-theorized in transnationalism scholarship (Morokvasic 2003, 2004; Williams and Baláž 2004). Regarding representations of women's experiences in migration literature, Freedman and Tarr (2000:5) stated, “women are still represented as victims, trapped in traditional lifestyles and unable to express their agency.” Stone-Mediator (2003:126) also addressed that manifestation of such repressive, ideological discursive practices in theorizing the experiences of marginal women does not only “disempower women by representing them as mere victims or dependents,” but also disregards how objectification of marginalized women “is located within and supported by far reaching economic and legal institutions.”

On the other hand, in telling stories of marginalized women, transnational feminists are concerned with “systematic relations of domination” because “they recognize that the current global economy, with its transnational corporations, capital mobility, and international division of labor, has exacerbated (even while it has

complicated) race, class, sex, and gender hierarchies.” (Stone-Mediator 2003:129)

However, marginalized women do not internalize their repression and subordination because “although the social practices and political hierarchies are mediated by language practices and although they do not define our inner nature, they do profoundly affect our daily choices and concerns.” (ibid) For this reason, employing a transnational feminist framework as an analytical tool is vital for exploring historicized and contextualized accounts of transmigrant women because it seeks to uncover women’s agency rather than reproducing powerlessness images of women. In doing so, transnational feminist analysis addresses “the multiple and interlocking kinds of power relationships that affect women’s lives within and across national boundaries” and “explores [the] concrete ways that the most disempowered people can use resources in their everyday lives to challenge the discourses and the institutions that keep them in subservient positions.” (ibid)

Prominent transnational feminist scholar Mohanty (2003b:23) problematized the construction of the third world women as “a homogenous” and “powerless” group [which] is often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems.” She stated that Third World women are represented “as victims of male violence, as universal independents, victims of the colonial process, victims of the Islamic code, and finally, victims of the economic development programs” (ibid: 23), which she called as “the play of discursive colonialism in the production of Third World Woman as a singular monolithic subject.” (ibid 2003:194). As a result, “this mode of feminist analysis, by homogenizing and systematizing the experiences of different groups of women in these countries, erases all marginal and resistant modes of experiences” and also “limits the theoretical analysis as well as reinforces Western cultural imperialism.” (ibid:41) In other

words, it invokes a narrative of “double colonization” (Pethersen and Rutherford 1986).

Similarly, transnational feminist scholar Kim-Puri (2005:151) argued that “the universalization of discourses” not only obscures “certain subjectivities” constructed by such hegemonic discourses, but also produces “material inequalities” (“who is considered a subject and therefore has access to social resources, who is made invisible and therefore denied, who is seen as a victim and therefore in need of rescue.”). As Mohanty (2003b:143) suggested, a reconceptualization of Third World women as agents rather than victims can lead feminist scholars to “think about the possibilities of emancipatory action,” and she added:

It is, in fact, the predicament of poor working women and their experiences of survival and resistance in the creation of new organizational forms to earn a living and improve their daily lives that offers new possibilities to struggle and action. (ibid:161)

Mohanty also articulated that Third World women do not constitute a coherent group of women, but that they are from different countries with economic, political, racial, and cultural differences. Women’s subject position needs to be reformulated by underscoring their subject positions within multiple hierarchies of power structures. In doing so, “historicizing and locating political agency is a necessary alternative to formulations of the “universality” of gendered oppression and struggles.” (Mohanty 2003a:461)

In order to explore the experience of Third World women workers, Mohanty suggested that “we must pay attention to the specificities of their/our common and different histories” (2003b:168) so that we can understand the diversity and plurality of resistance and struggle of women. In relation to this, she exemplified how Bangladeshi home-

workers in the clothing industry in the English West Midlands use family and community ties to negotiate for better wages and shorter-working hours, and Gujarati women factory workers in East Midlands hosiery industry used shop floor culture to generate solidarity and resistance. Regarding these examples, she suggested that case studies of the “incorporation of Third World women into a global division of labor at different geographical ends of the current world order” require a comparative methodology. This comparative methodology should take “a historically delineated category of ‘women’s work’” as an example of a productive and necessary basis for feminist cross-cultural analysis and be able to “historicize and locate political agency.”(2003b:142) Therefore, she set across-cultural feminist projects, which can provide an “alternative to formulations of the “universality” of gendered oppression and struggles.” (Mohanty 2003a:461)

In the light of transnational feminists’ arguments presented in this section, I frame my analysis of transmigrant agency by transnational feminism in three ways. First, I historicize and contextualize au pairs’ participation to the international division of reproductive labor through au pair programs in the United States in Chapter 1 by considering how post-communist transition in Eastern and Central Europe accompanied by global restructuring influenced their social and economic status and led them to leave their countries. Second, in presenting their social status in American host families’ households, I analyze everyday resistance of au pairs to oppressive and exploitative practices of their employers by describing their resistance strategies in Chapter 5. Third, I describe the limitations and extent of their agency in their incorporation and settlement strategies in order to construct better lives for themselves.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology, data collection methods, data analysis procedures and study participants' profile. This project is designed to explore how transmigrant women exercise their agency and implement social networks in building and maintaining transnational mobilities by examining their everyday struggles and resistances. As suggested by Mahler (1998) and Pessar and Mahler (2003), transnational migration experiences of women are gendered, and thus, feminist ethnography is the most suitable approach for writing and textualizing their "culturally diverse knowledges and socially negotiated experiences" of transnationalism from below (Harrison 2007:23). In addition, feminist ethnography enable researchers to accentuate women's voices, experiences, and agency in relation to the sociocultural and economic contexts in which they are situated (ibid:24), and investigate the role of stories in struggles of resistance against exploitative and oppressive relations (Stone-Mediatore 2003:127).

As Naples asserted, the methods the researchers choose and how these methods are employed are "profoundly shaped by our epistemological stance" (2003:3). As such, I employed in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group conversations in exploring how women make meaning about their transmigrancy experiences.

3.1. Methodology: Feminist Ethnography

Ethnography is ideally situated to feminist research because "its contextual, experiential approach to knowledge eschews the false dualism of positivism, and drawing

upon such traditionally female strengths as empathy and human concern, allows for egalitarian, reciprocal relationship between the knower and known.” (Stacey 1988:21) By false dualism of positivism, feminist scholars refer to the binary positioning of an “object-subject” relationship, which creates an asymmetrical power relationship between the researcher and the researched subjects with the claim that researchers can create objective empirical analyses of the research subjects. Postmodern and poststructuralist feminists, such as Joan Scott (1999) and Donna Haraway (1988), debunked the objective knowledge production claims of Western scientific knowledge by asserting that *vision* and *positionality* of the researcher, indeed, produce subjective accounts of the researched subjects. Scott problematized the constructed nature and *situatedness* of knowledge through vision (1999:775-776) by stating that:

“Knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct apprehension of a world of transparent objects. In this conceptualization, the visible is privileged; writing is then put at its service. Seeing is the origin of knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission—the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience.”

Similarly, Haraway asserted that subjectivity, as well as vision, are multi-dimensional, and offered an alternative epistemological approach, which can replace objective truth claims by terms such as “partial, locatable, critical knowledges.” (1988:581) As such, objectivity in feminist perspective means, “quite simply situated knowledges.” (1988:581) In other words, “*experience* is not a truth that precedes culturally given representations of experience but is actually mediated by those representations.” (Stone-Mediatore 1998:117) Harding argued that “introducing this subjective element [*positionality of the researcher*] into the analysis in fact increases the

objectivity of the research and decreases the objectivism” through conscious researcher *reflexivity* and *intersubjectivity* (1987:9).

Unlike traditional ethnographers, feminist ethnographers strive for “more reciprocal and less mystical relationships” through reflexivity and intersubjectivity to their relationships with their subjects, which are the organizing principles of feminist methodologies (Bloom 1997:111) By subjectivity, Bloom explains that the “researchers are urged to be aware of and disclose their own histories, values, and assumptions that they bring into the field” which “decrease the sense that they are neutral, objective observers” and “increase their awareness of how knowledge is produced in a relationship, within specific dynamics of power and positionality.” (1997:112) During data collection stages, I sought to incorporate subjectivity to my interactions with my research participants in two ways. First, in my initial encounter with a study participant I acknowledged facts about my personal and academic backgrounds to my participant. I explained that my interest in writing the lives of au pairs who are seeking a transnational settlement strategy derived from my own personal experience as a babysitter and a transnational, my academic interest in understanding the lives of women in post-communist societies, and my feminist activist agenda, which aims to be an agent of making the voices of marginalized women heard. This introduction extended into a conversation where my study subjects asked various questions about my personal background. Second, I sought to share my findings with my study participants through focus group conversations in order to create more subjective accounts of my participants’ experiences. For example, when my participants narrated that they felt freer in the United States, it resonated with my own gendered experience of patriarchal authority in my

home country. When I brought up this theme in a focus group conversation, however, my participants explained that by freedom they meant the lack of privacy, which was a social manifestation of the communist regime in their everyday lives. As such, integrating conscious researcher reflectivity into my data collection methods enabled my research participants to actively be involved in the knowledge production process.

Intersubjectivity is defined as “placing the researcher on the same plane as the researched” (Harding 1987). Conventional ethnography, for ethnical and political reasons, were criticized to embody an exploitative relationship because it involves the exercise of power by researchers over practitioners (or at least serves to the interest of researchers rather than those of the people shared).” (Hammesley 1992:146) Klein argued, “a methodology that allows for women studying women in an interactive process will end in the exploitation of women as research objects” (1983: 95). I sought to build a reciprocal relationship with my subjects, rather than a relationship where my relationship with my research subjects ended at the termination of an interview or participant observation visit. I believe that my relationship with my study participants, which involved sharing of intimacy, emotions and empathy, were more than an artificial interest in learning about their lives. I did not seek to build intimate friendships with the participants in order to get the most information from them. Yet, when such close relationships sprang based on mutual experiences, care and feelings, I did not enforce the “researched and the researched” distance.

Building intersubjective relationships with my participants also shaped my level of involvement in their lives. Being relatively older and having expressed my feminist agenda, I was seen as an older sister, and even as a therapist for some of my participants,

which allowed them to share their intimate feelings, concerns and problems with me. Also, at the end of the initial interviews, many participants asked me if I was knowledgeable about various topics, that were relevant to their concerns, such as how to connect with other co-nationals, how they could get schooling in the host country during their stay, how to find their way around in the city, and so on. At those times, I shared practical information I gathered through my experience with other participants and living in the same metropolitan area for over six years. In addition, I facilitated networking of newcomers, who felt lonely upon arrival in the country, with their fellow co-nationals when they asked if I knew any au pairs from their nationalities and invited them to our social gatherings in the weekends.

Worth noting, too, is the fact that although I was no longer a complete “outsider,” particularly for five informants with whom I developed close friendships during the course of data collection, I reminded them that I was keeping field notes of their narratives and interactions I observed. For example, when I moved to the same neighborhood with Ivanna in the last year of data collection, the frequency of our social interactions with her increased. Particularly after she stopped her friendship with her best friend, she started coming to my apartment more often, taking me with her to the activities, and sharing her intimate feelings with me. One night she called me in tears, and said, “I have never told this to anybody, but I can’t keep it inside anymore. I can only trust you. I was raped ten years ago.” After her intimate confession over the phone, she told me the entire story the next day. I decided that she needed professional help, and helped her find and contact the Rape Crisis Center where she could get individual and group therapy sessions. Once she started to feel better, I asked her whether she felt

comfortable about me having this story in my dissertation as I found it relevant. In similar situations where my informants “forgot” that my initial and primary purpose of involvement in their lives was to conduct my research, and shared their intimate stories with me, I asked how of much of the information I could use in my research.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Ethnographic data collection methods for this study included in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus group conversations.

3.2.1 In-depth interviews, Interview Questionnaire and Procedures

The primary data collection method in this study is in-depth interviews with women of formerly Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, who work as au pairs in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area. Stating that transnational feminist analysis overwhelmingly employ textual and discursive analysis, Kim-Puri (2005) argued that empirical research using interviews provides “representations of how meaning is constituted within the context of research” not because cultural discourses “are false or less than real,” but rather that empirical research can acknowledge “how subjects make meaning about social practices and relations.” (Kim-Puri 2005: 149)

The interviews consisted of initial interviews conducted between November 2009 and July 2011, and follow-up interviews during January and November in 2012. Initially, I sought to interview only women who were currently in the Cultural Exchange Program and working as au pairs. I conducted my first interview with a Ukrainian au pair, who

switched to an F-1⁹ student visa after the termination of her two-year au pair program, and continued to live with and work for her second host family while attending a community college. During our 3-hour of interview, she informed me that the majority of her au pair friends who originated from Central and Eastern Europe countries extended their stays once they completed the au pair programs. She informed me that these au pairs extended their stays by applying for a student visa, and once they completed their degrees, they re-extended their stays through the Optional Practical Training Program (OPT)¹⁰, an H-1B work visa¹¹, or got married and obtained permanent residency.

Given that my research was designed to explore how social networks help au pairs build a transnational life style, I revised my target population and participant selection criteria, and sought to recruit participants who entered the United States as au pairs via the Cultural Exchange Program, and currently residing in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area. Thus, my sample constituted former and recent au pairs who were

⁹ The U.S. Department of State defines the eligibility for a student visa as follows: “In general, for academic students attending a university, college, high school, private elementary school, seminary, conservatory or other academic institutions, including a language training program, an F visa is the appropriate category. For students attending vocational or other recognized nonacademic institutions, other than a language training program, an M visa is generally the appropriate category.” Source: <http://travel.state.gov/>

¹⁰ “Students who are authorized for Optional Practical Training (OPT) must have an I-20 endorsed for OPT, and provide a USCIS-issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD). When authorized, Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment that is directly related to the eligible F-1 student’s area of study.” Source: <http://travel.state.gov/>

¹¹ H-1B work visa is a non-immigrant temporary work visa that allows foreigners to be employed by U.S. companies. This visa is designed to be used for staff in specialty occupations and is subject to annual numerical limits for extensions of employment. The foreigners must hold at least a Bachelor’s degree in the specialty of the occupation for which they apply for the visa.

either: 1) at different stages of the au pair program (newcomers and au pairs at later stages of the program); 2) holding F-1 student visas; 3) enrolled in the OPT Program after completing degrees in American educational institutions; 4) holding H-1B work visas; and 5) obtained Green Cards through marriage with an American citizen.

The snowball sampling method was employed for the recruitment of the study participants. I reached my first study participant through a friend of my colleague, for whom the interviewee worked as an occasional babysitter. After our interview, she connected me with au pair friends of hers whom she met either through regular au pair agency meetings, her own networks, or in the community college she was attending. As I met new au pairs, they referred me to their friends. In some cases, the referees initially talked to their friends on my behalf and described my study, and upon approval of their friends, provided me with their e-mails, cell phone numbers, or Facebook profile names of the volunteering friends. Upon approval of the referee, I sent them the following informatory message:

Привет (*Hello*) (Name)! I am a friend of X (referring friend). I am recently a doctorate student at the University of Maryland. I am Turkish, and I am writing my dissertation research on au pairs in the D.C. area. My dissertation topic is about the experiences of au pairs from post-communist states who live in the Metropolitan D.C. area. X told me that you would be helpful. What I do is meet you in your free time for an informal interview, lasting 1-3 hours, in a convenient place to you, and listen to your life story and experiences as an au pair in America. I would be very thankful if you would like to participate to my research! You can either reply to my message through Facebook, call me at 706-614-0782, or email me back at nihalcelik1980@gmail.com. Looking forward to hearing from you!
Best, Nihal Çelik

In other cases, during my participant observation visits, I met the potential informants in an event or friend's gathering that I accompanied with my study

participants. On these occasions, the study participants introduced me to their au pair friends. In both cases, reaching potential informants through introduction of my study participants was particularly helpful in establishing relationships and trust with the potential participants who may have preferred not to share their personal stories with a complete stranger.

In the recruitment process, a total of five au pairs whom I contacted through e-mail or Facebook declined to participate to my study. Of the contacted au pairs through Facebook, one wrote, “I don't think that I have an interesting story to tell you”; one who chose not to participate cited time constraint as the reason to decline, and one scheduled an interview three times, and subsequently canceled. I was referred to two former au pairs who were not holding an official immigration status (overstayed without documentation); however, they never replied to my messages, for understandable reasons. The rest of the au pairs I contacted found my research topic interesting and showed enthusiasm in sharing their stories. I believe au pairs who were not satisfied with their host parents or the recruitment agencies were more interested in being interviewed because they rarely had the opportunity to talk about their program experiences to outsiders other than an au pair friend. As such, these interviews lasted usually longer than two hours.

The interviews were held at a convenient time and place for the study participants. Out of thirty study participants, twelve participants, whom I met for the first time, preferred to meet at a Starbucks Café, twelve at a restaurant, and one invited me to her apartment for the interview. Among the participants that I was initially introduced to by their friends in a gathering or event, two preferred to have the interview over Skype due to their busy schedules; one, at a playground where she takes her daughter after work;

and two came to my house.

In the beginning of each interview, I explained my background, dissertation topic, my feminist agenda that aims at reporting their marginalized experiences, resistance and struggles, and informed the participant about the issues of confidentiality and informed consent (see Appendix 1). All participants were assigned a codename of their choice. In some cases, they requested me to choose one for them. The initial interviews lasted about one-and-a-half to three hours, and were recorded by a digital voice recorder upon taking the participants' consent. The interviews were conducted in English and Russian. As a majority of my informants, excluding five au pairs from Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, were fluent in Russian, I took intensive Russian language courses throughout 2009 and 2011 in order to overcome potential language barrier issues. Acquiring an intermediate level of fluency in the Russian language helped me when interviewing a newly arrived au pair with a basic level of English fluency, and the informant did not know the English translation of a Russian word, and while attending events and gatherings for the purpose of participant observation, where most of the time study participants communicated in Russian.

I prepared and used a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions covering the pre- and post-migration life experiences of the study participants (see Appendix 2). I initiated each interview by asking them, "Can you tell me about yourself, your family, and your life at home before coming to the United States?", which was targeted to explore their personal and family background information such as age, level of education, occupation, and living arrangement. The second set of questions explored their au pairing experience, which involved their motivation to become an au

pair, their process of enrolling into the au pair program, their relationships with the agency, and their matching of their first host families in the United States. The third set of questions was targeted to explore their everyday lives and work experiences in the United States regarding their cultural, social and economic incorporation to the host society. The fourth set of questions explored their transnational transactions, networks, and communications with people left behind in their home countries. The final set of questions explored their feeling of belonging, emotional well-being, and future settlement plans. Although I had some control in how the interview was constructed by following an interview guide, I was not concerned about when each set of questions was to be asked. Therefore, while keeping the conversation with the informant flexible by letting them lead the flow of their storytelling, I interposed carefully at times when there was space for probing to get more clarification about those areas that seemed important to the respondent and asked focused questions aimed at eliciting feelings and opinions concerning the narrative, or to move to another section of the questionnaire.

Between January and November in 2012, I conducted follow-up interviews lasting from half-an-hour to two hours with the participants. The goal of these interviews was to explore if any significant changes had happened in their incorporation experiences and settlement plans. I conducted these interviews either via face-to-face, Skype, phone conversation or e-mailing, depending on the availability of the respondent. For example, four out of thirty au pairs returned to their home countries after the initial interviews. Due to their work schedules and time differences between the host and home countries, we could not set up a Skype or phone interviews. They rather preferred to answer my questions via e-mail. For those, I prepared and used a short questionnaire with open-

ended questions, which investigated their incorporation of experiences in their home societies and projection of their new settlement plans. Similarly, I arranged the format of the follow-up interviews with the rest of the participants based on their availability. All but one study participant were still residing in Washington, D.C., when I contacted them. I set up face-to-face, Skype or phone conversations with these participants and planned the date of these interviews based on their projected initial settlement plans. For example, I contacted the informants whose initial settlement plans were to finish a degree and return home, in order to see whether their settlement plans had changed after graduation. Similarly, I arranged interviews with the informants who were planning to be in the au pair program for a certain period of time (one year or two years), after a planned time period was completed, in order to see whether they changed their initial settlement plans and goals they reported during the initial interviews.

In addition to having information about their initial settlement plans through interview transcripts, I was updated about changes of their plans through their au pair friends with whom I could establish closer relationships and their Facebook status updates. Among all participants, all but one had Facebook accounts, and sent me friend requests and added me to their contact lists either before or immediately after the initial interviews. Among those, twenty-five of them were active Facebook users. Although a social network platform was not included as a data collection site in my research design, I benefited from viewing their status updates by being informed about major changes in their lives, and thus, could arrange the timing of the follow-up interviews. For example, I was informed through Facebook when one of the participants got married, and consequently arranged a Skype conversation with her to talk about the details of her

marriage story.

The types of interviewing methods employed in my follow-up interviews were informal and unstructured. I initiated each interview by recalling participants' initial settlement plans and goals that they reported in the first interviews, and then asked, "How's your life going? Has anything changed in your settlement plans since we last met?" Informal interviewing, as Hesse-Biber stated, enabled me to "uncover topics that might otherwise be overlooked by the researcher." (2007:115) For example, au pairs who were initially planning to return home extended their stay for purposes that they did not really prefer to seek. One of them applied for a student visa for the second time when she could not find a job that would grant her a work visa. When I asked why she would want to take second associate's degree, she expressed her fear of incorporation into her host society after being abroad for six years, which then led to a discussion about oppressing cultural expectations from single women in her home country. For the purposes of uncovering topics that would give important directions to my research, I sought to keep minimum control over the flow and content of the conversation in the rest of the follow-up interviews with the study participants.

3.2.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation was a supplemental data source of this research. Between November 2009 and November 2012, I took numerous participant observation trips. I kept field notes during these trips as well as after I conducted interviews with the study participants. In the initial interview, I expressed to the informants my willingness to participate in their everyday activities and received their informed consent. However, as my study participants were dispersed around the Metropolitan D.C. area, held busy work

and school schedules, they did not have regular social activities at certain venues, and the majority of them were living with their host families, making it difficult for me to connect with and follow all of them on a regular basis. Rather, I sought to develop my involvement in study participants' everyday lives and activities naturally by waiting for their invitation to their social activities.

My first participant observation took place when Nadia, my first study participant, invited me to her best friend's birthday party in their friends' house. I had met Nadia in the fall of 2009 when she was in her third year in the United States. Thus, she had large networks with other Ukrainian au pairs. Additionally, because she was studying to obtain an associate's degree, she was also acquainted with many au pairs from nationalities aside from Ukrainian. Upon meeting for our first interview, which lasted three and a half hours, she said, "Let me tell you my interesting story." Nadia explained that she had worked in two different families who did not treat her fairly. She told me that I was the first person who seemed willing to listen to her entire story with interest and without interrupting her. After interviewing Nadia, I told her that I wanted to interview other au pairs and participate to their social gatherings. She spread the word about me and it was not long before I was invited to their next social gathering; Maryana's birthday. There I met her Ukrainian friends who were former or current au pairs.

At the birthday party, I was the only non-Ukrainian girl with a "Russian look." Although I had Caucasian features (tall, skinny body, distinct cheek bones peculiar to Eastern European women) peculiar to that of Ukrainian women's, my dark and strong, curly hair stood as a direct contrast to Ukrainians' blond or light brown, straight/wavy hair. I looked more like a Georgian woman to them. Also, with my dark purple, wool

dress and flat black boots, I was more plainly dressed than many of the women there, who were wearing shiny, high-heeled red boots and night dresses. They all had freshly manicured nails, and their hair and make-up, made it appear as if they had just stepped out of a beauty salon. After speaking briefly with a few of the au pairs in the main room, Nadia took me into the kitchen to introduce me to her girlfriends: “This is Nihal. She is from Turkey. She is a student at the Maryland University. She is writing a book about my life [laughing]. She is actually writing stories of au pairs in America.”

Following this occasion, I was invited to several events, gatherings, and “hangouts” such as birthday parties, “girls-night-outs,” barbeque parties, picnics, national festivals, and Independence Day celebrations of this group. As I participated regularly in the women’s Ukrainian community for three years, I developed close friendships with a total of five study participants, and organized gatherings on the weekends for having brunch or dinner in my house, where they brought their friends and also met other au pairs through my channel.

3.2.3 Focus Group Conversations

Gatherings in my place also had been the sites for having focus group conversations with informants. As Hesse-Biber argues, for feminist researchers, focus groups are “useful in accessing the attitudes, feelings, and experiences of groups who may have been marginalized or silenced within a society,” including women of ethnic and racial minorities (2007:173). Hesse-Biber and Leavy called feminist focus groups “happenings” (2006:199); a conversation where “group members communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own terms,” and by doing so, “take part in multiple levels of knowledge-building” (Hesse-Biber 2007:173) The focus group

happenings can be an “extremely useful tool for understanding the experience of oppression—the daily experience of which may appear “second skin” to individuals and thus go partly unnoticed or interrogated” because “these daily experiences, thoughts and feelings may be repressed or quickly forgotten by members of minority groups for whom such experiences are part of daily life.” (2007:182) Daily experiences of oppression also remain “largely invisible to those culturally privileged.” As such, focus group happenings can “unearth subjugated knowledge” through focusing on “double invisibility,” which makes this critical knowledge difficult to reach.

In an informal conversation format, I could pose questions my participants in order for clarifying some themes emerged during initial analyses of data and receiving feedback on my analyses. For example, in the interviews when asked what they liked about living in the U.S., my informants expressed how they enjoyed being able to buy shoes, dresses, and drive a car in the host country. In one of the gatherings in my place, I brought this topic up to them to and initiated a two-and-a-half-hour conversation about the purchasing power and consumption patterns in the Ukraine. In a similar way, I initiated group conversations in each of these gatherings based on the themes emerged in my analyses such as gendered expectation regarding dating, marriage, family and employment practices, where they compared their lived experiences at home and the host society.

These informal focus groups, which lasted from an hour to three hours, were not only very influential in shaping my analyses through feedback and clarification, but also enabled me to provide better accounts of their lived experiences, opinions and feelings by allowing women to frame their experience in their own words, and historicize and

contextualize their experiences.

While interviewing was the primary source of my data collecting methods, participant observations and focus group conversations were important sources of supplementing my analyses as well as being influential methods to overcome social desirability bias, which was present in some initial interviews, at later stages of the data collection. For example, majority of the au pairs reported that improving their English, which was also one of the primary goals of the Cultural Exchange Program, was their primary reason in their decision to become an au pair and come to the United States. As I was involved in their everyday lives more intensively, they revealed their life stories in more detail, and other important experiences, such as in Ivanna's rape story, which they thought to be very important factors in their decision to leave their countries.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The collection of data was followed by data analysis. I transcribed all the audio files of the interviews and focus group conversations. I used the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software program for analyzing transcribed data and field notes.

The coding took three stages. In the initial stage of coding, I assigned codes to the data by the themes of the interview guide question such as "motivation to become an au pair," "life in host family's house," "future plans," "transnational networks and transactions," etc. In the second step, I sorted data by these codes, which collected all answers related to that question, and read them carefully to find emerging themes and topic. In the third step, I re-assigned codes based on the emerged themes and topics such as "meaning of transnational life style" and "*being one of the family* discourse," and so on, which became the analytical categories for the findings.

In addition, given the relatively large size of sample, I used SPSS for producing univariate descriptive analysis illustrating of study participants' demographic information such as nationality, age, family's SES background, year of arrival, total length of stay, and so on.

3.4 Study Participants' Profiles

Of thirty participants, twenty-one identified their nationality Ukrainian, three Russian, two from the Czech Republic, two Hungarians, one Georgian, and one Polish. Among three Ukrainians, two were born in the Ukraine but were raised in Georgia and Germany while the third informant was born in Germany but spent her life in different countries as her father was serving in the military in various countries before returning to the Ukraine. As such, when I refer to the nationalities and home countries of these study participants in the dissertation, I indicate both their nationality and the country they were raised. For example, a study participant who was Ukrainian but had spent her entire life in Georgia would be described as "Ukrainian/Georgia," and a study participant who identified herself as Russian but was living in Ukrainian prior to migration would be denoted as Russian/Ukraine.

The study participants arrived in the United States between the ages of 19 and 25, with a mean age of 22.3 years. At the time of final interviews, participants' ages ranged between 21 and 31, with a mean age of 26.5 years. Twenty-two of them identified their hometowns as an urban settlement (e.g., a small city, a capital city), and twenty of these participants were working or studying in the capital city of their home countries prior to migration. Eight study participants, on the other hand, identified their hometowns as a small town or village.

When asked about their social class background, 24 participants identified themselves as middle-class and 6 participants, as working-class. They defined their social class based on the highest level of education they and their parents held, their, and if they were financially dependent on their parents, their parents' ability to pay for living expenses. For example, a study participant whose parents owned their houses or were able to pay rent and living expenses regularly and could afford to pay tuition of their children would define her social class background as middle-class. Also, a study participant who could afford her own living expenses by waged-work defined herself as a middle-class person, yet, this was an uncommon situation as only two among thirty study participants were able to live independent of their family's support. On the other hand, a study participant defined herself as working-class when her parents held vocational school degrees, living on pension or earning minimum wages, and could partly contribute to the living and education expenses of their children. Thus, these study participants had to work to make a living.

Overall, the study participants had attained high levels of education, with 73.3% holding Bachelor's and graduate degrees at their home countries. The highest level of educational degrees they obtained were high school (n=5), some college¹² (n=3), Bachelor's (n=14), and Master's (n=8). Out of five high school graduates, four attended

¹² Of three who have some college degree, one attended Gymnasium, a two-year degree after high school as a preparation to university, in Germany. Other two participants attended Vocational Technical Schools, educational institutions offering two-year vocational and academic training in a profession in Central and Eastern Europe, in transportation and hospitality. I grouped these pre-university degrees into the category of "Some College."

Table 3.1 Descriptive Summary of Participants' Biographies- Self Reported

Code Name	Nationality	Age	Highest Degree Earned at Home	Social Class	Occupation Prior to Migration
Julia	Czech Republic	26	High School	Middle	Recent Graduate
Adela	Czech Republic	27	High School	Working	Help Desk Agent
Lamara	Georgia	29	High School	Middle	Au Pair
Dora	Hungary	25	Some College	Working	Waitress
Ema	Hungary	27	Some College	Working	Au Pair
Irenka	Poland	31	Masters	Working	English Teacher
Yeva	Russia	27	High School	Middle	Undergraduate Student
Sasha	Russia	28	Bachelors	Middle	Recent Graduate
Alisa	Russia	30	Bachelors	Middle	Branch Manager
Nadia	Ukraine	30	Masters	Middle	Financial Analyst
Natalka	Ukraine	27	Bachelors	Working	Graduate Student
Hanna	Ukraine	28	Bachelors	Middle	Undergraduate Student
Ioanna	Ukraine	28	Masters	Middle	Tourism Agent
Olga	Ukraine	25	Masters	Middle	Specialist in IR
Maryana	Ukraine	28	Bachelors	Middle	Recent Graduate
Yaryna	Ukraine	25	Masters	Middle	Lawyer
Jenya	Ukraine	24	Bachelors	Middle	Recent Graduate
Kristina	Ukraine	26	Masters	Middle	Office Assistant
Ivanna	Ukraine	30	Bachelors	Middle	Accountant
Kalyna	Ukraine	27	Masters	Middle	Recent Graduate
Katerina	Ukraine	25	Bachelors	Middle	Recent Graduate
Alena	Ukraine	22	High School	Working	Undergraduate Student
Larissa	Ukraine	25	Bachelors	Middle	Recent Graduate
Nina	Ukraine	21	Some College	Middle	Recent Graduate
Arina	Ukraine	30	Bachelors	Middle	Salesperson
Polina	Ukraine	25	Masters	Middle	Accountant
Liza	Ukraine	28	Bachelors	Middle	Office manager
Fedora	Ukraine	24	Bachelors	Middle	Office Assistant
Galya	Ukraine	23	Bachelors	Middle	Hotline Teller
Karina	Ukraine	27	Bachelors	Middle	Computer System Administrator

Note: Age=Respondent's age at the time of last interview; Previous Occupation Prior to Migration=Latest position held at home prior to coming to the United States as au pairs.

college for 1-2 years but did not finish their degrees. Two of these participants took one year off for participating to the au pair programs and two other participants had dropped out of school for personal reasons. In addition, one participant who had a Bachelor's degree was enrolled in a Master's degree program, but left the program in order to come to the United States.

Of thirty, ten participants were full-time students or current graduates and had no work experience prior to becoming au pairs. Among twenty participants, two worked as au pairs in Germany and Belgium after they graduated from school; four were holding part-time or seasonal jobs, sixteen were working in full-time jobs. Among full-time workers, three of them lost their jobs, due to economic crises, prior to coming to the United States.

Table 3.2 shows the year of arrival to the United States, total number of months enrolled to the Au Pair Program, whether the participant extended their stay after leaving the Au Pair Program, type of visa changes they had during their stay in the United States, and their current marital statuses by November 1, 2012.

Participants arrived to the United States as au pairs between the years of 2003 and 2011. The total number of months the participants was enrolled in the Au Pair Program ranged from 4 to 24 months, with an average of 18.2 months. Their length of stay in the United States ranged between 1 to 7.4 years, with a mean of 4.7 years.

In accordance with the requirement of the Cultural Exchange Program, all participants were single at the time they started the au pair program. Of thirty, thirteen got married during their stay in the United States. Their husbands' nationality varied:

Table 3.2 Immigration Statuses of Study Participants

Code Name	Year of Arrival	Months in Au Pair Program	Extended the stay after Au Pair Program?	Visa Status Change Time 1	Visa Status Change Time 2	Visa Status Change Time 3	Visa Status Change Time 4
Lamara	2003	24	Yes	M-1	F-1	OPT	M-1
Adela	2005	24	Yes	F-1	OPT	F-1	
Nadia	2006	24	Yes	F-1	OPT	F-1	
Hanna	2006	12	Yes	F-1	OPT	F-1	
Maryana	2006	24	Yes	F-1	OPT	H-1B	
Yeva	2006	6	Yes	GCH			
Ivanna	2006	6	Yes	F-1	OPT	H-1B	
Sasha	2006	24	Yes	F-1	OPT		
Irenka	2006	24	Yes	F-1	OPT		
Karina	2006	4	Yes	GCH			
Natalka	2007	12	Yes	F-1	GCH		
Ioanna	2007	12	Yes	F-1	OPT	GCH	
Kalyna	2007	24	Yes	F-1	GCH		
Alisa	2007	18	Yes	F-1	OPT		
Larissa	2007	18	Yes	F-1	GCH		
Arina	2007	24	Yes	F-1	GCH		
Julia	2007	24	Yes	F-1	Returnee		
Dora	2008	24	Yes	F-1	GCH		
Katerina	2008	18	Yes	K-1	GCH		
Liza	2008	9	Yes	GCH			
Jenya	2009	24	No				
Alena	2009	12	Yes	F-1	GCH		
Olga	2010	22	Yes	F-1			
Yaryna	2010	24	Yes	F-1*			
Nina	2010	12	No				
Ema	2010	22	Yes	M-1*			
Polina	2010	18	Yes	F-1			
Fedora	2010	24	Yes	F-1			
Kristina	2011	24	Yes	F-1*			
Galya	2011	12	No				

Note: GCH = Green Card Holder; M-1=Part-time student visa; F-1= Full-time student visa; K-1=Fiancée visa; H-1B= Temporary non-immigrant work visa; OPT=Optional Practical Training and (*) denoted that the study participant was in the process of getting student visas.

Three of them married to American citizens whereas the rest were married to Green Card holders whose countries of origins were Russia ($n=2$), Ukraine ($n=1$), Morocco ($n=1$), Haiti ($n=1$), Bolivia ($n=2$), Costa Rica ($n=1$), and the Dominican Republic ($n=1$). One study participant on the other hand, married her conational (Czech), who was a nonimmigrant. Their husbands had working-class backgrounds, excluding two Russian and one Ukrainian husband, who were middle-class.

In the initial interviews, of thirty participants, eight were enrolled in Au Pair Programs; seven held student visas (F-1 visa), five were in the OPT visa program, nine were Green Card holders, and one was holding work a visa (H-1B). Out of nine married participants, eight were married for less than three years and were in the process of obtaining permanent residency (Green Card), and one was married for four years and received a Green Card through her husband. By the time data collection was completed in November 2012, out of eight au pairs, three were still enrolled in au pair programs but were in the process of obtaining student visas to extend their stays, and four au pairs returned to their homes. Of twenty-three participants who were no longer enrolled in Au Pair Program, six held student visas, twelve were Green Card Holders, two were in H-1B work visa program, and three were OPT interns.

CHAPTER 4

BECOMING AN AU PAIR: INTRODUCTION TO THE AU PAIR PROGRAMS, MOTIVATIONS, INITIAL SETTLEMENT PLANS AND MATCHING PROCESS

In this chapter, I describe how study participants were informed about the au pair programs in the United States, their motivations to participate in the au pair program, their initial settlement plans in the United States, and the matching process.

In the first section of this chapter I explain the roles of social networks, social cycles and au pair agency advertisement in introducing the au pair program and encouraging them to partake in the program. I then explain the ways in which study participants were motivated to participate in the au pair program in the United States due to educational goals, such as improving their English competency and having a chance to study in American universities; cultural exchange purposes, such as exploring American culture and life style and realizing their dream of traveling to the United States; and personal reasons, such as taking a year out to distance them from unpleasant experiences or traumatic events or from their daily life routines. For some, the high au pair salary also was an important benefit of the program.

In section three, I present initial settlement plans of the au pairs when they applied to and were approved to participate to the au pair program in the United States. In this section I also analyze the roles of transnational networks in making their initial settlement plans. Finally, in section four I describe the matching strategies and preferences of au pairs when placed with host families.

4.1 Introduction to Au Pair Programs

Study participants were informed about the au pair programs through their social networks and advertisement of au pair agencies in their countries.

4.1.1 Introduction through Social Networks

As explained by the Network Approach, migrant networks channel information to the potential migrants about living and working conditions in host countries. This can serve as motivation for them to migrate. I asked study participants anyone in the United States had informed them about the au pair program. Only four study participants reported that they were motivated to enroll in an au pair program through their acquaintanceships in the United States. Study participants who had transnational networks prior to migration explained that au pair friends of these participants recommended that they participate in the program:

How did you hear about the au pair program in America?

My friends in college left for au pairing and I was communicating with one [of them] when she was in America. Then I made my decision because she was saying, “Yeah, it is wonderful, it is great experience, enjoy it.” (Jenya, Ukrainian, 24)

My friend told me about this program. After university she came to study in America. Now she is in Cyprus. She is working there. (Kristina, Ukrainian, 26)

I had an au pair friend in New York. She was telling me, “Oh, it is the best job. You should try.” I told her that I [didn't] want to take care of kids. Then I called the agency, and they invited me for an orientation. Then I applied and that's how I am here now. (Adela, Czech, 27)

From the ads and a friend [of mine] who came to Boston to work as an au pair. I [hadn't seen] her for three years. We were just communicating on the phone or by e-mail. (Olga, Ukrainian, 25)

The remaining participants reported that they did not have any networks, relatives or friends in the United States who could have informed them about the au pair program. They explained that they were informed about the “au pairing opportunity” through au pair agency orientations given in their school’s career days or through online advertisements or fliers. Many more learned about au pair programs either through a referral by a friend, relative, professor, coworker, or by searching for work and study abroad programs abroad on the Internet:

How did you hear about the au pair program in the U.S.?

So when I [was working] for this company, I met one girl and she told me this story about her sister, who actually went to Germany, and there is such a program, I never heard about this: *Au pair in America*. She said, “Oh, why don’t you go? You go there for one year. My sister just came back. She is very happy. She traveled a lot. I said, “Let [me] check it out.” (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

It was really random. I was searching for a student exchange program and I found that agency, the biggest one in Ukraine: Cultural Care. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

It was August 2005, and actually we went to a concert together with that girl, and she told me about it. Then I applied. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

It was actually through my mom's friend whose daughter went to Germany. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

I had a relative who came back from the United States. Yeah, she was actually the daughter of my mother’s cousin, not a close relative. She did that au pair program. That’s how I [heard] about this program. (Tamara, Georgian, 29)

I saw fliers of the au pair programs in the campus. That time [in 2005] the au pair program wasn’t that popular in Ukraine yet. I knew couple of girls who went to Germany and France, and after they returned home, they went back as au pairs again. So I assumed that it should be a good program. Why would they want to go back if it wasn’t, right? (Yevea, Russian/Ukraine, 25)

Given the lack of transnational networks with former or recent au pairs, most study participants relied on information provided by au pair sponsoring agencies via web sites, orientations, and advertisements.

4.1.2 Dual Marketing Strategies of the Au Pair Agencies

Sponsoring agencies provide information for participants and families, and facilitate the matching process online. In their web sites, sponsoring agencies have two links: one, for potential au pair program participants and, the other, for potential host families. In the link for “Become a Host Family,” benefits of hiring an au pair for host parents are enumerated as: low-cost, flexible, convenient, secure and reliable childcare service plus having cultural exchange (learning about a new culture and having their children learn a new language). The discourse is organized around marketing childcare providers to host parents rather than emphasizing the objective of cultural exchange, which is listed at the bottom of “benefits” lists. For example, the Cultural Care agency wrote (2013):

Au pair childcare is a unique alternative to day care or nannies—one that is growing in popularity with American families. Au pairs are live-in childcare providers, ages 18-26 years old, from different countries around the world. They provide 45 hours per week of flexible childcare, household help and cultural experience for less than \$8 per hour. Hosting a Cultural Care au pair costs just \$355 per week (less than \$8 per hour). This cost is per family, *not per child*, so you won’t pay extra if you have more than one child.

In addition, this agency provided a table, entitled “Why Host An Au Pair?,” which compares the benefits and costs of services provided by an au pair, a nanny, and a daycare service. In this table, the agency illuminates that the cost of hiring an au pair is one-half of salary to be paid to a nanny and one-third of daycare expenses, in addition to

being the most flexible and reliable option among the three. Listing the same benefits in the same order, Au Pair in America's web site for host parents opens with a statement: "Meet the ideal childcare solution for your entire family..." Paying less than \$8 an hour for a childcare provider for families with more than one child is more economical given that typical childcare providers charge families based on the number of children they care for. In addition, sponsoring agencies provide "full-time, exceptional" service for families by being available 24/7, intermediating the relationship between host parents and au pairs in case of conflict and incompatibility, and offer replacement.

For potential au pair program participants, sponsoring agencies have a separate link, "Become an Au Pair." The following quotations are taken from the first pages of sponsoring agencies' web sites designed for potential au pair program participants:

This is your opportunity to have the adventure of a lifetime, make new friends from around the world, live with an American family, care for children, study something new, improve your English skills and explore the USA! With Au Pair in America you will: Experience American culture, study something new, travel, improve your English, gain independence and self-confidence, make new friends from around the world, HAVE FUN! (Au Pair in America 2013)

Do you love children? Have you dreamed of spending a year in America? Now, while you are young and free? As part of your education or while deciding what to do with your life? You can make it happen, by living as part of an American host family for a whole year through EurAupair International Child Care Programs. You'll help care for your host family's children in exchange for the rich experience of living as a treasured "big sister" or "big brother" in an American family. (Eur Au Pair 2013)

At the heart of our au pair program is cultural exchange and the opportunity to truly experience life in the United States. This begins with your host family welcoming you into their home, not as an *employee* [emphasis added] but as a member of the family. (The International Au Pair Exchange 2013)

Imagine getting paid for living your dream. Being an au pair in the USA you will have the chance to save money while experiencing American life. In addition to that you will be provided with room and board with your host family. They will also contribute to the cost of university classes. (Cultural Exchange 2013)

As seen in these advertisement texts, sponsoring agencies have different marketing strategies for attracting host parents and au pairs to their programs. While they emphasize work components of the program to the former, they valorize the cultural and educational components as the benefits and opportunities offered by the program to the latter. These agencies also misguide potential au pairs in these advertisements about the realistic conditions waiting them in the United States. For example, as quoted above, Cultural Care wrote that host families will “also contribute to the cost of university classes.” Au pairs participate in language study schools, not to universities in the United States. Even there is not such a limitation to attend universities in the United States, the cost of university tuition fee is much more than the education allowance that is paid by host families. Therefore, they can only afford taking a couple of language study courses either in language schools or communist colleges. As I will show in next chapter, two au pairs, having no idea about cost of American education, were dreaming of taking university degrees while working as an au pair. The International Au Pair Exchange similarly misleads au pairs by stating that their status will be family members, “not employees” in host families they will live with, although the status of au pairs were clearly defined equally as “cultural exchange visitors and employees” in 1994.

Regarding 45 hours of childcare responsibility, agencies use familial metaphors such as “you will be the big sister,” and they underemphasize that host families will depend on the au pair’s childcare services on a full-time basis. Rather, they describe the

au pair's as "taking part," "assisting in" and "helping with" host families in their day-to-day routine of host parents" and caring for children. However, duties and responsibilities of au pairs are clearly stated in the "duties and responsibilities" link provided in agencies' web sites. The primary motivations of au pairs matched what sponsoring agencies advertise in their web sites: a lifetime chance to travel and live in the United States, a chance to improve their foreign language competency, study in American universities, and so on. Their perception of au pairing jobs was echoing online advertisement of the au pair agencies, which articulated au pairing as cultural exchange opportunity:

What did you think about au pairing?

I was so excited. Oh my God! I am [going] to the United States, I am going to be a part of some family, and they are gonna pay me. I am gonna have a lot of fun. I will meet a lot of friends, I will see America, and everything. (Natalka, Ukraine, 27)

Like Natalka, Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) said that au pairing "just looked easy" in the beginning because "these people care about you, you stay in their place, you take courses, you see a different place." She added, "It just kind of trapped me, right there." Similarly, Hanna (Ukrainian, 28) expressed that "the whole package" of au pairing opportunity sounded like an easy job with many benefits:

They put it in a better way than actually it is. They explain everything nicely, a lot of benefits, a lot of this, a lot of that. They were talking about all the benefits, and they [the host families] will pay us. At that time [the au pair stipend] was \$140 per week. But, you are not paying for food, for rent, for nothing. You are pretty much living with them, speaking [their] language because that's why you are going there, plus they give you stipend money. It wasn't like you are going to work and this will be your salary. I understood that you are going to live with them, help them out, be in an environment [where you can] learn English for a year, plus they will give you some stipend money. That was it, and I was like, "This is perfect. Why not?" Because all I needed was just to learn the language. I

wasn't coming for work, so it sounds like really good. But then you come over here and you see, like sometimes, you realize that you just work for them, and you are not a *guest* [emphasis added]. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

Except for one participant, who stated that she loved children and wanted to work with children, none of the participants reported that they were interested in developing professional childcare skills or even working with children. Indeed, all but three participants had former childcare experience.

In one of the informal focus group meetings with six au pairs, I opened a conversation to understand how then they could ignore that they would be responsible for childcare on a full-time basis. I asked:

What did your agency tell you about being an au pair in the United States?

What they told me in the agency about au pairing was completely different than what I do here. They told me “You are going to be like a big sister”, come on. You are just a nanny. You are a cleaner and you are a cook. (Fedora, Ukrainian 25)

The first thing is to get a chance to travel. They know how greedy we are about traveling. These girls working in the agency; they all were very young, and were former au pairs in Germany or in the United States. The director of the agency was an au pair in Germany, too. So they all know how it is to be an au pair. They know that it is not easy. They went through a lot of s*** themselves in Germany. When you are coming to America, as a newcomer, you have no idea about it could be so they know how to catch you. All they talk about is traveling. And they have all these pictures. I remember that day. Do you remember this wall? [Asking Maryana who went to the same agency in Kiev]. They have a huge wall in their office with hundreds of pictures on it. Smiling faces, hugging, kissing kids, in Italy, Paris, blah blah. I just walked in and I saw that wall, I was like, “Oh my God! This is great!” They say, “You will travel and you will learn English.” And they said to me, “It is travel. You will be with the family. They will travel a lot. You will always go with them and they will pay for everything. Plus they will pay for your school and the only thing you need to do is”, this is what they exactly

told me, “You just have to wake up the kids in the morning, send them to school, open their room’s window to get fresh air inside, and do their beds. Kids will be in school all day and they come back at three.”

But it is clearly explained in the brochure and web site that you were expected to do more than that, wasn't it?

Yes, but because we have a different perception about childcare, we don't understand how serious it is. We are from a country where there is a family, which means a mom does everything. So, we don't expect it would be different here. So, when I saw babysitting, it never crossed my mind when I was 24 years old that this mom can just see their kids one hour a day because I am from a family where my mom does everything. So, you just have this perception. Even till this day, after being here for six years, I still don't understand that you give birth to kids, you don't spend time with kids. She goes to work at 5 am, comes home at 4 pm and the first thing she does is to start talking to her mom or sister on the phone and ask me, “Can you please take the kids to the basement for me?” For me, but these are your kids! What are these kids for? (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

Agreeing Nadia, Katerina (Ukrainian, 25) explained her visit to the agency:

When I went to the agency, they told me: “You help the host parents with the kids as a part of the family and they will give you pocket money in return.” They didn't tell me that I would have a regular weekly work schedule of 45 hours. I didn't know about that until the host mother handed me my schedule.

After listening to them, I opened web site of one of the au pair agencies in America in the Internet and read them all the duties and responsibilities of au pairs, and then asked them whether they had ever read these guidelines. Katerina added:

Yes, you read this but again the agency doesn't really touch on that when you visit them. Plus, after hearing all these opportunities you can have in America and you will not pay anything for it, you just want to come here so hard, no matter what.

Similarly, in follow-up interviews, au pairs reported that the au pair agencies

explained the work aspect of au pair program participation as an “easy duty”. Kristina (Ukrainian, 26) said, “My agency had the working hours information on its web site but when I went to talk to them, they were like ‘Girls it is only 45 hours, it is nothing. Let's participate in our program.’ It is a lot of hours actually.” In addition, as Yeva (Russian/Ukraine, 25) and several other participants agreed, these agencies sell these programs to young girls as a big opportunity to travel to the United States. When I asked Yeva how she thought that she could have time to travel when she would work as a full-time childcare provider, she said: “Well, you will have two weeks off and when you finish twelve months successfully, you have one month to travel before you leave the country. One full month!”

As shown in these cases, and also raised by several participants during the interviews, local offices of the international au pair sponsoring agencies provide misleading information for convincing girls to participate in the program. Further, cultural differences in childrearing responsibilities also create a different expectation that they would be helpers to the mothers, not the person who will be primarily responsible for childcare. Although au pair programs match host parents with their class-peer au pairs, gender roles expected from mothers and work and family life balance significantly differ between the United States and post-communist societies. Most study participants reported that they were raised primarily by their mothers, and were reportedly raised by other close family members, such as their grandmothers. The ones who were babysitters in their home countries worked part time to earn pocket money while attending school. Therefore, they did not have information about how providing live-in childcare for dual-earner families would be substantially different. They did not realize the seriousness of

their full-time childcare responsibilities until they took intensive childcare instructions in the orientation in New York City upon arrival, or when they were handed their weekly schedule by their host parents.

4.2 Motivations to Became An Au Pair in America

During interviews, I asked study participants to describe their motivation to participate in the au pair programs in the United States. The top three motivations were: educational purposes, such as improving English language skills and studying in the United States; cultural exchange purposes, such as becoming acquainted with a new culture and a country; and personal purposes, such as distancing themselves from a traumatic personal relationship or experience at home. An ancillary motivation that they reported was saving money for their education or other personal expenses.

4.2.1. “I wanted to improve my English”

As has been the case with other studies focused on au pairs (Bagnoli 2009; Burikova and Miller 2010; Geserick 2012), study participants reported that improving their English competence would increase their employability and help them achieve future educational goals. In addition, for those study participants who aspired to work at an international company and travel internationally, English language proficiency could be an important source for meeting these goals.

Twenty-one out of thirty study participants reported that their primary motivation to seek au pair employment in the United States was to learn and/or improving their English proficiency. Among this sub-group, three Ukrainian participants had majored in English as a Second Language. Their professors encouraged them to practice their language skills by joining the au pair program before beginning a teaching career:

I was learning English, and I was really good at this. Then, my teacher, I had private tutor, this woman, she did a lot in my life. If it [weren't for her], I would not come to the United States. She made me to go the university after graduating from high school. Then, she said that I have to prove myself: I have to go somewhere and to prove my English. My grammar was perfect but my [speaking] wasn't good at all. (Natalka, 27)

I am a teacher of English, French and foreign literature. After graduating from the university, with my classmate we decided to expand our knowledge of language, because our school was great but we mostly learn theoretical material. They say in our school, "If you want to learn a language go and stay in another county." I know the theories, the deep level, the history of language, phonetics, grammar... You can know it all, but you may just not be able to speak. So we just filled [out] the au pair program application documents to come to the United States and get involved with the native speakers because this is the biggest experience you can possibly get if you are a language specialist. (Jenya, 24)

Like Jenya and Natalka, Katerina (25) was an English major and was encouraged by her professors to study English abroad in order to practice her speaking skills. She initially came to the United States in her junior year as a summer camp teacher with the Work and Travel Program. After graduating from the university, she wanted to come back for another year primarily for exploring America more and connecting with her friends and the au pair visa was the only means to realize these goals:

After I graduated, I was planning to [a] study specialist degree [Master's] and take courses for the entrance exam. Basically when I came back from [the] work and travel program, I asked the agency what other programs they had for studying English and they recommended me to be an au pair, so I said why not? I applied for the au pair program when I was studying for the specialist degree exam. Then, they called me from the agency [for recruitment as an au pair], and I accepted that because it would be harder for me to come here if I waited until I finish[ed] the specialist degree. I would be older, and with a specialist degree the embassy would ask, "Why do you still need to study English?"

Twelve au pairs, who did not major in English, explained that improving their English proficiency would increase their employability. For example, Yaryna (Ukrainian, 25) had a specialist degree in law. She started working in a small law company after graduation. Although she liked her profession, she could not find a job meeting her expectations. Rather than being unemployed, she decided to take a full-time job in a small company, but was unhappy with the working hours and low pay:

When I finished the university, I just worked in some small law company. But I didn't like that job. I had to work [from] 8 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock in the evening, and I didn't like sitting in the office all day. I was not so happy with my work. I couldn't find a good job. My salary was, even it is now much more less than what I make here as an au pair. It was like, 1200 Ukrainian Hryvnias; about \$200-300 a month. It was impossible to live [on that]. I didn't have to pay for apartment, because I lived with my mom in our own apartment we own. Still, just for transportation everyday, for food, for clothes, it was impossible to live.

Yaryna (Ukrainian, 25) added, “If you want to get a good job in Ukraine, you have to know English well.” By “good job”, she meant the employment opportunities in big Western-based companies in the private sector. As such, she decided to come to the United States for improving her English language skills and thus her employability in the labor market. As explained before, Western companies offer better salaries in comparison to the ones in the public sector jobs or small private businesses. As these companies are working internationally, a good level of English proficiency was a desirable qualification that employers look for in job candidates.

Most study participants, excluding three who majored in English, learned English in school and identified their level of English fluency at basic or intermediary level. None were satisfied with their level of spoken English fluency. Given that the international companies transact businesses at the global level, employers' chances for promotion was

highly influenced by their level of English command. Maryana (Ukrainian, 28) and Fedora (Ukrainian), for example, had recently graduated from university and were at the beginning of their work careers before they came to the United States. Maryana was planning to work as an auditor in an international company. However, her command of English was at the elementary level, not advanced enough to get her dream job. Fedora, on the other hand, got a job offer after graduation and wanted to improve her English before she started to work:

So when I graduated, I really wanted to be an auditor. But in order to get a job in an auditing company, you have to pass an English exam. So, when I heard about the au pair program in the U.S., I don't really know what led me, but I just [went] home and I told my mom about it. Well, my family was really surprised by my decision. I think I was really pissed off about my English skills that I can't get the job I wanted. So, I really wanted to be an auditor, so I just said, "Whatever, I am gonna go and stay wherever," and I didn't really know much about it [the au pair program]; helping the kids, staying with the family... I didn't really think that it could be hard or something. I decided that I am gonna go for one year then I am gonna take a vacation, and after just come back in and my English skills would be ready to get the job. (Maryana)

I had really good English but I still wanted to make it better. I was planning to go back in a year. I had an invitation [job offer] from a company, and I told them I [would] go back in a year. (Fedora)

Among study participants who were already holding full-time jobs in international companies at home, Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) and Alisa (Russian, 30) thought that they could take one year off in order to improve their English language competency and return to their jobs after completing the au pair program in the United States. They believed that practicing their English would help them advance in their careers:

I was obsessed with English. You can study [English] your whole life, but [if] you do not [interact with] people who speak English, you never gonna speak fluent[ly]. I used to work in an American company and I use to [have] contact with a lot of American business partners, they would come a lot and it was a nice job. I was making like good money for myself...But this English thing, because I always liked languages, trapped me. You go there, meet people, you practice your English, and there is this family there who takes you in, they pay for English courses. (Nadia)

I always had the dream to learn English and I never had a chance to learn in Russia. I am from a small village and English education is not very good. When I got out of school, all I [learnt] is to say my name in English...For my job I was travelling to China a lot and there were teams from different countries. They all were speaking English, so I decided to apply to the au pair program. I was completely sure that I [could] learn English in one year [*laughing*]. I came here with zero English. (Alisa)

Finally, for some participants, mastering their English language skills was believed to be of help to them in their education. Nina (Ukrainian 21), for example, was living in Germany with her mother before she came to the United States. She explained that she was planning to enter a highly prestigious international university in Germany, where courses were covered in English. Similarly, for recent college graduates who were planning to study a Masters' degree, such as Katerina (Ukrainian, 25), improving their language skills would help them in their higher studies.

4.2.2 “Studying in the United States would look good on my C.V.”

For those study participants who could not afford to attend a university or study their preferred field, due to tuition fees, the au pair program could provide an opportunity to get educational degrees, or at least take some courses in American colleges and universities. Among this sub-group, Dora (Hungarian, 25) and Lamara (Georgian, 29) were informed about this opportunity and were primarily motivated to pursue college

degrees in the United States. Dora explained why she could not attend university at home as follows:

The year after my dad passed away, I did start the college, I got into the university, but it was far away. We have something like a part-time [school], you go in every two weeks and weekends but it's just kind of crazy, so that really didn't work for me. I had four jobs, and trying to do that and trying to have a life. I didn't feel happy. I was babysitting, I was working at the pharmacy, I was working at this hotel. 3 different jobs, and I would be working a night shift, which is 12 hours, 8 [a.m.] to 8 [p.m.], and when I go back at 11:30 and work in the restaurant until 10 at night, you know, and then the next morning I would go for babysitting from 9 to 3, then I would work in the pharmacy from 4 [p.m.] to 7 [p.m.].

Entering the country as an au pair, she explained, could open the route to study in the United States. However, Dora was misinformed about the content of the education component of the program:

What was your motivation to come here?

When I was working in a crew ship, the American tourists motivated me. In the au pair program, they said, you are paid \$500 and can spend it for studying. As an au pair you have to learn and take some courses. That was appealing to me. I really want[ed] to study but I wanted to study seriously, like going to college, but I didn't know 6 credits [number of credits paid by the host parents] was literally nothing. (Dora)

Lacking finances to afford a university degree, Lamara first went to Germany, where she also had her cousins working as au pairs. Upon returning to Georgia, she searched online for information about earning a college degree in the United States.

What was your motivation to become an au pair in the United States?

Going to college, this [was] what I really wanted. I couldn't get education in my country. That was my main reason, I guess, why I decided to come here. I was just thinking that I would go for one year and see, how it would go.

Unlike Dora and Lamara, Karina (26) and Olga (25) had already received university degrees in Ukraine. Although studying in the United States was not their primary motivation for becoming au pairs, they were attracted to the opportunity to take university courses or receive an educational certificate degree in the United States.

Karina explained:

After college, I got a job in computers and I loved my job. It wasn't hard and I was making good money. All my friends were single and we were going to the clubs. We were young, making money and going to clubs... I just wanted to come to the United States. I don't know, maybe because I was young and crazy. I just Googled "How to go to the United States?" and found the au pair program. I wasn't sure if it was real or not. Then I found girls, they said it is legal and real and I applied. I knew that this program allows you to go to college and take credits.

Olga (Ukrainian, 25), on the other hand, could get a job in an American-based company with her own efforts. She was initially working as a full-time secretary and attending classes for getting a Master's degree. Later, she got promoted and became a specialist in international relations. However, she said that her department was very small and her chances for promotion were absent due to her lack of networks:

My job was paying OK but still wasn't enough to pay for my rent. I was lucky because I was living in my father's house and not paying rent. Plus, I was the youngest with the least experienced in comparison to the other few people who were ranked higher than me. I would be stuck at this position forever unless one of them left their job. So, I would either work as a specialist forever or find a job in another company.... In Ukraine even though if you are smart, if you don't know somebody, reach somebody with a good connection, you will not get a good job. You will not get good opportunities because rich parents just need to get their children to these best positions, their "golden kids." I speak English, but I wanted to improve my English skills to get [a] better job in Ukraine. Having a degree or certificate in the U.S. and being able to live here by myself for one year

are positive things for the employers to see in a C.V. I ideally want to work in a company [that is] owned by a U.S. partner in the Ukraine, so I can work there and travel to the U.S. I wanted to come to the U.S. because it was the cheapest option to study English abroad that I could afford.

As Park explained (2007:61), “Due to globalization and unequal distribution of wealth and resources an education from western postindustrial countries has higher prestige than an education gained in developing countries.” For the participants who were motivated for educational gains, they believed that attending American schools for educational or language study would make them more competitive in the labor market. Given large income differentials between their home countries and the United States, pursuing these goals through the au pair program was an inexpensive and lifetime opportunity for them. However, they were not informed about or search for the possibility of obtaining a university degree in the United States prior to their departure.

Due to the lack of accurate knowledge, their educational allowance, a total of \$500 to be paid by their host parents, looked like “a huge amount of money.” This is plausible given the wage differentials between their home countries and the United States. Having different course credit systems in their home countries, they were also ignorant about the value of six credits in the American education system. Nonetheless, as Lamara reported, they were planning to explore educational opportunities available for them once they arrived in the United States.

6.2.3 “I have always dreamed about visiting America”

When asked why they decided to join the au pair programs, five participants ranked their desire to travel internationally and experience American culture as their first motivation. The rest of the participants ranked this opportunity as their second or third

motivation. Except Katerina (Ukrainian, 25) and Sasha (Russian, 28) who came to the States for summer Work and Travel Programs, none of the study participants had been to the United States before. They also expressed their deep desire to visit the country at some point in their lives. As Ritzer argued (2012), globalization enabled broadcasting of American culture and consumption styles to other countries in the world, which made American tourism attractive to foreigners. Being exposed to the American culture and touristic sites in the movies, they had the curiosity and the dream to personally explore the country at some point in their lives:

What was your motivation to come here?

Curiosity. Since I was a child, I wanted to come and visit and travel. I wanted to go to the Disney World, and I did that. I saw America in [the] movies, and I had relatives in Pennsylvania. Plus my mom went to Canada in 1990s and she showed me photos. I read some stuff. It was mostly relatives. (Ivanna, Ukrainian, 30)

I came here [because] I just wanted to travel and see the world, and I wanted to see America and it was really difficult to get a tourist visa. Also it is too expensive to come here. So, I was willing to come to the United States. I was always fascinated with the United States. It is so free. It is the most powerful country. I love power, and I always love powerful countries. Because I could get a visa through the au pair program, I decided to come as an au pair. (Yeva, Russian/Ukraine, 27)

What was your impression of USA before coming here?

In all these movies, you think it is gonna be like that, and it is actually like that. Everything is beautiful, nice neighborhoods... Then actually when I was coming, I couldn't even think or imagine how it is gonna be. Cause I don't know why, I just couldn't believe that was happening. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

I thought that United States has a lot of money, cool people, has a new culture, free people. I wanted to go and see. I didn't consider Europe because people in Europe are more conservative. Europe is an old lady, and the United States is a young guy and I was young. (Karina, Ukrainian, 27)

I was kind of scared [of coming to the United States] and at the same time, it was my dream to come to the USA. (Natalka, Ukrainian, 27)

I was seeing it as an opportunity to get to know another life style. I was kind of jealous; I guess [it was] because some of my friends were traveling. I should [travel], too. Why I am staying [in Ukraine] when everybody is traveling? (Larissa, Ukrainian, 25)

As Bagnoli (2009:331) argued, today, international travel is a highly desirable consumer option” that “facilitates the accumulation of cultural capital in the form of cosmopolitan knowledge of the world which is viewed as necessary to the construction of a youthful middle class identity.” Among all study participants, two had visited the United States previously, with a summer work and travel program where they worked as camp counselors. Because they didn’t have time to explore the United States, due to their work schedule and limited time, they wanted to come back. Many study participants, particularly those with middle class backgrounds, had travel experiences across Eastern and Central Europe and the Middle East. Some, like Lamara and Ema, could visit Western European countries through working as au pairs in Germany. One participant visited Western European countries as a tourist. A few others could visit non-Western countries, such as China and Turkey, through business trips. Particularly for Ukrainians, Georgians, and Russians, who were not member states of European Union, taking Schengen visa was not any easier than taking an American tourist visa.

Traveling to the United States was a dream for them, given the high cost of transportation and accommodation expenses. The study participants explained that it would cost them a few thousand dollars if they would travel to the United States as tourists. Even if they could afford the expenses, they reported that the U.S. embassy didn’t easily issue visas to Eastern European countries. Obtaining an American tourist

visa was difficult, given that many Eastern Europeans are believed to seek immigration, not a touristic trip.

Obtaining au pair visa (type J-1) was also difficult. Ukrainian and Russian study participants stated that they did not expect to obtain J-1 visas easily. Ukrainian participants explained that many of their friends were not granted visas when they applied for Work and Travel Programs. In Russia, on the other hand, one of the au pair agencies, Cultural Care, was closed three years ago. Russian participants believed that the termination of this program was a consequence of many Russian young women leaving the program immediately after they entered the country or refusing to return home after completion. In Cultural Care's online forum, an employer of the agency explained, contrarily, that high rates of visa rejection for Russian applicants led to this decision:

Despite meeting with representatives and meeting all necessary screening criteria, we found that the visa rejection rate remained extremely high and this resulted in a great deal of frustration and emotional distress on the part of the au pair, host family, and children who were all invested in the relationship and anticipation of the au pair's arrival.

Therefore, when financial limitations and strict visa issuance policy of the U.S. government for the Eastern European nationals are taken into account, au pair programs provided the most convenient and cheapest option; as Geserick (2012:63) defined, "a carefree travel", for the ones who always had dreamed about visiting the United.

4.2.4 "I wanted to take a year out"

For various personal reasons, such as a traumatic break-up with a romantic partner, sexual abuse, loss of a parent, an unfortunate experience, and divorce of parents, and undesirable working experiences at home countries, study participants reported that

living abroad temporarily seemed like a good opportunity to take a break from emotionally painful and stressing experience. In addition, for the study participants who were going through a transition, taking one year off seemed like an opportunity to widen their horizons and reconsider their options.

Kalyna (Ukrainian, 25) and Polina (Ukrainian, 25) decided to leave their home countries immediately after breaking up with their foreign boyfriends, whom they defined as “the one” in their lives. Kalyna met her Muslim boyfriend when she was interning with a hospitality business abroad. Because her boyfriend’s parents’ did not want him to marry a non-Muslim woman, the couple had to break-up:

We loved each other, but our families didn’t agree. I made [up] my mind and decided to break up. I was really upset, so I decided to go somewhere.... Oh my Gosh, I was crying like crazy. We had been together 3 years. The hardest time to break up is when you love each other. We had to break up, but it wasn’t really hard, because he broke up and the same day went back to Turkey and I moved in with my mom. So this was three months before I came to the United States. I wasn’t working that time. I just finished master’s [degree]. It was summer break and I found a family here. It was fast.

What were the other options to come here? Why as an au pair?

I didn’t [do] a research. I didn’t look [for] a lot of options. One day I was just bored at home, Googling for go[ing] abroad or study[ing] abroad and some programs abroad; that I remember. And the au pair program came in the first page. I got the address, went there, signed the contract and called my mom to tell her.

While Kalyna did not have any plans after the program, Polina was determined not to return home again. Polina worked in two international companies, where she was sexually harassed and laid off. Then, she lived in a Middle Eastern country for a while with her Middle Eastern boyfriend. He later lost interest in their relationship. After she returned home, her family had dissolved. She was unemployed and hopeless about her

future in her country:

I got a job in Kiev at an international company as an accountant for a year. I worked in my first job less than a year. I left the work because I was sexually harassed. My supervisor asked me to stay after work one day, and when stayed, he wanted to sleep with me. Because I rejected him, the next day the human resources department called me, and they basically fired me. Then, I started working at a British company. Then, we had an economic crisis in the autumn of 2009; a big economic crisis happened in Ukraine. They fired a lot of people, and I was the first one because I was young and I could find another job. Nobody cared for me. My boss apologized me, saying “It wasn’t you, but we had to protect the other person who has more experience here than you.” I was kind of shocked because my rent just doubled and I was unemployed. There was crisis in Ukraine and it was impossible to stay there. I just needed to get out of my country no matter what. So I took my laptop and I Googled. It brought me Australia; it was kind of hard. Then Canada; you need at least \$50,000 to move there. I found this au pair program. I read about it and called them the next day. I went to the bank, and paid the fees and sent them the application...I wanted to stay here from the very first day. I decided to do that in Ukraine.

Ivanna (Ukrainian, 30) was planning to leave Ukraine to seek a new life abroad. Her mother left Ukraine for Canada in 1977, in order to gain income for her family. Her sister followed her mother later. Her father, on the other hand, stayed in Ukraine. Ivanna was initially planning to join her family and relatives in Canada. However, the Canadian government did not accept her immigration application. Thus, she decided to work as an au pair in the United States until receiving immigration papers from Canada. She explained:

Canada was not really a dream for me. I wanted to see the U.S. I was curious about the U.S. so here I have opportunity, why not? If I won’t like [it], I will move to Canada.

During the course of research, Ivanna shared with me the traumatizing experience

she had endured ten years ago. She later explained to me that this experience was her main reason for leaving her home permanently. She was raped by a stranger and had been subjected to continued abuse by male partners afterwards. She reported that she wanted to leave everything behind and open a new page in her life. She thought that, through an au pair program, she could learn about new opportunities in the United States. If she could not find anything, then she would migrate to Canada as a dependent of her immigrant mother.

Two study participants Lamara (Georgian, 29) and Liza (Ukrainian, 28) decided to participate in au pair programs after the loss of their fathers. Lamara explained that her dream was to travel to as many countries as she could, one of which was the United States. However, taking an au pair job in the United States was not part of her agenda. Rather, she was planning to enter a university in Georgia. She initially went to Germany as an au pair, after graduating from high school with the intention to travel across Europe. Upon returning to Georgia, she was notified by her family that her father had passed away while she was in Germany. Consequently, she decided to not stay in Georgia but to look for new opportunities in higher education degree abroad:

I went to Germany just to see new things and have fun. Because I always liked to travel and that was my dream, so I did it. I traveled throughout Germany, I went to Paris, and in [one and a half years], I decided to go back to Georgia and it was kind of sad. When you are away and [then] you go back, you really want to see everybody alive and happy. It happened that my father passed away, and my family didn't tell me this. So, the funeral was the next day I went home. That was stressful, very stressful... I was thinking [that] I [was] never gonna do au pair job again, but somehow when I went back, everything changed. My expectation that I had before I went there was completely different.

So you had emotional reasons to leave home and come here?

Yes, emotional, too. Disappointment probably; I was not able to do what I planned. As I said, it was not my plan to be au pair second time, but yeah, losing my father was one reason probably, because when I went back home I didn't really look for a job. My plan was to go back [to school] for studying. In Georgia, we don't have people who have money in banks. He didn't have savings but he earned money to support the whole family, and since he passed away, we didn't have that anymore and that's was the other reason why I came here.

Like Lamara, Liza (Ukrainian, 28) lost her father before she decided to pursue opportunities abroad. In addition to having her family dissolved, she was dissatisfied with her job:

How did you decide to become an au pair?

After all, I got a job and something was missing. That time, my father passed away and my mother got married again. I didn't have any siblings. I have an adopted brother but I lost contact with him. He lives in Belarus. I don't even know if he is alive. So I am the only child in the family and I was like, I am gonna try to get out of this country. I didn't really feel or see myself here. I always wanted to try something else. I was kind of different all the time. I started doing some search to find a way to get out. This au pair program came across. (Liza, Ukrainian, 28)

One study participant, Yeva (Russian/Ukraine, 25) reported that she decided to participate in the au pair program when she was robbed in Ukraine. She explained how this unfortunate experience upset her. It was the fourth time that she had been robbed and she was carrying a large sum of money, sent to her by parents. When she heard about the au pair program, her sadness was still fresh. She decided to leave home to explore America.

For those study participants who lost a parent, had an abusive relationship, and had been subject to sexual violence, or experienced a traumatic breakup or event, taking a year off in order to distance themselves represents, what Bagnoli (2009) calls as “an introspective journey.” Travelling abroad at these moments “in which the parameters that

had regulated people's lives up to that point suddenly stopped making sense, and previous certainties were lost... would emphasize the dimension of loss one was already living and could be a way to try and recover some control over events." (Bagnoli 2009:341) In their research with Slovak au pairs in London, Burikova and Miller (2010:30) also found that unlike conventional migrants who are motivated for economic gains, the decision of young people to take on au pair jobs was initially related to their personal relationships. Thus, they went to London as au pairs for personal reasons or "on a whim," thinking that traveling would provide a "requisite distance" from their personal relationships. In other words, traveling abroad in the moments of anxiety, disappointment, transition, and loss "would also turn into moments of opportunity" to break away from negative feeling by immersing in new lives and realities (Bagnoli 2009)

A second group of participants reported that they were going through a transitional stage in their lives when they decided to take one year off. Three studies, one with Western European au pairs in the United States by Geserick (2012), one with Western European au pairs, backpack travelers, and language students in Western Europe (Bagnoli 2009), and one with Slovak au pairs in the United Kingdom, also showed that young people going through a major transition in their lives were willing to take one year out before they precede to a new stage in their lives. Geserick (2012:51) defined this stage as *gap year* "that lies between graduation and a post-secondary career" and "falls into the developmental phase known as post-adolescence". She observed that traveling abroad was a common practice for young Western Europeans who needed time to decide about their career paths after graduating from high school. Thus, living abroad through an au pair program, she explained, wouldn't only give them to consider what they wanted to

with their careers, but also help them acquire new skills, such language skills, and “use new freedom to explore themselves and engage in self-focused activities” such as travel abroad.” (ibid:51)

My study participants who wanted to use a gap year, unlike Western European au pairs, were mostly university graduates. Among three participants whose highest level of education degrees was high school, one was a recent college drop-out undecided about her major, one was working in hospitality sector but was displeased with the working conditions and the pay, and one was planning to attend a university but couldn't afford to do so. Among university graduates, Sasha (Russian, 28) explained that spending a summer in the United States with the work and travel program led to a major transformation in her life and this she changed her career plans. She wanted to come back to the United States experience more of American culture, and the au pair program was her only option to re-enter the country:

I thought, before I came here for the first time for the summer, that I would go back and finish my university and go find a job, and move to Moscow that I love, and just live my life there. Then, I went to America and I liked it so much; it changed everything. I was so lost, I didn't know what to do anymore because I understood that, I don't have anyone in America but I just couldn't be in Russia anymore. When I left, I had two years to graduate so all these times I was just living for and waiting to come back here. It is just everything is so different here, and it has a better quality of life overall.

Other participants who were currently attending universities or graduated already were motivated to take a gap year due to high unemployment, difficulty of taking jobs in their fields due to competitive labor market or lack of access to these competitive positions, or having made a wrong career decision rather than not knowing what they wanted to do in their careers.

Irenka (Polish, 31) and Galya (Ukrainian, 22) worked in jobs that did not match their career preferences. Both had to postpone their career plans temporarily when they could not find a job in their preferred professions:

My Bachelor's degree was in company management, and my Master's was in European business relations. When I graduated from the university, I couldn't find a job in Poland. I wasn't in the city. The only job [that was] offered to me was teaching in school so I taught English for one year.

Did you study English before?

I [had] learned English since I was in the second grade, and I had English in high school and then at the university.

How did you become a teacher?

They approved me as a teacher. The principle recommended me to finish teaching school, because I didn't have any preparation. She was nice because she promised that at some point she would give me money. It was a part-time teaching job, and I still had to pay for the teaching certificate. I had \$300 or less. It is hard. It was good that my parents had and I paid my bills and at some point couldn't afford something else. Since high school, I wanted to go abroad so at some point I started to put some money away and I told myself, "I can't be a teacher, I need to do something for my English so I came here as an au pair.

Galya majored in psychology in Ukraine. However, she also worked in a position that doesn't match her specialty. She explained:

In our country, they give very little money, that's why I didn't work in my specialty. I worked in the government hotline... I want to work as a psychologist because I like my specialty but in Ukraine, they pay very little to psychologists.

Another study participant, Kristina (Ukrainian, 26) reported that, when she finished high school, her parents decided her major for her. Thus, she studied international relations, and she had no interest in working in that field. She started to

work in a small company at a secretarial position because of the lack of employment opportunities in her field. Because of the economic crisis in 2009, she was laid off. After being unemployed for a while, she decided that there was no future for her in her country. Thus, she started to plan on moving to Australia with her boyfriend. As a requirement for immigration policies, she needed to improve her English language skills. Therefore, she decided to live in the United States for one year.

Nadia (Ukrainian, 30), on the other hand, had been working in a very prestigious Western company as a financial analyst. She was very satisfied with the pay and working conditions, but she had no interest in working in the field of finance. Thus, she wanted to take a gap year to consider new options while improving her English language skills to be more competitive in the labor market when she returned home. However, except a couple of very close friend, she didn't tell that she was going to be an au pair in the United States because she thought that it didn't sound like a smart decision when she had a well-paying job and was recently got promoted:

For me, it was embarrassing to tell my parents that I am going to the Unites States, quit my job where I was making \$1500 a month with, that I am going there to do babysitting. I told them I am going there for studying. Basically I lied to them. I lied to everybody, except my closest friend. I told my parents "there is this program, blah blah blah, you just go there, you will stay with this family, it is a student exchange program." Something like that. My family actually bought that. But my dad was not happy at all. She said, "Why are you doing this? You have a good job." I was making good money. For example, my mom has more than twenty years of experience, she was making \$200 a month, I was making like \$1500 a month.

As shown, study participants who had work experience in their home countries were mostly dissatisfied with working conditions or disappointed that they couldn't get

jobs in fields consistent with their training. As such, these participants thought that they could take a gap year to break away from their life routines once they heard about the cultural exchange opportunity that au pair programs offered.

4.2.5 “Au pair salary pays well”

Although they have not ranked the financial benefits of au pair programs as their primary motivation, study participants from working-class backgrounds mentioned that the au pair salary also attracted them. Alena (Ukrainian, 22), for example, explained that most Ukrainians, like herself, preferred to apply for au pair jobs in the United States rather than in Europe because of higher salaries paid in the former. Indeed, she claimed: “Ukrainians come here mostly not for cultural exchange but to earn some money. I know some girls sending money to their parents to help.” Hungarian study participants, Ema (Hungarian, 27) and Dora (Hungarian, 25), thought that besides improving their English language proficiency, they could save some money to use when they return home. Although Dora’s primary motivation was not saving money, she explained that she was paid \$2.50 per hour for babysitting in Hungary and “of course \$200 [weekly au pair stipend sounded like a lot of money.]”

Ema (Hungarian, 27), on the other hand, graduated from a vocation school in hospitality. After working as a waitress for 3-4 years, she felt that she no longer wanted to be a waitress, given her dissatisfaction with norm of irregular working hours peculiar to this sector:

I went to technical school on hospitality for two years, to learn how to cook, bake and serve. I wanted to be a waitress and I was a waitress after school for 3-4 years. I thought it wasn’t enough for me so I wanted to go somewhere else and do something different. I love children. When I was young, I was babysitting my

cousins, little kids. I like kids and I decided to do something different like an au pair. I went to Belgium as an au pair for half a year. After that, I came here.

You didn't like the hospitality sector?

No, I like it. There are two things I love: hospitality and children.

Why did you say that it wasn't enough for you then? Was it because of the lack of promotion?

No. Actually, when I decided to become an au pair, my boss asked me to become the manager of the cafes and restaurants in a stadium. I always wanted to be a manager. But I already made my mind to become an au pair, and moved on. I didn't like the sector because I had to work in bars and restaurants, sometimes very long days and night. There were people smoking. I didn't like the working environment. I can't have a family with long late hour working schedules.

Economic differences between host and home countries and class differences within nations are important factors to consider in explaining how some au pairs were partly motivated by economic gains while others were motivated by cultural and educational gains. Existing studies in postindustrial countries showed that au pairs originating from Western European countries, such as Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, were motivated to participate in au pair programs for education, cultural reasons, or personal reasons (Bagnoli 2009; Geserick 2012). On the other hand, au pairs originating from economically disadvantaged countries such as Eastern and Central European nations (Burikova and Miller 2010; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Lutz 2002; Morokvasic 2004), the Philippines (Oosterbeek-Latoza 2007; Stenum 2010), and Tanzania (Swai 2007) were motivated by wage differentials between their home countries and host countries. For example, Oosterbeek-Latoza (2007) explained that Filipina domestic workers in Norway took au pair jobs as a professional position to generate income, and deliberately rejected to be called as a family member by their host

parents.

In addition, intersecting inequalities of nationality and social class created different motivations for potential au pair program participants. Existing studies with the women of Eastern and Central Europe showed that these nationalities were taking au pair jobs for economic reasons, such as generating family income or saving money for their career-related or educational plans (Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Lutz 2002; Morokvasic 2004). However, as I observed with my study participants, social class differences within the same nations create multiple motivations. While study participants who identified themselves with the middle class did not report economic gains among their motivations; their lower class counterparts emphasized that au pair salary, due to wage differentials, was an additional motivating factor for them.

4.3 Initial Settlement Plans in America

Boyd (1989:651) defined “settlement” as “the intention and decision to settle in receiving countries. It does not preclude an eventual return to the sending areas or subsequent migration elsewhere.” Based on study participants’ primary intentions and decisions for transnational migration, I identified two types of transmigrants: *Goal-oriented transmigrants* and *explorer/escape transmigrants*. *Goal-oriented transmigrants* were composed of recent student or graduates, and employees who were at the initial stages of their careers, with clearly set higher education or career plans to seek when returned home. They were primarily determined to increase their employability, likelihood of working an international companies or entering English-speaking universities when returned home through increasing their English fluency. As such, their

transmigrancy in the United States temporarily to fulfill these goals, such as Maryana (Ukrainian, 28), Nina (Ukrainian, 21), and Hanna (Ukrainian, 28):

I decided that I am gonna go for one year and come back in October and get my Masters'. After that I really wanted to be an auditor but in order to get a job in an auditing company, I had to take the English [proficiency] exam and I knew I wouldn't pass it. I didn't really want to go [abroad], but in that case I had no other choice so if I want to achieve my career goals so I had to go...I never really went anywhere by myself so it was a little tough decision. I tried just not to really think about it so I actually started thinking about it before my flight. "It is one year, what am I gonna do without my mom?" You know, [laughing], it would be hard. (Maryana)

I moved to Germany with my mother when I was 15. I finished high school and then [obtained] an economics degree in a gymnasium. The university that I want to go is only in English because it is a private international university. That was my first reason to go to the USA. Second reason was that it is hard to find a job in Germany like in Ukraine so it is better to have experience in another county. I wanted to see USA; I wanted to travel; I wanted a break from school. Last year was really hard for me because I went to school Monday through Fridays and I was working during the weekends so I decided to go to USA for one year and it was a good decision. (Nina)

I was studying at the faculty of foreign language and I finished three years. Then at the end of the fourth year, we have finals, like government final exams, to get the bachelor's degree. I was scared, crazy scared because everything was mostly in English. Actually it was even by a [coincidence] that I met that girl [who] was working part-time at an au pair company. [She said], "We have this and that program", and the only English speaking country was the United States. So I decided to take a break from school and prepare for the exam by improving my English in the United States. (Hanna)

Explorer/escapee transmigrants, on the other hand, were motivated to take time out from their work or school routine for exploring American culture, opportunities for studying in American colleges or universities, or motivated for distancing themselves

from bitter personal experiences or relationships (dissolution of family, breakup from a boyfriend, loss of a parents, and so on). Study participants who had negative employment experiences after graduation, such as being laid off or sexual harassment, and the ones who had not much hope about the future of the economies of their countries also fall into this category. Thus, they were escapees in the sense that their transmigration stemmed from their desire to go away from the negativities of their lives, and were explorers as they were motivated consider new opportunities in order to improve their life chances. Individuals, who did not have clearly set plans after school and wanted to travel internationally was also a subgroup of explorers. Like goal-oriented transmigrants, explorer/escapee transmigrants were also mostly planning to settle temporarily in the United States, however, they wanted to use this time to explore more opportunities available for them in the United States, rather than fulfilling clearly defined goals.

Among explorer/escapee transmigrants, except one study participant, Polina all study participants were initially planning to stay in the United States from between six months and one year. Two additional participants, Ivanna and Kristina, were planning to migrate to another countries after completing the au pair program. The rest of explorers/escapees were planning to stay from six months to one year:

So I was like, I would give it a try [to see if she can get a college degree here], but I would never knew that I was going to stay here that long, five years, because first when I got here, I didn't know anybody. [Lamara lost her father unexpectedly, could not afford attending university at home, and wanted to explore if she could get a college degree in the United States]

When I was in Ukraine, I was not even planning for one year. I was looking for 6 months. So I will come here for six months, first for learning English so that I could get better jobs at home. [Yaryna worked as a lawyer in a small law office

where she was paid little, she could not find any better jobs, and decided to take one year off and improve her English]

My friend [had] come here for vacation to and she loved it. All these stories she told, American dream and all these stuff... My mom always wanted me to live abroad. Ukraine's economy is not good. If you have a rich family and tons of money in your pocket, then you are OK. My family is middle-class but I had no opportunities there so my parents always wanted me to live abroad...I didn't have a plan. It wasn't like I will come here and stay here no matter what. I was seeing it as an opportunity to get to know another life style. If I like it, I would stay; if not, I would go back. I was looking at the big picture; how it would work. Well, of course after 5-6 months, I came to the point that I didn't want to go back. [Larissa decided to come to the United States after graduating from university]

I was going to college at home and at the end of my first year I quit because I didn't like my major. I always wanted to go somewhere and you know the easiest way to go somewhere is as an au pair. My initial plan was to be here for first six months or one year. I was thinking that I [would] want to [return] home, what am I gonna do here? (Julia, Czech, 26)

However, only three out of thirty participants returned to their home countries immediately after finishing the program. One additional participant returned home after staying for four years. Considering the fact that their total length of stay in the United States ranged between one and 7.2 years, with an average stay of 4.5 years, the gap between planned and actual length of stay can partly be explained by the lack of access to transnational networks in the destination country.

As discussed by migration network theorists, migrant networks *function as social capital* prior to migration, through channeling useful information about opportunities in the destination countries. In addition to lacking access to transnational networks in the destination country, the extent of transnational networks were important in shaping settlement plans of the study participants. The four study participants who reported that

“they knew someone” in the destination country were only informed about the au pairing experience in the destination country because informants were current au pairs. Two study participants who came to the United States as summer camps counselors came back as au pairs because stating that they didn’t have time from work to explore the country. Limited extent of transnational networks or absence of any networks prevented the study participants from learning about alternative living and working condition and potential opportunities in the United States, which they later discovered once arrived and established networks in the United States.

I asked the participants who overstayed after completing the program why they had not initially considered longer settlement plans in the United States. Majority expressed that they had not considered this possibility, given that they had made a quick decision to take a year off. Also, they explained that having a common perception about the strictness of U.S. immigration regulations, and not having any friends or family in the United States, might have prevented them from thinking that extending their stay was a viable option.

4.4. Matching Process

Upon receiving approval from the agencies for participating in the au pair program, study participants created online profiles on the web sites of au pair agencies. In these profiles, they provided their portrait photos, photos taken with children, and information about their skills. Host parents also created online profiles wherein they introduced and displayed photos of their family, children and house. Placement of au pairs was a unidirectional process where host parents initiated communication with the candidates they liked. Employers contacted the study participants via e-mail, and in

return, au pairs sent them an introductory letter drafting their skills, interests, and expectations from the au pair program participation. If the host parents were interested in interviewing the candidates, they scheduled phone interviews with them.

These interviews were also an opportunity for the host parents to investigate the English fluency of the potential candidates. Some study participants thought that when host parents did not show interest in matching with them after a phone interview, it was because those families could notice their low level of English proficiency during the phone interview. On the other hand, for some host parents who were interested in other criteria, such as benefiting from native language or talents of the au pairs, English proficiency was not their primary criterion. The matching process started when both parties agreed to be matched, and the agencies proceeded with making the necessary arrangements for the placement of au pairs with the host parents.

I asked study participants what their criteria were in picking their host parents. Study participants reported that the location and nationalities of the host parents, strictness of host families' rules and the number of children in host family candidates were important factors that affected their matching decisions.

The most important criterion in au pairs' matching decisions was the number of children in the host family candidates. Study participants reported that they did not want to be a part of "big family," which would bring more childcare responsibilities, and thus, leave less free time from work. For some, families with babies and infants were more attractive because they would not have to deal with older children whom they thought to be less manageable:

I didn't want to work for big family with many children. I have a lot of experience with babies. I [used to] babysit a lot for young children because my brother had a baby and I have many friends with babies. This family I picked was nice and only one child: a 9-month-old baby child. (Nina, Ukrainian, 21)

After being called by many families with several children, Alena (Ukrainian, 22) decided to look for her ideal family by using another website, where au pair and host family candidates could post adds. After she found a family, she referred them to her au pair agency to have a formal match:

A family [who contacted her] had five kids, I said no. Another family found me who had 2 kids already, 3 dogs, and [the host mother was] pregnant to triplets. I was like, probably, no [laughing]. I decided that I have to search somehow by myself. Greataupair.com is actually the website where all Ukrainian girls are looking for families. So I found my family in Silver Spring. I didn't know that it was a cool area. I thought it was close to D.C. They said, "We have a three years old boy and a baby 5 months old, and a 12-years old girl but you don't have to take care of her. She is in school full-time. We are such a great family and you will be part of the family. Everything will be fine." I said, "Yeah, sure. Call my agency and book me.

One participant, Larissa (Ukrainian, 25), explained that she did not want to take care of girls because she thought that boys were easier to get along with.

During the match process, some host parents misinformed the au pairs about the workload expected of them. One au pair, Nadia (Ukrainian, 30), reported that her host mother hid the fact that she was expecting a new baby, who would be an additional child to be taken care of. Another host family with four children told Katerina (Ukrainian, 25) that she would look after the younger children only, which was not the case once she started to live with the family:

Actually what happened, they had one kid in their profile but she actually lied to me, because when I met them, she was pregnant, but she didn't tell me that [earlier]. So, couple of months after I moved in, she said, "I need to talk to you" and she said, "I am pregnant." But she knew that before this rematch, I knew that. (Nadia)

When the host mom called me in the beginning, she said she had four kids and I was going to take care of the younger ones only. She has two pair of twins aged 4 and 12. In the beginning, I was supposed to take care of the 4 year-old twins. What I ended up with was taking care of four of them. (Katerina)

The location of the host family was the second most important criterion in study participants' matching decision. Most study participants came from rural areas with well-established public transportation systems. They also did not have much driving experience as they obtained driving licenses upon being approved by the agencies to participate in the programs. Thus, being placed with a family in a metropolitan area where they could use public transportation to commute was an important factor for many au pairs, especially the ones who participated to the program for exploring America. Because they did not have much information about the geography of the country, they either used online maps or relied on the information provided by the agency to look up the location of families. Except for two study participants, who were matched with families in Atlanta and New York City and then moved to the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area, the rest of the study participants were placed in families living in D.C., Virginia and Maryland. Living in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area was attractive for the study participants, knowing that that it was the capital of the country. Some study participants reported that some agencies or host parent candidates misinformed them by saying that they were living in places convenient to public transportation or close to the downtown when in reality they were not. While some could

find out about the location of the family by online sources, others did not do so and ended up being placed with families in suburban areas that were not very convenient to public transportation:

I came to a suburb of Virginia. There is nothing there. At home, the agency told me that it was in D.C. I thought that it wasn't too far and I could take a bus to the city. It costs so much to take transportation to the city. When I saw I-95 for the first time, I thought that I would never drive in America. (Julia, Czech, 26)

I matched with a family. They said, "Oh, we are really close to [the] NYC." I Googled their home address and found that they were about two hours away from the city. I didn't go with them because I didn't want to live with some kind of red necks. (Liza, Ukrainian, 28)

Third, being from the same nationality as the host parents influenced study participants' matching decisions. Some study participants with low-levels of English proficiency cared more about the nationality of the host parents, thinking that they would feel more familiar and secure in a family where the parents spoke their native languages. These families also were looking for au pairs that would help their children practice their native languages:

My English skills [were] really bad. My [host] family was actually Jewish. [The host mother] was American and [the host father] was Russian. So when I talked to him, we were laughing. He is actually a cool guy, he came to the United States when he was 14 years old. In that case, it kind of helped me [that] he [was] Russian. My mom [felt] more confident. I am not gonna be really afraid that I can not understand English...But they were actually looking for a person who [had] music skills because their children were [learning to play] piano and they needed someone for their kids to practice piano. [Because] they wouldn't go with anyone without music skills and I had [the match]. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

My first family had two adopted children from Russia. It is interesting, actually my second host parents had adopted their children from Russia, too. (Kalyna, Ukrainian, 27)

I [knew] a Hungarian family [back home] who knew a Hungarian family here and they wrote to that family for me. Because I don't speak English well, the agency wouldn't take me. They wanted me to teach Hungarian to the kids, so we were matched with this family. (Ema, Hungarian, 26)

One family was from New York. She was American and the host dad was from India. They really wanted me. For some reason I didn't like them. I decided to work for a Ukrainian family. I like[d] them so I chose them. (Galya, Ukrainian, 22)

Finally, one study participant explained that she avoided matching with families who had curfews and one with matching with families who offered her a basement room. Most of the time during the match process, families did not inform au pairs about their rules governing au pairs' free times such as what time au pairs should be back home at night, whether they could use the family car for their personal needs, things they were allowed to do during their work hours (talking over the phone, listening to music, and so on) or what their living arrangement would be (place and description of their room). If they did, then study participants preferred not to match with the families who did not offer desirable living and working conditions, as Julia (Czech, 25) and Jenya (Ukrainian, 24) did:

I had a couple of families who wanted me but I didn't want to pick fast. I wanted to compare the families. One had [a] curfew. All of a sudden the agency called and told me that there was a family who really wanted to match with me...They [had] three kids and they were Jews and I decided to talk to them. Everybody told me not to choose them with three kids and they were Jews. But I liked them and I felt that they were the right family. They were very nice. Host mother sent me an

email and pictures of the kids, and asked what I like to eat. The kids were [at the ages of] 3, 6 and 9. (Julia)

One of the families I was considering had a basement room for me and that was the reason I didn't want to match with them. I am not a Cinderella or anything, living downstairs. (Jenya)

Study participants who were primarily motivated to travel abroad for distancing themselves from a personal relationship or trauma, reported that they were not selective; rather, they “just went the first host family candidate” who contacted them. In addition, study participants who applied to the program during the winter or fall season, which was considered to be “off-season,” reported that after waiting for a couple of months, they were scared of not being “picked.” Therefore, these participants did not consider all of their options and ended up being placed in families who were not good matches. Among these, Polina (Ukrainian, 25) was unemployed, had a traumatic break up, had their parents divorced and was temporarily staying with her friend when she applied to the au pair program. Because no family contacted her in the first two months and she needed to find a job and a place to live immediately, she agreed to match with the first family who called her. At the end, she was placed in a family with four children that she would rather have preferred not to have if she could have had more time to think. Like Polina, Kalyna (Ukrainian, 27) said that because all she cared about was to go abroad after a traumatic break up, she randomly was matched with the first family who contacted her:

I had my driving license but I didn't have any driving experience. A lot of families want girls with good driving license. It was hard because I was still living with my friend. She started to date a guy, and one day in October, she told me that I should start thinking about doing something. So I was planning to apply for jobs in Kiev. A family with four children called me. They were in Washington, D.C.

and we matched. I needed to decide and do something fast and here they are. That time it was like, God sent me a family. In a month, I got my visa. (Polina)

I was speaking with only one family and they interviewed me. Everything went fine and we made a match. It was just one family, one interview, and I was matched. That was it. It was fast. It wasn't a matter for me which state or town they were in. I didn't care at that time. I didn't know anything about the U.S. I didn't care which state I would go. For now, I think I was so lucky to get here—what if I would have gone to Texas or Arkansas or some other place in the middle of nowhere? But it happened here. (Kalyna)

Arina (Ukrainian/Georgia, 29) and Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) explained that they ideally wanted to match with families located in areas close to the city center. However, because they applied at off-season and did not want to wait too long for a match, they accepted the first match proposals:

I applied in early January but I didn't hear from any families for two months [after submitting her application]. I called the agency and they said, "You can get a call tomorrow, or months later. We never know." But I was ready to go. I got my driving license. Because I didn't have many options, I accepted the first family who called me. They were living in a suburb an hour from D.C., in the woods...The closest neighbor was a mile away from their house. If I knew that it was low season, I would wait until the summer to have more options. When I asked him [the host father] for the pictures of the house, he said he didn't have any but his house was modern. When I arrived, the house was a mess. (Arina)

[In their online profile] They looked like nice people. They had jobs and three kids. We just talked once, they sent me 2 emails, and that [was] it; we were matched. I agreed to match because [of] the fact that they are living near [the] Washington [D.C.], they looked nice in their pictures, and I read their profile... Of course people don't put everything in there but I don't know. I remember one thing that if I didn't accept their [match] offer, I thought that nobody else would pick me so that's why I agreed right away. (Nadia)

While host family candidates sometimes provided misleading information about

their families and locations, study participants also misinformed the families about their previous childcare experience and driving competency. All but three study participants, two were former au pairs in Europe and one was part-time babysitter at home, said they had “formal” childcare experience. In their home countries, mothers were primarily responsible for the care of their children and relied on their extended family or friends when they needed someone to look after their children. As such, some study participants provided occasional unpaid babysitting for their friends and families, and thus, they did not see any harm in counting these as formal, paid childcare experience in their application profiles. Others, such as Polina, Kalyna, and Liza, had no experience with children:

Did you provide paid childcare services in your home country?

No. I didn't babysit for somebody but just for friends or family. It is not common in the Czech Republic to have a paid babysitter. When I was a kid, I stayed at home with my older brother, when my parents were at work. So, it is still not that prevalent to hire a babysitter. I made up that I had babysitting experience before coming here when I applied to the agency. I did [babysit], but it was just the kids of my family friends. All kids are different so you just deal with the situation. (Julia, Czech, 25)

No [laughing]. I mean, not officially. It wasn't like work, but I have so many cousins, nephews and nieces. At some point, I was staying with the kids in their apartments and I was playing with them in the yard. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

No. The agency sent me the application materials, and I started to get them together: Fake references, pictures with children... I don't even know a girl who had real references... I don't even like holding babies or touching kids. I had only one photo taken with a baby and I took that one to the agency. They told me not to put it in my profile and that I should get new photos because I supposed to look happy with kids in the photos. The one I brought them; I was holding a baby but at a distance from me, and my face didn't look like I was enjoying it. (Polina, Ukrainian, 25)

To be honest with you, I had no experience with the kids so I gave fake references and fake pictures. The agencies don't tell us to fake our childcare experience but they do help you to choose the pictures. I don't like kids at all. I don't like touching kids. Even in Ukraine when people gave their babies to me, I was saying, "I am sorry I have scoliosis, my back will hurt." The truth is, I don't want to hold your baby and I don't want to smell your baby. They kind of smell funky all the time. So the agency helped picking good pictures of me with children, saying "This doesn't look real, this is good." (Yeva, Russian/Ukraine, 27)

I didn't have any experience with kids. Even my friends did not have any kids. All my papers were fake. You have to have a lot of references for childcare, so everything [her application documents] was fake. (Kalyna, Ukrainian, 27)

I had these fake references about my babysitting experience; everyone had fake references. I got it from my best friend, and her sister and from my uncle. (Liza, Ukrainian, 28)

For the families with children attending day care or school, driving competency was a very important criterion for selecting an au pair. None of the study participants owned a car at home and most obtained a driving license before they left home. As such, the ones who provided accurate information could not get a match for a while or had to match with families having infants or toddlers. On the other hand, the ones who misreported their driving competency in order to find a match had hard time in adjusting to driving when they arrived to the United States. Their host parents did not allow these au pairs to drive the kids until they practiced driving for a while under host families' guidance or by themselves.

While the au pair programs look for au pairs who have interests in spending time with children, or "love children," few study participants expressed interest in this aspect of the programs. Gendered cultural norms regarding childcare as an "innately feminine" task that doesn't require training, skills, or effort (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003;

MacDonald 1998) also shaped study participants' rationality for submitting fake references to the families: Having no or some experience in childcare, or for some "getting along well with children" or "liking children" were enough to be qualified for working as paid child caregivers. However, once they started to work as live-in au pairs, as will be explained in the following section, the physical and emotional challenges of this care work would create frustration, disappointment and exhaustion for them.

4.5 Conclusions

The motivations, expectations and settlement plans of study participants regarding the au pair program showed that study participants came to the United States not out of an economic necessity, but to be cultural exchange or language exchange students. These expectations fit well with the general objective of the program for foreign youth, as it was described in the introduction chapter. As such, mastering English language skills was ranked at the top of all motivations, as it would help study participants to improve their marketability in the labor markets, advance their professional career, and proceed to their higher educational study plans when they return to their home countries. Given the harsh economic conditions in their home countries as explained in Chapter 1, in addition to have good foreign language skills, they also thought that having educational and living experience in a foreign country could put them in a more advantaged position in competing for jobs in the labor markets. Thus, educational component of the program, although it offered limited access, was an important motivating factor for the participants.

In addition, au pair programs, as presented by the au pair agencies, were perceived as a scarce opportunity to travel to and learn about the United States and American culture without any financial costs or risks. When considering the wage

differential between the host and home countries and difficulty of obtaining a U.S. visa, as Geserick described, participating to the au pair program looked like carefree travel to a country that they had always dreamed of visiting. In addition, study participants were convinced that it would be a safe and cheap option to travel abroad given that host parents were screened by the agencies, were willing to “host” them as guests or family members and pay for all their expenses.

As found in other studies concerning motivations of au pairs, several au pairs in this study were motivated to participate in the program in order to take a temporary break from their lives, either to distance themselves from unexpected or traumatic personal experiences, or to refresh their thoughts and reconsider future plans. For these participants, the decision to apply to the program was a quick one, usually followed by moments of anxiety, frustration, disappointment, or sadness.

Unlike other studies of au pairs, I found that salary had not been a major motivating factor. However, I claimed that an intersectional analysis of social class and nationality would provide further understanding of this matter. I found that working-class study participants valued financial benefit of the program more than their middle class counterparts from the same nationality background. Thus, they ranked financial benefit of the program among their primary motivations.

Finally, I found that the lack of transnational networks with the host country has been an important factor in shaping study participants’ expectations from the program and their initial settlement plans. In the lack of networks with other au pairs in the host country, study participants solely relied on information provided by the au pair placement agencies. These agencies misarticulated the roles and responsibilities of au pairs by

marketing the au pair program as an easy job. Even though the United States government took an important step for a fair treatment of au pairs by defining their status as “employees,” sponsoring au pair agencies, as the sole mediators between the host parents and au pairs, still try to persuade au pairs that they will be like a guest, a family member “not an employee”. In doing so, they market a distorted image of “au pair life” to potential au pair program participants in order to attract them by disarticulating crucial work aspect of au pair placement in the United States. Thus, au pairs were attracted to the non-work aspects of the program, such as traveling, meeting new people, and experiencing American lifestyle. Because the meaning of babysitting differs in American and Ukrainian contexts, au pairs were not aware (and also misled to believe) that their fulltime childcare service was a pivotal need for their host parents.

In terms of initial settlement plans, study participants reported that they were planning to stay in the host country no more than one year. I explained that in the lack of transnational networks, these plans were meaningful because they were not informed about the kind of opportunities they would have in the country. This finding will be elaborated upon in the chapter 6 where I describe how social networks in the host countries transformed the initial settlement plans of the study participants.

Study participants’ matching criterion and strategies employed for granting a “good match” reflected their motivations for becoming au pairs and gendered cultural norms about childcare, which in return shaped their experiences as au pairs. Priority of living in a metropolitan area, being placed in families with fewer children or with parents from same nationalities, flexibility of families’ living terms in their matching decisions resonated their willingness to participate in the au pair programs as an opportunity to

travel, study, and experience American culture. Au pairs who applied during off-season or were primarily motivated to travel abroad for distancing themselves from a personal relationship or trauma were not very selective applicants, and thus, were placed in families who were not “good matches.”

During the match process, host parents could sometimes provide misleading information regarding the location of their families or the services expected from the au pairs, which led to unexpected amount of work and isolation of au pairs. Au pairs could also be misleading by presenting themselves as good driver and experienced babysitters. Having limited or no information about the necessity of daily driving in the United States, the gendered cultural norms regarding childcare as an “innately feminine” task that doesn’t require training or skills accompanied by unpopularity of hiring paid domestic helpers in their home countries, majority of the au pairs provided fake childcare references and stated that they were experienced drivers. While driving incompetency could be overcome by practice or rematching with families who needed less or no driving service, underestimating the physical and emotional labor aspects of fulltime childcare service later led to exhaustion, frustration and disappointment in their au pairing experiences once were placed with the host families.

CHAPTER 5

AU PAIR IN AMERICA: WORKING AND LIVING EXPERIENCES OF AU PAIRS

In this chapter I present the working and living conditions, and personal experiences, of au pairs living with American host families. I also discuss their relationships with host families and perceived statuses in host families' households. In doing so, I analyze how intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, age, immigration status and cultural values of domesticity created asymmetrical power relations between the au pairs and their employers.

In section two, I describe au pairs' everyday struggles and resistance strategies for coping with and overcoming workplace abuses, and negotiating their relative powerless positions in host families' households. I also analyze the roles of au pair agencies, limitations of au pairs placement regulations, cultural differences, and functions of social networks in shaping resistance strategies of the au pairs. Finally, I describe the access of au pairs to social networks and the extent of these networks during the au pair placement stage from an intersectionality framework of analysis.

5.1 Work Schedules

Work schedules of au pairs varied based on specific needs and demographics of the families for whom they worked. The number of children under their care, ages of these children, work schedules of host parents, children's schedules for school and extracurricular activities and other household duties assigned by the employers were the factors that constructed the content and length of their workload and schedules. Study

participants fit their school schedules and annual visits to their home countries according to their weekly work schedules provided by their host parents in accord with these factors. These factors also determined the total number of hours study participants worked in a week. When children's daily schedules were emptied on school breaks or holidays or au pairs were asked to accompany the families on their vacation times, study participants worked more than 45 hours weekly. While families headed by a single parent added more working hours, the employment status of host mothers did not influence the workload and work hours of the au pairs. When children were older and more independent, or spent most of their time at day care or school, study participants worked less than 45 hours weekly. However, if the number of school-aged children was greater than two, more child-related tasks such as cleaning and cooking, and thus, additional work hours were required. Finally, leisure time of the study participants, which was set at one and a half days per week by the Department of State, was also adjusted, primarily in accord with the schedules of the children and host parents.

Duties of study participants, who were taking care of children at school or kindergarten age, were consisted of waking up the children in the morning, getting them ready for the school (feeding and dressing them and preparing their lunch boxes), driving them to their schools and extracurricular activities, tidying and cleaning their rooms, doing their laundry, helping them with their homework and preparing meals for them.

Working hours of the au pairs also depended on children's school schedules and the times at which host parents left for work. Host families generally were composed of dual-earner parents, who left home early in the morning for work. In families with school-aged children, as their host parents left early in the morning, au pairs had the sole

responsibility of preparing the children for school. In addition, in families headed by a single parent with full-time job, au pairs had longer work hours.

Because her first host parents were commuting from Virginia to D.C. for work, Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) had to be awake by 5 a.m. to prepare three children, aged 5, 8 and 10, for school. As she was taking care of three children, she was kept busy with cleaning up after them, doing their laundry, and cleaning their rooms while they were at school:

What were your responsibilities?

I was driving the children to different schools. I was preparing their breakfast, dressing them because they did not know how to dress themselves. Basically, I was supposed to go and pick up the youngest one from the school at 12 o'clock, and the older ones [came home] from school at 3 o'clock. I didn't really have time for myself at all when they were at school because there [was a] three hours' gap between dropping the youngest to school and picking her up. [When children were at school] I [was doing] their laundry. So there [were] three kids and Americans don't wear the same stuff the second day. If they didn't do their beds, I had to do their beds. I had to clean their rooms every day. They had a common bathroom that had to be clean[ed] all the time. When they came home, I prepared lunch for them, and just stayed with them and [help with] their homework until 6 o'clock. These were basically the instructions.

A typical workday of study participants resonated with the content of Nadia's daily schedule. Au pairs were mostly occupied with child-related light housework at times when children were not around. When au pairs worked in houses with 3 or 4 children, their daily workloads took longer time to complete. Among these au pairs, Katerina (Ukrainian, 25) agreed to be placed in a family with four children on the condition that she would be only responsible for the care of younger twins. However, she found herself responsible for all of the children's care, in addition to having a very structured and labor-intensive work schedule filled with regular cooking, laundry and

ironing:

Because there were four kids, there was a lot of laundry. I also had to [prepare] a menu on Sunday night for the whole week's breakfast, lunch and dinner [in a way] that meals [could not] be repeated during the whole week. [The host mother] said, "You don't have to cook dinner, but just in case, if we are late at [coming] home, I want to know you will be able to do this for the kids." They worked long hours so I was cooking every day. I understand that they want[ed] their kids to eat healthy food, but it was a lot of responsibility. At my home, I would have the same meal, I don't even eat that much and even I need[ed] to eat, I could barely cook. My mom was cooking and I would help her.

What was your daily schedule like?

Younger kids' school starts at 9 [a.m.] and the older one's starts at 8 [a.m.] so they have their breakfast at 7 [a.m.] and by 7:30 [a.m.] they leave the house. Obviously, I had to be in the kitchen at 6 [a.m.] every morning and prepare breakfast ready for all the kids by 7 [a.m.] Meals were [expected to be] served neatly and combined well. Then, I have to drop the younger ones to school, [their] dad took the older ones [to the school]. I had to pick up all of them from school, prepare their lunch and drop the older ones to the activities and the dinner should be ready at 6 [p.m.]. Even the nights when I didn't prepare the dinner, I was obliged to stay for dinner. I couldn't say like, "OK, it is 5 [p.m.], I am out."

Why didn't you want to join them in dinner?

Because I was exhausted by that time already. Everything was left one me. I could hardly find time for myself. My host mother said, "Whenever you think you are done, you can go." But the whole thing, there was a lot of work to do; it is not only putting the clothes on the washer or dryer, I had to iron all of it. At nights, I was off by 6 [p.m.] or 7 [p.m.], and since I have to wake up at 6 in the morning, I [didn't want to] wake up tired [so] I [was going to] the bed early. On Friday nights I couldn't go anywhere cause I was very tired. So I would just sleep. Then [on] Saturdays, since I had to wake up early every [other] morning, I was sleeping till noon. Basically I only had Sunday afternoons and Sunday mornings, because on Sunday nights, if I want to go somewhere, I would obviously let them know, right? They warned me about it: "Well, you are a member, you have to be here at tomorrow 6 [a.m.]."

Katerina worked at this pace for approximately seven months. Feeling very exhausted, unhappy, and isolated, she contacted her agency several times. When she wanted to change her host family, her counselor advised her to give herself time in order to get adjusted to her duties. She was eventually rematched with a new family, but felt that the au pair agency wasn't very helpful:

My host family wasn't following the rules. I was like a housemaid more than an au pair. I had pressure on me; the host mother was yelling at me every day. I wasn't happy there; that's not why I [came] here. I called my counselor and she said, "You have to be there at least three months, because probably you will get adjusted to things, you will let things go away." In the beginning I thought that maybe it was my fault, I am not doing well but talking to other au pairs, I saw that 80% of them were not doing what I was doing, not even close to that. It was unfair. I called the consular again and she told me, "Don't freak out. This family is not great but I will help you out with them. I talked to them already and she will follow the rules with you." Nothing changed. When she called, my host mother told her that she wants her kids to eat healthy and cooking doesn't take more than half an hour. No, it took at least an hour every meal to cook for what she wanted in menu. Because I kept calling the counselor, she told me that if they put me on rematch list, I [would] have to go with the first family who picks me and it could be anywhere in the U.S.

I don't think there is such a rule, is there?

No, there wasn't. I can match with [whom] I want to, not with whoever takes me. She was lying because she wanted me to keep working for them. She knew that au pairs were running away from that family every year. She knew that I had a boyfriend in Virginia and so I wanted to stay here. Then she offered me to find a family by myself, and convinced them to register with their au pair agency. They would give the family a discounted registration fee, and match us quickly. Then I learned that actually there are web sites that you can look for families online. I found one in Virginia, and the agency re-matched me with them.

Jenya (Ukrainian, 24) and Polina (Ukrainian, 25) were two friends who were also working for families with four children. Unlike Katerina, Polina did not complain about

her cooking shift, because it meant that she would spend less time, as she said, “to deal with” four children who were “good kids” yet “were never quiet” and “spoiled as most American children.” Time spent for cooking was an escape for her from babysitting, which, as she explained, she had had no interest in doing when applied to the program. Polina’s host mother was a stay-at-home mother; yet, the mother’s presence at home didn’t necessarily reduce her workload. She reported that she was always working more than 60 hours per week and her extra work hours were unpaid. Similarly, Jenya was preoccupied with the child-related duties all day as her host parents were full-time employees and were absent from home. Both found working for a family with four kids very challenging. While Polina resented the fact that she could never ask her host mother to follow their contract, Jenya relied on her spirituality to cope with the challenges of her workload:

Taking care of four kids is tough; it is not easy. It is not easy but it is fun. It is fun because it is different and complicated, that’s why it is fun. Whatever God sends to you, no matter how difficult it is because he sent it to you, you will find a way...In the weekends, I just want to stay in and relax, lay down and watch some TV in my room. Doing nothing sometimes. It is OK to be lazy. I read a book, sometimes go out with my friends for a movie or dinner. (Jenya)

With four children, you don't have time to sit...Because the mother was at home, I also had to pretend that I was doing something all the time. You can't just sit [down]. I was cooking for them every night. For me it was better to cook rather than playing with the children. You have to cook for the kids but the father wasn't eating at home so I was cooking for the mother and myself, too. I cooked vegetables, meats, rice, pasta, and the fruit needs to be washed, cut, put in different bowls. I was watching everyone to finish their dishes. That’s what the mother wanted me to do; making sure that they finished their food. I had to clean the dinner table and load everything in the dishwasher. I could have been different. I was working 60 hours, and they never paid me for these extra hours. I was sick once, and had high fever and she said, “We are going to the concert.” What the

f***! I was still supposed to work because they were going to the concert and they were not paying me for extra. I was stupid not to ask them pay me for extra hours. (Polina)

Arina (Ukrainian/Georgia, 30) was working for a single father who had three children and one large dog. When she arrived, she found that they were living in a “messy house” “in the woods” that she had to clean, in addition to taking care of all chores, and caring for children and their dog. Because the host father was leaving at 5 a.m. each morning, and not coming home until 5 p.m., she was fulfilling “a surrogate mother and wife” (Lan 2007) position, working non-stop during the time he was gone and after he came home from. She worked for this family for one year, and eventually rematched with a new family because she was physically and emotionally exhausted.

When I asked Arina if she tried to negotiate reducing her working hours, she explained that the way she was raised in Georgia, and the expectations that she would be a family member stopped her from doing so. In addition, because she was living in an isolated area and not driving, she did not have a chance to meet other au pairs and compare her experience with theirs. Therefore, she thought that her workload could not be much different than that of a typical au pair.:

He never [talked with] me about my what my hours [were going to be]. If there was no one at home, I guess I am not working. In the summer, I was working all the time. Because the father [didn't] cook, they used to come to me when they [were hungry]. I [couldn't] say, “I am not working, go do it yourself.” In the mornings, he was asking me, “Go do breakfast” and I was doing it. He never said “please”. He was yelling at me sometimes and after yelling, he was saying, “OK, go and prepare breakfast.” Once one of my friends stayed with me in my room. We were woken up early in the morning by the kids because they were kicking my bedroom door and saying “Hey, wake up. Daddy wants the breakfast.” I was basically doing all the chores. And there was a huge dog in the house, and she was

very hairy. Of course nobody was taking care of her. They weren't even grooming her. There was a huge pile of dog hair in the corners of the house. If the father yelled at the children, maybe then they would take her out to the deck and brush her hair once a month. They didn't even have a maid. I asked him why, and he said that he couldn't afford it. He was buying \$200 purses for his girl, so he couldn't afford a maid...I feel so bad that I let him to do these all to me.

Why did you let him behave this way to you?

Because the au pair agency said that you are going to have a host family and they will be like your parents so I was respecting him as a father. This is my Georgian mentality. An older man is telling you [to do] something and you don't argue with him because of your respect to his age. So I was overworking. I was shy to ask about my hours because since we were living as a family, they were not hours. It is a Georgian thing as well. In Georgia, you don't ask your boss what your salary would be because you would feel uncomfortable.

Arina was born in Ukraine but raised in Georgia. Like Arina, Nadia (Ukrainian, 29) explained that Ukrainian au pairs were reluctant to bargain for their working hours because of cultural differences:

It is in our culture that we have to respect people older than us. We don't call older people with their first names only. We called them as "Aunt" or "Ms." When our teachers enter the classroom, we all have to stand up and say "Hi." I think because we respect people older than us, we don't question host parents. (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

In comparison to those in families with several children, au pairs who took care of babies or children old enough to be independent reported that they worked 45 hours or less per week. The first host parents of Galya (Ukrainian, 22), Kristina (Ukrainian, 26), Dora (Hungarian, 25) and Ivanna (Ukrainian, 30) had only one infant in their families. Regarding their work schedules, these au pairs defined their duties as relatively easy, as they had more control over their labor and built a special bond with the baby under their

care:

What are your work hours?

I wake up at 7:30 [a.m.], I have thirty minutes to get ready and go upstairs. My host parents leave for work and my day starts. He [the baby] has a schedule to be fed and to have a bath. I play with him and do his laundry. Then the parents come home around 5 [p.m.]. [The] host mom was cooking because she gained weight when pregnant and wanted to prepare light meals. I didn't have to clean up after meals but I helped them. Sometimes they cleaned up after me when I had to leave for my classes. (Kristina)

I worked from 9 [a.m.] till 6 [p.m.] five days a week. My host parents work. My schedule depended on the baby. If she wanted to eat, I fed her. If she wanted to sleep, I put her to sleep. My only responsibility was to take care of the baby. (Galya)

Depending on the schedule of host parents and how their duties were determined, au pairs in households with teenagers had more structured work schedules, which were composed of 45 hours or less in a week. Among those, Julia (Czech, 25) was initially placed in a family in a suburban area with two children aged 3 and 6. After working with them for six months, she decided to leave. She hoped to find another family with older children. She explained the difference between two families as follows:

My first host parents were doctors and living. Their work schedule was crazy; they were working a lot. My kids were 3 and 6 years old and I was with the kids basically all the time. There were no clear work hours for me. I never worked 40 hours a week, because I always worked more. Then I luckily I found a family in Potomac, with teenagers so it was great. They really didn't need me more than just taking the kids to school and activities. I wasn't playing with them or anything; I was just driving them to places. Also, I was cooking for them. They ate five meals; chicken all the time. It was easy. I don't even call it cooking.

Similarly, Adela (Czech) was placed in a family with two teenagers. She stayed with this family for five years. She explained that she was initially working for about 40

hours per week, but that this schedule reduced gradually as the kids grew older. Fedora (Ukrainian, 27) on the other hand, was a new au pair in a house with two teenage children. The total hours worked per week was reduced once the children began attending school, during the fall and spring, and was about 45 hours during the summer as she was spending more time involved with their extracurricular activities.

Regardless of the length and content of their work schedules, all au pairs expressed that they appreciated host parents who provided them with structured working hours and instructions, and did not expect them to work after they had arrived home. Even those who had to work long hours with demanding workloads, appreciated knowing that they would be off at a certain time every day to go to their bedrooms or leave the house:

I really had a big advantage with my first family. If I finish[ed] my work at 6 [p.m.], that [was] it. At 6:01 [p.m.], the host mother was at home and that [was] it. I [was] done. And they paid on time; I never had issues with them about that. (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

I didn't work more than 40 hours a week. My family actually was pretty loyal. The most I loved about my family, whenever they are at home, I didn't work. If either of them were at home during the day, I stopped working, yes. (Ioanna, Ukrainian, 28)

Conversely, some au pairs reported that they worked longer hours and had less control over their free times when their host parents provided them with unstructured working schedules and arbitrary days off:

At the very beginning I was really pissed because I was supposed to work 45 hours, and they were going out on Saturdays evenings, so it was more than 45 hours. Between 9 [a.m.] and 1 [p.m.] I was free then, but then the schedule, it was kind of hard. I was kind of upset because the au pair [they had] before me, she

picked up the kids only three times a week, so I was like, why they even do this to me? I mean, well, everybody wants to save money. I was free on some Sundays. They didn't go out every Saturday, once or twice a month... Actually what I really didn't like about them because they didn't really tell me about what I had to do, so I knew what I need to do but they didn't really tell me "OK, you can go now," so I just needed to figure out when I am done with working by myself. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

After Maryana completed the program, Olga (Ukrainian, 25) became the host family's new au pair. Her host family put Maryana in contact with Olga when she arrived in the United States. Like Maryana, Olga was very dissatisfied with her unstructured working hours. Her off days were barely pronounced, and thus, she was "on call" most of the time and was not attending social gatherings with her au pair friends.

By the au pair program regulations, families were expected to spend leisure time with their au pairs and expose them to American culture. However, some au pairs reported that they were still expected to work when they dined out or went to vacation with their host family:

When I was with the baby all day, I was supposed to be done by 6 o'clock. I am not supposed to work after that time, right? They always asked me to go to dinner with them. I could never say no because she would be like, "You don't want to come with us?" In the restaurant, when everyone was eating, the baby poops herself. Everyone suddenly looks at me and the mother says, "Oh, she pooped, she pooped!" That means I had to change her diaper. If we went out together, I always had to carry the baby. It is like, you never belong to yourself. Even on family vacations we had. She was like, "Oh we are going to Michigan!" I hate Michigan because we were going there every summer for one and a half months and I had to be with them all the time in a house in the middle of the forest. It is a family place of course they loved it, but for me, I was working 24/7. There is nowhere to go, I was just stuck in the house with the kids...Even on the beach, you always have to watch the kids. I had to follow kids whatever they did. Even I didn't like to swim, I had to swim when they did. There is no break time at all. At

least in D.C. at 6 pm I could escape and meet my friends but on vacations I couldn't. (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

That family also took me to few places. They went to Massachusetts. They didn't even ask me if I wanted to go with them. They were going for a wedding and needed me for watching the children. [Later] we had an argument when I requested a vacation because they said, "Remember that Massachusetts trip, it was your vacation." I was watching the kids; it wasn't a vacation. I was cooking dinner for everyone there. I wouldn't spend my vacation to cook for them. They took me with them to trips when they have space in their van, and I was watching their kids when they needed to go to restroom or something. (Arina, Ukrainian/Georgia, 29)

They used to take me with them on vacations. Now, they ask me if I want to go with them and I don't want to. I mean I love them but I don't want to see them every single day. When it is vacation for them, I still feel like I am working. If I see they are doing something wrong, I cannot just ignore. So I prefer to stay at home. (Sasha, Russian, 28)

As live-in workers, au pairs' work schedules and hours showed similar patterns to that of live-in domestic workers. As Lan (2006:19) stated, live-in domestic employment "challenges the dichotomization between workplace and home" and "public and private" because private zone of live-in domestic workers overlaps with their workplace. In the lack of a clear distinction of boundaries of work place and home and "given their expectation of being treated as 'members of the family'," live-in domestic workers lacked control over their working hours and labor. In addition, they performed tasks outside of their duties because they "did not view the required tasks as work but as 'help,' as is understood within the moral economy of domestic work." (Hess and Puckhaber 2004:69)

Adela (Czech, 26) explained that she was cooking for the entire family once a week, folding parents' laundry when she found it in the dryer because helping her family with housework "wasn't a big deal" given that she was working less than 45 hours a

week and her parents were treating her well:

I was working about 38-40 hours in my first year, and then it became less and less hours as kids grew older. My host mom was cooking on Mondays, I was cooking on Tuesdays, and they go out on Wednesday. I was allowed to drive my host mother's car in the beginning. Then they bought me a car after my second month. I think they first wanted to see if I was good with the kids. I never had a curfew. She used to give me \$25 for the gas a month because I was using the car mostly for myself. They were paying my cell phone. I was very lucky.

Unlike live-in domestic workers, however, au pairs did not report any problems regarding salary or wages. They were paid on time and given the amount determined by au pair program contract. However, when they worked extra hours, not all host families paid them for it.

5.2 Living Arrangements

Twenty out of thirty au pairs lived in the basement level of their host family's houses, one in the attic, and the rest had bedrooms in the upper level, mostly located at the corner of children's bedrooms. Placement of live-in domestic helpers in "separate quarters, usually in the basement or attic" or at the corner of children's bedroom "wherein they lack privacy or personal space" (MacDonald 2010:237) was a common finding in literature on accommodation of live-in domestic workers (Chin 1998; Constable 2007; Cox 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo; 2001; Lan 2003b; MacDonald 2010; Rollins 1985) Regarding placement of domestic workers in the basement, Chin (1998:132) stated, "The allocation of living space in which employers occupy the upper floor while placement of live-in domestic workers in the basement or the ground floor is a manifestation of power relations." The physical distance created by placing the au pairs on the lower level of the family house is thus an extension of live-in helpers' lower status

in the family and recalls “a historical throwback to the days of master and servant or upstairs and downstairs” (Cox: 2000:241) Thus, “spatial deference,” where the message is “domestic’s place is on the bottom,” underlines the inferiority of the domestic worker (Rollins 1985:173).

Narratives of two au pairs reverberated with these themes of “master-servant relationship”:

My room was a basement. That’s what they actually give to au pairs in the U.S. It was a nice basement, it was a nice room, and everything was nice. But you just feel like, it’s like, “You can just live in the basement.” That’s it. For me, it was just like “you have to remember what your place is.” (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

While waiting for a rematch, I had a trial with a family. They wanted me to cook and clean, and they showed me my room in the basement. It had no carpets and was very cold. Even the bed was on the floor. It was like a prison [laughing]. The shower didn’t have hot water so I got sick. And that weekend after I spent two nights there, I was like, “OK, let me see what I can do.” I left them immediately. (Ivanna, Ukrainian, 20)

Surprisingly, au pairs whose bedrooms were located in the basement were mostly happy with their accommodation as long as their rooms were decorated nicely and in fairly livable size and had windows and separate entrances:

I had my room in the basement. I was very a big room with a TV, DVD, laptop, and they gave me a cell phone. They never told me “don’t use this or that.” I heard some host parents do that. (Larissa, Ukrainian, 25)

I had my own bedroom and bathroom in the basement, the whole basement is mine so I could come back home at 1 a.m. in the morning, who cares. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

I have a room and bathroom in the basement. It is really nice and it is quiet. I wouldn’t want to live between the kids upstairs [because] I [wouldn't have]

privacy. And I have a different door to enter basement. I always use the main door but if I want to, I can use the back door. I cannot complain. (Sasha, Russian, 28)

We live in a house with a big backyard. I live in the basement. I have a kitchen, but it is not finished yet it is good. I have my own bathroom. It is very new and comfortable. I don't need to see them if I don't want to. In the weekends, I am usually not at home. In downstairs, there is father's office. There is a TV there, but the office is very cold so I can't stay there more than half an hour because I am freezing. (Ema, Hungarian, 26)

I was living in the basement with a separate entrance. I could stay out [as late as] I wanted and dress in what I liked and sneak in in the morning. (Liza, Ukrainian, 28)

As au pairs expressed, living in the basement with a separate exit was more preferable than living in the upstairs because they would have more privacy and autonomy. As adult-aged individuals who sought to have social lives outside of the houses they worked, having a separate entrance let them have freedom to dress as they liked when they went out, have more control over their entrance and, exit to the house without encountering the family members.

However, not all participants had privacy in the basement. In some family houses, children's playrooms, parents' office rooms, guest rooms, utility rooms for laundry and storage were located in the basement. Thus, these au pairs didn't enjoy much freedom and privacy:

My room was in the basement. It was nice. I had my own entrance so I didn't have to use the main entrance. There was this playroom next to my room. Kids were playing there all the time. So it was never quiet. It was fine for a year, but then it was too much. I lived with them for three years, and then I moved in with my boyfriend. (Adela, Czech, 26)

Yeah, it is in the first floor. It is like, my room, the oldest children's room and two younger's room [next to each other]. Upstairs, parents' room. It is a single-family house. In my second host family, I was staying in the basement where there [was] a refrigerator and laundry room, so I [ran] into them a lot. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

I have my room in the basement, it is next to mom's office, so sometimes it is not much private. (Olga, Ukrainian, 25)

For the au pairs who were living in their own rooms, distance from the bedrooms of family members and decoration and comfort of their bedrooms shaped their overall satisfaction with the living arrangements:

In both houses I worked, I had a room upstairs, near baby's room. I had a window, TV, laptop; old, but mine, bathroom shared with baby, a big bed and my room was always warm. My living conditions were very good. (Ivanna, Ukrainian, 30)

I had a room on the second floor with two windows, with a view of forest, and a TV and a DVD. It wasn't in the basement as all au pairs' room. It was separated from the rest. If I come home late, I wouldn't wake anybody up. They didn't give me curfew. I had a friend who had. If she was later than 11 p.m., she had to find a place to stay that night because she were not allowed to get in. (Arina, Ukrainian/Georgia, 29)

My room was like [as big as] two tables; it was too small. It was on the second floor and by the kids' room so it was always noisy. how noisy a baby and a toddler [could] be together. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

When I came to this family, one morning when I woke up I felt depressed because where I was supposed to stay, my room, was too small. Really, really small. It had just a bed and a table. That's it. I was like, "Oh my God, I am a slave" [laughing]. (Natalka, Ukrainian, 27)

When it comes to kids, you need your privacy to get away. I lock my door, and they knock the door, "Hey, can I come in?", and I say "No" because when they come in they will stay there. Sometimes I want to have my distance and I appreciate that they understand it, not get offended or something. It is good hat they understand I am tired. (Jenya, Ukrainian, 24)

Although the majority of au pairs had comfortable, nicely decorated living spaces, some au pairs were placed in families that did not offer comfortable living conditions. If they were treated well by their families, as Alisa explained above, they remained with these families. On the other hand au pairs who did not like the working conditions or treatment from their families, did not stay with their families long. They compared the living conditions provided to prison. These conditions, also forced them to recognize their lower status in the household. As such, they immediately requested a rematch from their agencies and were placed in new host families:

I was living in the basement. My room was without windows. So I was like, “Oh My Gosh, what I am doing here?” I didn’t unpack my stuff for months. I was crying, and I was calling my boyfriend. He sent me an open ticket and money, and asked me to get into a plane and come back. He still asks me to come back even he has a family. I couldn’t leave there more than one and a half months and found a new family. (Kalyna Ukrainian, 26)

[The host family] had two houses and they moved to the new one after a while. I had to live in a room without an air conditioner, no windows. I had to stay in a closet, like a den. In the old house, I had a room and bathroom in the basement. In the new house, there was a cinema room and a bar room. They were on the first floor and they had three bedrooms for each [two children and the host mother]. My room was between [the] children’s bedroom and there was nothing in the den. I stayed one week there and I went to another family. (Irenka, Polish, 31)

Except for a few, who had good relationships with their host parents and thus shared family time, most au pairs preferred to spend their free time away from their families, in their own bedroom. Having a place where they could have privacy, silence away from children, and comfort were important for these au pairs, as they used their bedrooms to rest and relax, cry, eat, talk on the phone, read, or listen to music. No one was asked to spend their free time in their rooms; yet, they preferred to do so after work

hours in order to distance themselves from their daily work routine.

Because their workplace was also their private space, live-in domestic workers found more privacy in public (Ruddick 1996; Vertovec 1999). Staying in their bedrooms after work did not necessarily provide au pairs with complete privacy. The children under their care would come to their rooms to play, and family members would ask them for help or enter their living area to use the utilities or access rooms near their bedrooms. In addition, au pairs were witnessing the daily incompatibilities, fights or conflicts between the family members, which was disturbing for them. Further, they could be placed in families with incompatible lifestyles and views. Yeva (Russian/Ukraine, 27), for example, was placed in a very conservative family where the host father was constantly abusing his son and wife. She expressed her frustration while witnessing this oppression, stating, “I was in love with my host mother but I couldn’t stand seeing her crying and being completely obedient to her husband.”

While allocation of their living space created a physical distance and confirmed their subordinated positions in the host families, it also could provide some au pairs with more autonomy and control over their movement and privacy. When they were provided with comfortable, nicely decorated rooms with windows, it helped them feel more like an equal household member. In the following section, I will explain the factors that made au pairs feel “like a family member,” and, in addition to allocation of living space, how other factors shaped this feeling.

5.3 One of the Family? Employer-Employee Relationship

Affective, quasi-familial and personalized relations and non-work related bonds of attachment are aspects of paid domestic service that inevitably develop, especially in

live-in domestic labor arrangements (Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Rollins 1985). “Being one of the family” has historically been an important theme in studying personal employer-employee relationships and statuses of paid domestic helpers in the paid domestic work literature (Anderson 2002; Bakan and Stasiulis 1997; Constable 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Huang and Yeoh 2007; Lan 2003b, 2006; Miles 1999; Özyeğin 2001; Parreñas 2001; Rollins 1985; Romero 1992; Stiell and England 1997). Theorists have discussed the validity of a domestic worker’s status as a family member and explained that this familial discourse veils the asymmetrical power relationship between the employers and domestic employees derived from gender, ethnicity, race, class, immigrant status and nationality.

They also demonstrated that both parties use the notion of being one of the family for different reasons: Employers address familial metaphors with the purpose of extracting unpaid labor and more flexible service from their domestic workers (Anderson 2000). Calling paid domestic workers family members obscures “contract-bound employment relations” and thus “employers might manipulate a worker’s emotional attachment to her ward in order to extract additional unpaid labor or to request overtime.” (Lan 2003a:541) In other words, by calling a domestic worker a family member, the employers impose a “subtle form of coercion” on their domestic workers (Constable 2007:17). In addition, Anderson (2000:124) stated that through exerting “being a part of the family” notion, employers also attempt to manage “contradictions of intimacy and status that attach to the role of domestic worker, who is at once is privy to many of the intimate details of family life, yet is also their status giver, their myth-maker.” Anderson further explained that the being one of the family notion “explicitly rejects the

commodification of human relations while sustaining an illusion of affective relations.”
(ibid)

In her study of domestic workers in European countries, Anderson found that while being one of the family was perceived as “a great favor” for the employer, for domestic workers “it may be experienced as a denial of their humanity, a deep depersonalization, as being perceived only in their occupational role, as a ‘domestic’ rather than as a person with her own needs, her own life, and her own family outside of the employer’s home.” (ibid: 125) In conclusion, theorists of domestic work acknowledge that the being one of the family notion is rather “a myth,” “an illusion” that veils the asymmetrical power relationship between the employers and employees and mostly contributes to the exploitation, rather than betterment, of domestic workers.

On the other hand, domestic workers might want to be a part of the family because of resentment of working in an occupation “that is often difficult, degrading, and highly stigmatized” (Constable 2007:10). Their desire to be treated as human beings, and for deemphasizing servitude and creating an informal and less rigid work environment that would give them flexible work standards (Parreñas 2001). By choosing to integrate themselves into their employers’ families, domestic workers can also “use their bonds [as] care recipients to advance their status in the family and to exchange for material or emotional rewards from employers.” (Lan 2003a:541)

However, while “being a part of the family does not entitle the worker to unconditional love or support, it does entitle the employer to encroach on the worker's off-duty hours for ‘favors.’” (Anderson 2002: 112) Regarding the fluidity of this discourse, Anderson further explained, “In fact, many employers will invoke either a

contractual or a family relationship under different circumstances, depending on what is most convenient.” (ibid) For example, when domestic workers get sick, their employers would not let them rest but expected them to work. Therefore, the distinction between domestic worker as a family member and a domestic employee is left at the discretion of the employer. Also, as Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) and Cox and Narula (2004) showed, some employers would prefer to have a distant, rather than an intimate relationship with their domestic workers.

Furthermore, some studies demonstrated that paid domestic workers resist being called family members and prefer professional relationships with their employers (Romero 1992; Stiell and England 1997). In this way, they can “control the work process and alter the employee-employer relationship to a client-tradesperson relationship.” (Romero 1992:15) Bakan and Staisiulis (1977:11) explained that there are two reasons why many household workers firmly reject the notion that they are part of their employer’s family. First, “such kinship-idioms mask their actual subordinate status and position in their employer’s household.” Second, “it obscures the fact that domestic workers have families of their own.”

In the case of typical paid domestic employment, the “being part of family” notion develops by time in an employer-employee relationship as a result of a domestic worker’s long-term involvement in the care of children, the elderly and the family (Lan 2006). Regarding childcare work, Gregson and Lowe (1994) argued that “false kinship relations” develop because caregivers inevitably get emotionally attached to children and mothers see their nannies as mother-substitutes and feel indebted to them.” However, this is not the case in au pair employment.

As Miller and Burikova (2010:191) stated, “defining the au pair as an institution reinforces this idiom of pseudo-family relations as a means to create a sufficient and affordable market for childcare.” As literature on au pairs showed (Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Geserick 2012), young women who partake in au pair employment do not “experiencing this pseudo-family integration.” (Burikova and Miller 2010:34) Rather, they see au pair employment as the means for getting away from their own personal and familial problems, leaving home, visiting a new place, experiencing cultural exchange and personal growth, and so on.

Host families are not expecting pseudo-family relations either. Given that the U.S. government does not provide state-run child-care services similar to those found in most European countries, American dual-earner families value the affordable, live-in childcare aspects of au pair programs. In addition, by having educated, culturally similar class-peers, American families could get high-quality childcare (Geserick 2012; Wrigley 1995). Nevertheless, as Burikova and Miller (2010:35) explained, “Although neither side really enters into this arrangement in order to experience a pseudo-family relationship, most au pairs clearly expect a degree of family-like integration.” However, two studies does with au pairs in Europe found out that within the pseudo-family, host parents often impose a parental-like authority” on their au pairs whom they treated as children (Burikova and Miller 2010; Cox and Narula 2004).

When I asked study participants about their statuses in their households, based treatment and attitudes of host parents towards them, their responses varied. The first group of au pairs expressed that they felt like a family member such as an elder sister, daughter or second mother. The second group of au pairs expressed that they were called

family members but were not treated as such. The third group of au pairs reported that they had either a formal or a semi-personalized employer-employee relationship, and thus defined themselves as employees. The fourth group of au pairs reported that they felt like maids, servants or slaves. It is worth noting that, as found in Mellini et al.'s study (2007), objective aspects of the au pair arrangements (working hours and living arrangements) were not influential factors in shaping au pair's perspectives of their statuses. As such, an au pair who worked more than 45 hours per week and had four children under their care did not feel like less of a family member than did an au pair looking after one child who worked fewer hours. However, when family demographics were taken into consideration, au pairs who were age-peers with their employers had friendlier relationships with their employers.

Kristina (Ukrainian, 26) and Dora (Hungarian, 25) belonged to the first group of au pairs who identified themselves as family members. Both were placed in families with an infant, and parents in their late 20s and early 30s. Spending their entire workday caring for of an infant, they developed strong emotional attachments to the child in their care. They reported that their employers treated them like a family member and engaged them in family's quality time after work hours.

Dora's host parents were a newlywed young couple. As a fairly wealthy family that owned a family company, they did not have to go to work much. Dora had a very friendly relationship with her employers who were age-peers with her and called the infant under her care for three years as "my boy." Indeed, her role in the family was more like that of a household manager rather than an employee. Because they treated her like a sister, engaged her in social activities and events and were very generous to her

financially, she was voluntarily involved in the charge of household chores as if she were a family member:

I worked for them for little bit more than two years. I did a lot more than babysitting. My responsibility wasn't just [taking care of] the baby. I took care of the house as well. I was there every night with the family, like a big sister. They called me [the] second mommy. I actually never used my bedroom for other than sleeping because I had a great family. We were always spending time together. I was going to movies with the husband and playing softball with their dad. I was like a part of the family. We always had [the] dinner together. They always [took] me to trips [with them]. If I [had] to go anywhere, if they [needed] to go out, we were making arrangements.

Dora actually found her working and living environment very laid back after working in multiple jobs simultaneously to make a living at her home country. Because she could not attend university after finishing vocational school, her main motivation for coming to the United States was to study. Her host parents had been very supportive and helpful in realizing this goal:

Well, I didn't know how this college system works here. I wanted to study. My [host] family said that it wasn't really worth getting an associates degree. In [the] first year, I took English courses to get TOEFL in [a community college] and passed it. My host mom found [an] event management certificate in [a private university], which was expensive. Then they sponsored me for a student visa at the end of [the] second year and I started to study hospitality management. I wanna get my bachelor, right? I [will be] able to transfer to the University of Maryland in the fall.

Dora also developed very good relationships with her employers' families and friends as she was accompanying her employers to events and social gatherings. Indeed, she married her male employer's colleague that she met when her employer's father took her and him to a football game in Ohio. After working slightly more than two years for

her host family, she decided to quit her job because she was concerned that having her husband working for her employers would complicate their relationship. Although her early leave broke the verbal contract she had with her host parents, it did not damage their friendship:

My husband works in their company as the senior vice president of operations. I decided that I don't want to be an au pair anymore and be the wife of SVP of the operations. The host parents were still treating me the same way but it was me more than other people. I also wanted other people to know that I am not a nanny any more. When I told them that I was not going to work for them anymore, because I was supposed to stay for another year and they were helping me with the visa, it was the only problem we had. But, I stopped [working] because we are engaged now and we are gonna get married... We are still in touch. I talk to them every week. We go to movies together. They are gonna have their second baby on Thursday so I went over and helped with the baby's room.

In comparison to Dora's employers, Kristina's employers treated her more like a younger sister, as she was relatively younger than them. When Kristina arrived in the United States two years ago, her English language skills were very limited. In the first interview, she explained that her employers, who were a young couple working for the government, had been very respectful and kind towards her and helpful during her transition of getting used to the American lifestyle, finding a language school, and speaking English in her daily life. They always invited Kristina to their family events and vacations, organized activities to spend the weekends together, helped her find her way around in Washington, D.C., and had family meals together. When her employers left home in the morning, her shift started. She did not call her working responsibilities "work," but rather, a familial responsibility as a member of the family:

I don't think it is like working [because] I just stay with the baby. When I received my first salary, I wrote to my friend, "I am just having fun." We are OK, like a family. They are very careful about my hours. They are counting every minute. They pay me extra if I need to work extra time.

I met Kristina on her twenty-third month for a follow-up. She explained that she had been spending less time in her host family's house after work. When her shift finished, she left home to take photography courses, participated in the training of a triathlon group, and went to Bikhran yoga—activities that she did not have access to, or the money or resources for, while in her home country. As she made new social circles, she also started to take vacations with her new friends. She explained that, although she was spending more time independently, she still felt like a family member, and was willing to incorporate her time into the family time. However, there had been two occasions recently that made her upset about being left out: a celebration dinner for her host mother's pregnancy and a weekend trip when her host parents left on the trip without telling her or inviting her:

It has been almost two years. How is your relationship with your employers?

I still feel like a family member but sometimes I didn't feel this way so I was crying. The day before [the host mother] went to the hospital, she told me that her family was going to visit. I was upstairs and getting ready for my swimming class. I saw that they had a celebration dinner for the baby. She [hadn't] invited me so I was so sad about this...Every weekend we have plans together. We always discuss about what we are going to do in the weekends and they ask me if I want to join them. I woke up one morning and there was nobody at home. I was so sad so I just walked around the city and took some pictures. When they came back, I got to know that they went to Virginia to visit some castle. [If I knew about their plans], I would want to go with them.

Why do you think that they didn't invite you?

I don't know. I was talking to my boyfriend on Skype and he told me, "Maybe they need some rest from you and have their own family time."

Although Kristina was frustrated and heartbroken because of these recent incidents, when I asked how she felt about leaving her host family, she burst into tears. It was not because of having indistinct plans for her life after leaving them, but of a strong emotional attachment she had with the toddler and his parents. She was, among all other au pairs with a Facebook account, the only one who posted family photos with her host family. She wanted to stay longer to improve her English because she was speaking in Russian to the toddler the entire day. In addition, she broke up with her Ukrainian boyfriend, with whom she was planning to immigrate to Australia, so there was no reason to return home immediately. The only way to stay for the third year was to find a sponsor to switch to a student visa and find a new live-in childcare arrangement. Her host family, she said, did everything to help out and keep her. However, because they were working for the government, they could not let her to work for them while studying because international students were not allowed to work while on student visas. Therefore, they were more rule-abiding than other host families and did not want to get into trouble for being involved in an "illegal action." At the end of her 24th month in the United States, Kristina was seeking to stay with a friend and find someone in her home country to sponsor her.

Au pairs who extended their stay for the second year with the same host families reported similar frustration about their host families' real feelings for them. Indeed, most went through dramatic changes and severe disruption in the strength of their relationships and intimacies they shared with their host families. These au pairs belonged in the second

group who were called a family member but they were not treated like one in the long run. Like Kristina, I met Olga (Ukrainian, 25) at the initial stage of her au pair placement in a dual-earner (a Ukrainian host father and an American mother) family with children aged 8 and 10. Olga was motivated to participate in the au pair program to study in the United States. In our first meeting, she was very stressed about deciding what to do with her limited time in the United States. She knew about the educational opportunities in the United States from au pairs she had met and wanted to make the most of her time. After four months, in the follow-up meeting at my apartment, she was more relaxed because she felt more confident about her plans. Her host parents were encouraging her to study for a Masters' degree in law and paid for her TOEFL exam. When the children were at school, she took classes in a community college and, at night, was doing crochet dresses and studying for her classes. We met in my apartment to take photographs of her crochet dresses because her host mother motivated her to create an online website to sell the handcraft apparel she made. She explained that she felt like a family member because her host parents were supporting her in her studies and also were thankful for her voluntary contribution to household chores and her close relationship with their younger child:

You look more relaxed and happier this time. What has changed?

Yeah, because I have direct plans and I am following them because when I came here, my host mom and host dad, they were talking about, "OK, those are the books, if you want to study or enter university for a degree or whatsoever. [The host father] gave me American history books. And he is asking, "How many pages did you read today?" My host father kind of understands [because he was immigrant as well] that I am not here just to waste my time because I have Master's degree. It is not like I am [referring to the German au pairs] a 19 year-old girl, who just finished school and wants to have a fun year. I came here with a purpose.

Olga explained that she was looking for a university that she could afford and have a class schedule that fits into her work schedule. Her host parents often stayed at work late at night and Olga was looking after children during those times. Therefore, she could go to her classes only when the children were at school during late morning and early afternoon hours. As a result, she could attend early afternoon college composition classes at a community college to prepare for graduate school. Knowing that graduate courses are usually offered during late afternoon and evening hours, I asked her how she could study for a Masters' degree when she had to work during those times. She said: "I can't register for evening classes because they do a lot of favors for me." Going to graduate school did not seem feasible but she believed that she could do it because her host parents were very "supportive" of her studies. However, from what she described below, it was apparent that Olga was being more supportive and helpful to her host family because they had "a nice attitude" towards her:

It seems like you really have a good relationship with your host family.

Yes I do, because I never said, "OK this is my weekday off and I am not gonna do that." She can ask me anytime she needs me. I will be there because I understand them. She has a really hard time at her work with her boss, so once I get a chance, I am trying to support her. I know what's like to be a working woman with kids. We are all women, right? So we are supposed to understand each other. Like, I was working in the backyard one day and she likes that because she never has time for it and I did a plan: I am watering them each day and she is so appreciated of this, she is like, "Oh my God, these look so good, I like it so much." I feel very comfortable with their kids, too. The younger one is totally mine. Even though she is annoying sometimes, but I know how to control her. I do not accept it just as a job. I know she is growing up so I need to be an example for her, I need to give her some advice, so she can learn from me.

Do you feel like a family member?

I think the family makes me feel better, in their attitude to me. I told my host mom one day that Mary [the younger child] came to my room when she had a nightmare. She could go upper floor [to her host parents' bedroom], but she came to my basement. And when they were out, Mary didn't sleep and I was in her room giving her a massage when her parents came home. They saw me with her and my host mom told me, "Mary accepts you as a family member." They accept me as one and I feel really comfortable.

At the end of her first year, Olga accepted her family's proposal to extend her au pair program and stay with them for another year. However, unlike Dora and Kristina, her relationship with her host family changed dramatically. She explained, "They were fake friendly in my first year because they had to change many au pairs in their first year and they wanted to keep me." Once they "convinced" her to stay with them, the familial component of their relationship disappeared:

I am like a slave here for the last two years because I have done many unpaid hours for them. I did gardening to plant and grow flowers in the backyard last year, because the host parents asked me to do so and I was never paid for it. I work in the weekends and the host parents always control me. Now, I have to ask for their permission to go meet my friends after work hours. Even the children are not nice with me anymore. They are cursing at me, calling me a "bitch" or an "idiot," even in front of their parents and the parents ignore their inappropriate behavior.

The reason that her host parents' stop investing time and energy to her was that that they knew she had to leave soon as they did not sponsor her for a student visa. Like Kristina's host parents, Olga's employers were former government workers who were planning take on government jobs in the future. Therefore, they would risk their career plans by accommodating an international student as a nanny. Given that obstacle, in her twenty-second month in the au pair program Olga switched from au pair visa to student

visa by asking a relative at home to become her sponsor. She explained that, because her host family did not need her anymore, they did not care about her. They already found a new au pair who was arriving in a couple of months and asked Olga to stay with them until she came. Then, they changed their mind and asked Olga to leave in two weeks because the new au pair was arriving earlier than the planned:

Because their au pair couldn't get [a] visa they asked me to stay until January. Now she is able to get visa so they want me to get out in two weeks. They know how it is hard to find [a] new family, that it takes time. Because we had a deal until New Year, I stopped looking for families. They told me that I [could] sleep on the sofa in the basement if I can't find a place immediately, and [meanwhile], help the newly arrived au pair adjust to her new family. I can't believe that they offer[ed] me a sofa on the basement when they have a guest room. And I can't believe that they will make me no payments during the time I will keep working for them and helping with the new au pair.

The realization that being one of the family was a myth, employed by their host parents to extract more unpaid labor, particularly in the form of “labor of love” (Hochschild 1983), disappointed and hurt Olga intensively. As Romero explained (2002:73), housewives' involvement in domestic work is an “expression of love” towards their family members. Similarly, when middle-class women hire domestic workers, they expect their domestics to “possess similar emotional attachment to the work and demonstrate loyalty” to their employers (ibid). Romero further explained that the more personal service included in the domestic's daily work, the more emotional labor is extracted and the more likely the employer will insist that the domestic is one of the family.” (ibid) As Olga reported in the initial interview, her host family's favors enforced a “subtle form of coercion” (Constable 2007) on her for taking extra responsibilities. Because she was referred to as a family member, she thought that she must be more

caring, flexible and reliable for accommodating her host family's needs. She desired to be like a family member and her voluntary involvement in gardening and being a role model for the younger daughter were mostly due to her desire to have a mutually supportive relationship. However, when she realized that she was disposable or easily replaceable, she redefined her "unpaid hours" that she had fulfilled as being a slave, which she previously characterized as a "labor of love."

At the time of our last interview, she was very depressed. Because her host parents did not follow their verbal contract and asked her to leave, she felt betrayed and was deeply upset. She said that she was crying all day and sitting in her room since then. She was using sedatives that she had brought from Ukraine because she could not even stand seeing her host family anymore. Still, she had to stay until the new au pair arrived, because if she left now, she would not have a car, a cell phone, a new place to live and a replacement job immediately. She added, "I wish that [their new] au pair runs away from them after one month, so maybe then they will appreciate me."

Like Olga, Yaryna (Ukrainian) chose to work for a Russian family. She was initially placed with an American family in Washington, D.C. She chose to rematch because the child under her care was not easy to get along with. Her new family was located in the suburbs of New York City and had two children. By the time I contacted her for a follow up interview, she had been working for this family for 13 months. She explained that her host parents convinced her to get a degree and stay longer with them (she was already in her twenty-fifth month) and sponsored her for a student visa. Having a law background, she was enrolled for a Paralegal Studies Associates Degree in a community college and was waiting for her student visa papers. When I asked her status

in the family, she told me that she had “mixed feelings” about whether she was a domestic worker or an elder sister, because her employers applied “parental-like authority” to her:

They call me the bigger sister but I am confused if I am a bigger sister or a worker. They are acting like parents because they are checking out where I am, where I am going to, when I will come home and how I will come home. Every time I leave home, they are asking me all these questions. I don't like that they are intervening to my business or asking too many questions. We have dinners together and sometimes watch a movie after dinner. They visited me in the hospital when I had an appendicitis surgery. I felt like a family member that time because they did not leave me alone but then they never asked me about how I was going to pay the bill. I didn't ask for their help but they didn't check with me at all. So I negotiated with the hospital to pay later. I feel more like a worker because I am working more hours for this family. The parents expect me to clean after them, run errands, like taking their clothes to the dry cleaner, things like that. The older child is 11 and she expects me to clean up after her, carry her backpack and I help with the homework almost at any time, even in the weekends when I am in my room. Working for our people [Russians] is more difficult.

Have you ever talk to your host parents or the agency to get their help for reducing your work hours?

No I didn't. All girls know that au pair agency only helps with the families, not with the au pairs so I never called the agency.

The mean age of au pairs upon arrival to the United States was 22.3, and ranged between 19 and 25. As young, independent adult women (most had professional employment backgrounds), the last thing they wanted to experience was a parental-like authority that had not even been imposed on them by their biological parents. Even when in their home countries, they did not have parents controlling their movement because they either were living by themselves, in student housing while in the university, or did not have strict parents. The third group of au pairs, for this reason, preferred a semi-

personal or formal employer-employee relationship.

When defining their status in the host families' households and relationships with their host parents, this group, like the first two groups, identified their host parents as good employers if they respected their au pairs as human beings, provided them privacy and independence in their free times, followed the work hours as stated in au pair contracts, and accommodated their personal needs. When they lacked any of these qualities in their relationships, au pairs explained that they could be tolerant towards their host parents to some extent. Because they were knowledgeable about the worse au pair stories through their social networks, they believed that they should not risk their relatively better employers by seeking new ones.

Alisa (Russian, 30) defined her host parents as good employers because they respected her independence and let her take their family car for personal use, go out at night and stay with her friends as long as she acknowledged their needs beforehand. Although they gave her "a really small room and the house wasn't clean," because they were nice to her, she worked two years for them. She called herself lucky when she considered the bad stories she heard from other au pairs:

All my other friends, as far as I can tell you, they had horrible experiences with their families. They didn't have the right to say anything. Looking back, I think I have been very lucky. They have been really nice to me. I had a car accident one day. It wasn't my fault. I just started the car and somebody hit my car in the parking lot. My English was not good. I called my host mom and this lady told her that I was talking on the phone [when the accident happened] and I didn't. I didn't even understand that. My host mom, when I came, I was crying and she said, "It is OK, nothing horrible happened. This lady will pay it and it is not your fault. Don't worry." She was comforting me [laughing]. If one of my friends had this happened, they would be fired.

Like Alisa, for Liza (Ukrainian, 28) and Kalyna (Ukrainian, 26) having independence and being treated like an adult human being were the most important qualities they sought in their employers. For this reason, Kalyna did not work for her first employer, who was a single mom and wanted to be friends with her, more than one and a half months because she imposed a curfew on her to be at home early at night:

She was a single mom with two adopted kids. I didn't drive [at] the time, I drove the car but I wasn't really confident about driving and she didn't like it. I didn't really want to be friends with the family, I was like, "OK, I work here, just, really professional," but she really wanted to be friends. When I went out late at night, she didn't like it. We had a curfew, so it was another thing for me it wasn't appropriate at all. I used to live by myself. So, curfew, what?

Kalyna was rematched with a second host family, whom she defined as nice employers as they respected her privacy and independence and treated her very gently:

What made them so nice?

They never asked me about my private life, I was free to go wherever I wanted. I was free to take the car, so even when I had to do my au pair stuff, they always asked me, "Can you please do it if you don't mind?" They were never like "You have to do it!" This was very important for me. It was a really nice a family. I left them more than one year ago but we are still in touch. I see the kids. I spent last weekend with them.

Liza also changed her first host family because her host parents treated her like a child, rather than an adult. As such, she changed a total of four families by the end of her seventh month in the program:

My first family had a 2.5 and a 4.5 year old [children]. The little one was so attached to her mother. Every time she leaves, he was crying for her from the window. I was homesick and so much stressed. I tried hard and after all, the last thing was having a curfew. In Ukraine, living by myself for 8 years without my mother and having anyone telling me when to get home. This curfew was about

coming back home at eleven [p.m.] weekdays and in the weekends it was 1 a.m. They gave me a cell phone. They didn't realize that I have friends here but I made friends. I was speaking for hours with them over the phone. They cut \$60 from my salary for my phone bill and told me, "You just got here and speaking [over the phone] so much." I was pissed. My second host family was living in a really nice neighborhood. But they didn't let me drive. Because the previous au pair had a car accident, not a bad one, but they were scared. When I actually started taking driving classes to improve my driving. I just realized that I wasn't happy there. I felt so much pressure. They were trying to control me in every single thing, for very dumb things like listening to radio. It is nice classical music; not disco or party music I was listening to.

The fourth group of au pairs defined their statuses as maids, servants, or slaves, based on the treatment they received from their employers. When their employers imposed rules that limited au pairs' freedom of movement and independence, provided them inadequate living standards, did not have personal communication with them, and/or expected them to work even when sick, they drew a clear boundary, which acknowledged au pairs about their lower status in the host family's household. In return, au pairs chose, as Lan (2006:235) wrote, "to minimize their interactions with employers, so they can limit exposure to extra emotional burdens and the risks of transcending social boundaries." Thus, they structured their relationships with their employers as a professional arrangement from the very beginning. Although they were disappointed with the downward mobility they faced by being treated like "maids" or "servants," they endured the undesirable working conditions because they did not internalize negative associations attached to their status. Rather, they perceived their placement as a temporary job that would provide the means for realizing their goals in the United States.

Polina explained that from the very first day that her host parents did not engage her to their family time at all. They had no interest in hearing about Polina's story either.

When Polina came to the United States, her mother was working in a Middle Eastern country during wartime. Because she and her host family had a distant relationship, she and because she was never asked about her mother and was expected to work while sick, she decided that she should not seek a formal employer-employee relationship with them:

Do you have a relationship with your host family?

Not at all. They never asked me about how my mother was doing. They all knew that my mother was in that country that shitty things were happening. I am a kind of person, who would never ask them questions like “How did you meet your husband?” to start a conversation with them. So it wasn’t only them; I wasn’t also interested in being friends with them. If [I was] friendly, then they will ask more questions about my life. So when I finish my work, I don’t want to sit with them. I head out. Nobody would ask me to go join them or go entertain them because that’s not what they wanted. They wanted to have their family time... I never went on vacations with them even if they pay for everything. Being at home by myself, all in quiet is the best vacation ever...I was sick once and had high fever and she said, “We are going to the concert.” What the f***! I am still supposed to work because they are going to the concert and they are not paying me for extra hours!

In addition, Polina’s host mother was a stay-at-home mother. She explained that in the presence of her host mother, she could not take rest time or talk over the phone during her work hours. She explained that she did not understand why her employers expected her to entertain their children all the time and “love” them even while the mother was not so closely engaged:

I had to pretend that I was doing something all the time. You are not watching your own children all the time when you are home with them. You are sitting in front of your laptop and the children are hanging out by themselves. But you don't let your au pairs talk over the phone. They are expecting you to be so perfect. They want you to love and care about their children as much as they do. Of course I don't love them as much as you do. Do their teacher at school or in the fancy daycare love them as much as you do? No. They just take care of the children and

make sure that they are safe. You are not my family, they are not my siblings or cousins. But I am very responsible and reliable so they know that they kids were safe with me. I would not forget the kids outside.

After working around 60 hours per day with four children for 18 months, she quit working for them. Although they asked her to work for another six months and complete her two-year program allowance, she refused to do so because she “did not want to be a babysitter anymore.” At the end of her employment, her host mother sponsored Polina for a student visa. This was the only way to extend her stay legally in the United States.

Similarly, Ivanna (Ukrainian, 30) sought to have a formal relationship with her first employers so as to avoid blurring the boundaries between her work and private life. Yet, she never refused to perform extra services, and thus, was overworked. It was not the working hours, but her employers’ constant request for staying with them after work. Although she could not go too far from the family house because they were living in the suburbs and was not allowed to drive their family car, she left the family house to take a long walk for some privacy:

There was nothing to do around the neighborhood. It was far from the city so nobody would come pick me up for going out at night. There were times that I was just getting out after my shift was over and all I was doing was to passing the road across the Potomac and just walking around. There were bushes with the freaking mosquitos. I was just sitting there and thinking what the heck I was doing here. Then my host mother was like, “You are always leaving and hanging out with your friends. You never want to spend time with us.” I was like, you have no idea what I am doing when I leave home. Just not to see her I was sitting there until it gets really dark. Then I was coming to my room and listening to music or reading some book.

When Kalyna started to see someone, who could pick her up and take her out, her host parents were not happy that she was spending more time outside, even though it was

during her off-work hours:

Because I was working ten hours a day and after that I wanted to do something else, I wanted to rest. I did not come here just work. They wanted me, I guess, to stay after work to work for them. So I [would] work and I [would] have fun at the same place I work... One day they called me and my counselor, and said “We are going to have another baby and we are thinking of getting a new au pair because you are very good with our kid but you don’t love us. I was thinking, “Is it in the contract that I will have to love you? I loved your kid so much, and I respected you, but love? No.”

Her host family found a new au pair and asked her to leave in two weeks. Then, they changed their mind and told her that she had to stay and added, “Well, anyways, you have no other option.” Every time they changed their plans, Ivanna was accommodating. However, this time she made plans for the Fourth of July weekend with her friends to go to the beach. She wanted to spend the entire weekend and Monday, the holiday, with them. When she told her the host mother that she had already made plans, her host mother asked her to pack and leave their house immediately. Because she could not pack her winter clothes, which were stored in the basement, she went to their house, calling them repeatedly:

It was winter couple of months after and I was calling them to get my clothes and they never answered. I went to their house and entered from the backdoor and called them. The father came downstairs first, and he was like “What are you doing?” He was cool but then the wife came downstairs with the baby and started screaming at me. The only thing I remember was the baby’s face. She was smiling at me and I was so happy to see her. Then she was like, “Get the f**k out of my house otherwise I am going to call the police.” I got really scared and got out. He came after me and said, “Actually, we threw your clothes away. If you want, you can call the counselor, hahaha! Maybe they are gonna help you.” I said “OK,” turned around, I lost it at that moment, and showed my middle finger to him and left.

The fourth group of au pairs defined their status as maids, servants, or slaves in the host families' households. Like Polina, Yeva (Russian/Ukraine, 27) was working for a large family. However, more than her demanding work schedule, her family's treatment of her as a second-class household member made her recognize that being "on par" with them was an illusion:

The moment that I felt like crap and started thinking if I was just cheap labor was when they took me to see the Nutcracker. What they did was they got themselves really nice tickets and they got me a separate ticket on the third balcony or somewhere at the back, the cheapest ticket. I was so excited when they invited me with them because I love Tchaikovsky and I love Nutcracker and it was my first time seeing it in an American theater. I dressed up really nice for it. I was so upset that I couldn't say anything. I felt really bad because they basically sent me to the seat at the back. It was so hurtful because I am taking all my time to take care of your kids and I felt like one of those, like a servant or a slave. I realized that au pair is not "on par". This is bulls**t and they have to rename the program because this is not equal. Now it is funny to tell this story, but when I realized my place in their family, it was really hurtful.

Yeva also reported that her host mother refused to buy the groceries she requested ("nothing big, but even a simple yogurt"), claiming that she couldn't afford them. Indeed, she explained that it was only the host father for whom the host mother was buying "all quality food from Whole Foods" and the rest of the household members, including the kids, were fed with low-quality grocery food. The segregated seating in the ballet theater and being offered low-quality food at home confirmed her perception of an inequality of household membership, and the superior position of host family members. Further, she explained that the family environment was very oppressive because the host father was strongly authoritarian and abusive towards his son and wife. He was also imposing a parental authority upon her, and was very strict with the use of family cars:

I came back from my vacation and my luggage was lost in airport. Before that I got stuck in Chicago in the airport for two days so I was already agitated when I got home. They found my luggage and called me from the airport and I asked my host father if I could drive to go and pick it up. They have two cars, both sitting in the driveway. I was already a good driver, never got into trouble with driving. He said, "No you can't take the car. We can only give the car to you to drive to the college or your au pair activities." They were always strict about their cars. I told them that I would put gas in the car and I really needed it because they wouldn't deliver it home. Host dad told me, "Why do you always think that you have the right to use our cars as much as you want?" That really annoyed me because I was already overworking for them, without saying a word, trying to be a good pair and play with their children, and the kids were really crazy. You know, when kids are abused, they get crazy. I just opened my mouth and said everything inside. I told my host mother that I loved her to death but she really needs to grow some balls. When I get angry, I can't control what I say. I went upstairs, and started to get my stuffed pack. The host mother came upstairs and started crying and asking me to stay. But I couldn't.

Did you call the au pair agency?

Yes I called my counselor right away and she told me that I was f**ked up that I should never raise my voice or talk back to my host family and I should just apologize because they are really upset that I left them. And, the counselor made me feel really bad by saying that "The kids got really attached to you." I told her that I wasn't going back to that family. Then she wanted me to go back and say a proper goodbye to the family and I did, in a couple of days when I calmed down.

Yeva did not go for a rematch. As she put, she "escaped" from the au pair program. She changed her cell phone number. After working temporarily as a waitress, for a couple of months, she found a live-in nanny position through informal recruiting. Although the working and living arrangements were similar to that of an au pair placement, she said, "My relationship with the host parents was nothing like what I had as an au pair." Her working hours were clearly defined and her salary doubled. Yet, she did not work too long for this family because she needed proper legal status in the

country, which she received through marriage. Yeva's friend, Karina (Ukrainian, 27), with whom she stayed while looking for jobs, also left the au pair program after four months, because her host parents did not provide food. She found her family through informal recruitment, but she preferred a live-out working arrangement:

I had my own refrigerator. I couldn't use theirs. They gave me \$5 a week for food. I had no food at all. I talked to them and to my counselor but it didn't change. I couldn't work there anymore. I started working as a babysitter for a family. I really loved that family I worked for. She was Russian and he was American. I felt like she was like my older sister. I worked for 1.5 years for them. I didn't live with them. I rented a room and worked full-time for them. They paid me more than an au pair stipend but not too much but I loved them so much and I didn't care. Whatever they paid, I felt myself so good after that family. I didn't feel like I was working there. They loved me and I love the baby. Their boy started school so I stop working for them. I started to work part-time with [the host mother], and then I got pregnant. I still see them. I take [my daughter] and visit them. (Karina, Ukrainian, 27)

Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) had working conditions that were similar to those of Polina and Yeva, as she was placed with a large family. However, it took her a shorter time to realize that she was not going to be welcomed as a family member. On her first day, her host parents expected her to start working immediately after she arrived. They posted her schedule on the fridge and left for work. Neither did they invite her to the dinner table:

I arrived on a Sunday at 9 p.m. to my host parents' house. So I went to the bed and slept at 11 p.m. and I had to be up by 5 a.m. in my first day by because the parents leave home by 5:30 a.m. The first day I arrived, they didn't really talk much, but just said, "There is a list of your responsibilities on the fridge so just read it," and they left [for work]. [The host parents] later gave me [work schedule] instructions; 4 pages of instructions... We had no relationship at all. I was eating my food in my room in the basement.

When Nadia came to the United States, she was very skeptical about the au pair

employment program. Because she held a white-collar occupation at home, she was scared to end up working like a maid for an American family. She stayed with her first host parents for only three weeks. During this time, she experienced a deep depersonalization when the children under her care and her host mother treated her as if she was their servant:

This 10-year-old boy said, "Make my breakfast." And I was like, "How about please?", and he said, "My parents pay you, so I don't have to tell you 'Please, thank you'." He would call me bad names, like "bitch". Then I actually just realized what I did. Yesterday I was in the office, with people who are well educated and with good manners, and now here with these bastards, telling me what to do. They were so spoiled because they had new nanny every year. For them you are not even a person, you are not a human being. You are just an au pair, one of them, that's it. When [the host mother] took me to the kids' school, I remember that so clearly, she introduced me to teachers and said, "Oh this is our new au pair." And everybody looks at you. No feelings at all. You know? That was the time I got the impression that you are not actually a human being for them. You are just an au pair, that's it.

However, unlike Yeva, Polina and Karina, Nadia did not leave her family with. In her third week, her host family said they wanted to talk to her:

They said that they want a rematch because I didn't meet their expectations. They wanted to find another girl. Five years after, now I think it was because of my host dad. He kind of got interested in me, like sexually. The host mom was always sad and had no interaction with me. The host dad was opposite. He was always nice and paying so much attention to me. Every single time I turn around, he was waiting behind me and watching me. He was always willing to help me. He wanted to stay home, show me around and he was looking for a reason to spend time with me. He would offer me to drop me off to places even I told him my friends would drive me. He was like, "Do you know Nova? They have English classes there, I can take you there." He was interested in me. He touched me and did weird stuff.

Did host mother did not notice what was going on?

Yeah, she was always there when he was offering me all these drives or taking me to places. She was the one who told me about the rematch. Actually that was the only time I saw her smiling but she was crying when I was leaving. She told to my new host mom, "Nadia is the best. You will love her."

Two more au pairs reported that their host-fathers sexually harassed them. After working one year for a family who treated her like a maid, Katerina (Ukrainian, 25) was rematched with a family with twins. She worked one full year for a family she described as really nice, laid-back people. Then she married her boyfriend and started to work on a live-out babysitter for this family:

One day, when the mother was at work, the father approached me, held me and while rubbing my hand gently, he looked at me in the eye and asked, "Are you still interested?" I had no idea what he was talking about so I left the room immediately. He left home and called me from work after a while. He apologized if he made me feel uncomfortable. I said, "OK, it is OK", and [hung] up. After that day, I told them that I was too busy to babysit and stop working with them.

Has he ever done anything like that when you were working live-in for them?

No! That's why I was so shocked. He knew that I had a boyfriend I had no idea what he was thinking off.

Alena (Ukrainian, 22), on the other hand, could not leave her employers because of the risky rematching process. She had an extremely distant relationship with her host parents who were indifferent to her requests for a more desirable living arrangement:

It was the messiest, and the dirtiest house I [have ever seen]. They had insects, mice, everything in the house. I called the agency and I said that I couldn't live there. It is not a cultural experience. It is worse than it is in Ukraine. I am not getting any better. But I loved the kids. I like the area, too. I worked there because if you want to chance your family you have two weeks to find someone. It is called rematch. If you can't find one, you just go home. So I decided to stay there

and maybe talk to them for cleaning the house. But they didn't do it. "Ok, can you make my life easier? Can you give me a car, so I can go to D.C.?" Because my friends were always picking me up. I wanted freedom. They said, "Well, if you pay for the insurance of the car, we will give you a car." In a month, they eventually gave me the car because I called the program director and said, "I need a car to go to the classes and everything. I can't take buses to everywhere." It was my second month, I guess, and I encountered the second problem: My host dad started hitting on me. I was really very scared because I was 19 years old. I had no relatives or family here.

What did he do?

He waited till I am at home by myself and he started to touch me. He started walking into my room and staying. I asked him, "Can you please leave me alone?" I called the program director again. "I have another problem, sorry. My host dad was putting his arms on my knees and started touching me." "Well, if it gets even worse, call us again and we will do something." What can be worse? I mean, what else he has to do [to make them] take action? [That] he rapes me? Seriously? So none helped. I was really very disappointed with the agency.

Why didn't you talk to the host mother?

I told him that I would tell his wife and he stopped eventually after a month. I didn't tell this to his wife because they have three kids, they have a family. I didn't want to ruin these. He stopped eventually in a month but I was hurt and terrified.

In her sixth month, Alena decided to visit home to get away from these experiences. Also, she noted that she missed her family and Ukraine. She had frozen her enrollment status in the university for one-year au pair employment and, when she returned, she found that she had lost her student status. Therefore, Alena decided to study in the United States and leave her host family. When she returned, she asked the man she was dating to be her temporary sponsor.

When she was waiting for her student visa confirmation, she told her host parents that she was going to leave them at the end of her first year, in order to move in with her

boyfriend and return to school. They threatened to fire her immediately so that “she would go to the streets.” This time when she called the agency for help, finally the agency helped her and convinced the family to let her stay with them until the end of year. Towards the end of her stay with this family, Alena got sick several times due to inadequate food provided by the host family and living in a “dirty house”:

I had an infection. It was the first time in my life that I stayed in a hospital. In the house I was working, an insect bit me. I got infected. I still have scarves from that. Actually, after that, I went in the hospital for four more times. Because of that house, my immune system broke down. I can't buy my food because they provide it so I started to get sick a lot.

Alena said that she was all by herself during her stays in the hospital. A social worker was bringing her chocolates to cheer her up. Her hospital visits and stays due to infections accumulated a large bill (thousands of dollars) above the allowance amount of the au pair insurance. She explained that the bursary office of the hospital advised her to prove her low-income level to cancel out the bills. She brought the requested documents and her bill was waived.

5.4 *Where There is Power, There is Resistance*¹³: Every Day Struggles and Resistance Strategies of Au Pairs

Au pairs could tolerate some of the insufficiencies of their working and living arrangements as long as their employers were respectful of their independence and privacy and treated them as dignified human beings. Thus, au pairs relied on the qualities of their personal relationships with their employers, which were determined at the

¹³ Michel Foucault. 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Vol 1: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Random House.

discretion of the employers, when defining their statuses in the host families' households. Among 30 au pairs, 7 identified their statuses as maids, servants, or slaves; 14 described themselves as paid domestic employees, and only 2 enjoyed real family-like relationships and work environments as promised by the au pair programs. Seven au pairs, on the other hand, identified themselves as family members in the beginning of their placement in these families. Towards the end of their stay, these au pairs' perception of their families and their statuses in the host households had changed drastically as a response to changes in their treatment by their employers, and they redefined their statuses as maids, servants or slaves. However, none of the au pairs identified themselves with the degrading characteristics attached to their paid labor, as they did not come to the United States for domestic work employment or out of an economic necessity. Rather, they rationalized that au pair employment was providing them the means to realize their goals in America. At the same time, none viewed themselves, as Constable put (2007:202) "passive pawns." The ways in which they were involved in resistance attempts, such "deferential performances"; conforming their employers' expectations and shielding their real feelings, especially in the sense that they viewed their subordinate position as acceptable, necessary or natural (Rollins 1985), and as "acts of immediate struggles" (Parreñas 2000) against oppressive employers, as well as the structural obstacles created by the au pair program regulations, were multiple.

5.4.1 Au Pair Program Limitations and Unhelpful Agencies

Au pairs' experiences of live-in domestic employment arrangements, dynamics of relationships with their employers and workplace abuses, such as physical and emotional exploitation, and sexual harassment, partly overlapped with the global experiences of

immigrant domestic workers who are hired as caregivers and cleaning ladies. On the contrary, au pairs were granted health insurance and did not have problems with the payments of their stipends. However, the au pair health insurance had limited coverage, as shown in Adela's and Yaryna's stories with the hospitals.

In comparison to the au pair programs in Europe, au pair program regulations in the United States were clearly defined regarding the living and working conditions of au pairs in American host families. Au pairs in America, unlike the au pairs in Europe, were not expected to perform housework that is not related to the children under their care. However, most of them performed housework for the entire family either because they were discursively encouraged by their employers to take on housework responsibilities under the cover of "being family members" or employers simply put housework on their shoulders.

The first strategy au pairs used to resist the abusive practices of their employers was to contact their au pair counselors. Au pair agencies, which were the sole designated bodies to protect au pairs' rights and mediate conflicts and disputes between the au pairs and employers, often neglected au pairs' requests for betterment of their conditions. The belief that agencies were "the servants of host families" who pay thousands of dollars for their services, thus, they did not want to lose their customers, was common among the study participants. Either because their agency consultants were indifferent to their requests, or by having heard from other au pairs about how dysfunctional they were, most study participants were worried about not getting any help or support from these agencies. Their beliefs about the double standard practices of agencies' customer service was seemingly accurate, given that even in the most serious maltreatment cases, such as

sexual harassment and lack of provision of adequate food, agency consultants were invested in trying to convince the au pairs to stay with and their host families. Also, in most cases, agency consultants advised the au pairs to accommodate the needs of the host families and be docile.

Au pairs, particularly Ukrainians, also blamed the agencies of having an ethnocentric attitude towards them. After host parents of Ivanna literally “kicked her out” because she did not appear to love them enough, she was staying with her boyfriend and looking for a rematch. She agreed to work for one family in Virginia, despite the fact that her counselor told her to look for families in other states, because she should not be close to her boyfriend. Then, she was “kicked out” of the program as well. Along with other Ukrainians, who created “troubles” for the au pair agency, she said that her difficulties were “the straw that broke the camel’s back”:

When I am on my way to my new family, the host mother called me and said, “Well, you can’t work with to us because you are no longer [enrolled] in the program. The counselor called me and said that the previous family called the police and filed a report for you because you went to their house drunk an running in the house and threatening them.” I immediately called the agency. They were so freaking mad at me, because [out of] ten Ukrainian girls who came at the same time with me, some went back, some ran away from their families, some never got into their families’ houses, some went to rematch; so I was the last drop. When I called them, they said, “You are out of the program and you have to leave the country.” I told them that my family was lying and they threw all my clothes away, but they said, “We can’t really help and protect you against them because they are Americans. What are you?”

Did they really say this to you in exactly the same words? Maybe they put it in kinder words?

No, that’s what they exactly said. They also said, “We are so fed up with you girls that this time we are not gonna let you stay so you are gonna leave the country.”

But seriously, how can they do this? Because we are from Ukraine, we are not human being or don't have intelligence? They can cut you from the program and you basically go to the illegal status. But they didn't know that I actually [had] applied for a student visa just a few weeks ago. So because my [student visa] application was in process, [even though] they fired me, I could still stay legally in the country.

Some au pairs also believed that the agencies were more helpful to Western European women especially Germans au pairs, because they were “nationally” more privileged, meaning that they did not have to withstand bad working conditions. If they were dissatisfied with their the au pair program, they could go back because the living conditions in their home countries, which were not any worse than those in the United States, or as the au pairs said: “They had nothing to lose.” Believing that Western Europeans are less accommodating, more assertive and outspoken, Ukrainian au pairs claimed that the au pair agencies were more responsive to German au pairs’ needs. In addition, some claimed that the agencies were making ethnic assumptions¹⁴ such as “Eastern Europeans are more respectful to parents, and thus, are better workers than Germans” to host families when recommending them suitable au pairs based on the services families’ needs. Relevant to this observation, in her study with babysitters in

¹⁴ In the domestic work literature, such ethnic or racial assumptions about the performance and personality of domestic workers are commonly made by employers: “Assertive Jamaican women,” “naturally docile, subservient, good natured, and domesticated who Filipina women” (Stiell and England 1999:52), “Mammy” stereotype of African American domestic workers (“obedient to her mistress, yet strong and aggressive towards other African Americans, especially men”) (Rio 2000: 28), which disregards the fact that economic hardship makes immigrants from less disadvantaged countries accept hard working conditions, not their racial or ethnic backgrounds. These subordinated images and qualities are “clearly present in the cultural representations of domestic workers.” (Rio 2010: 27)

America, Wrigley (1996:52) wrote that German au pairs were more likely to come from middle- and upper-class families, where they were raised by nannies and servants. In an interview, she was also acknowledged by an au pair agency representative that because of their social class, German au pairs were more likely “to explicitly discuss child-rearing issues with parents” and “to have developed philosophies of their own and be willing to articulate them.” (ibid)

In accord with this statement, some Ukrainian au pairs also claimed that American host parents were nicer towards German au pairs because in terms of their cultural values and material wellbeing “they are like each other.” They further mentioned stories of their German au pair friends whose families were so flexible with them that au pairs could bring their boyfriends to their rooms, or could easily leave their host parents for simple reasons such as for not having a family car while living in the center of D.C. where driving is not a necessity.

Another problem au pairs encountered was the re-matching process, and more importantly, unhelpful agency consultants in acknowledging, protecting and helping au pairs in this process. Au pair programs allowed both employers and au pairs to request rematches from their agencies if they were incompatible. However, none of the au pairs reported that they were acknowledged that their host parents could request a rematch. Rather, they were told by the agencies at their home countries that if they would not like their families, they could get a new family so they would not be obliged to stay with an undesirable family. Because the first month of au pair placement is seen as an adjustment period, rematch requests are not processed by the agencies. Therefore, au pairs who did not like their working or living arrangements had to wait until the end of first month.

Then, as shown before, au pair agencies were most likely to convince the au pairs to stay with their host families with the promise that they would help them or that the au pairs should give themselves a chance to adjust to the family's life and rules. Au pairs, like Katerina, who were in despair because the agency would not help her, took initiatives to find a family online or by their informal networks and convinced these families to request them from their agency so that they could keep their au pair enrolment status.

The worst aspect of the rematching process for the au pairs was that, if their families requested a rematch, the au pairs had to find a new family in less than two weeks. Otherwise, they had to forego their enrollment in the program and return home. When Nadia's host family requested a rematch, she had no idea what it meant. It was her third week in the program when her host mother, whose husband was sexually provocative towards Nadia, told her that she wanted a rematch. Liza (Ukrainian, 28), on the other hand, was not even notified by her host employers that they requested a rematch and was asked to leave their house in three days. Furthermore, her counselor asked her to find a family by herself:

If you don't find any family within two weeks, you are supposed to leave the country. That's it—the end of the story. My counselor was supposed to put me on this open board, [where] families see that you are a rematch and if they like you, they can contact you. After the first week, nobody even tried to contact me and I got really scared, because if I didn't find any family in a week, I [would] have to leave their house, buy my flight ticket and go back home. I called my counselor twice. She didn't pick up the phone. I left her voice mails, then she called me back and said, "Oh I am sorry, I forgot to put your name on the open board." After that she didn't call me and I had 4 days left to find a family. I really freaked out at that point. What am I gonna do? I [didn't] want to go home and I didn't really have the money to buy a ticket because I didn't have any idea that I would go through such a thing. But luckily, one woman called me and said, "We have a three-year-old kid, that's it, we don't have any other kids. We live in Maryland, so

we would love to meet you.” After we met, I was praying to God, “Please help me. I want to do this, please just help me.” They called me and said, “We really liked you and we would love you to move in with us.” I just couldn’t believe, I was like, “oh my God, yes, yes!” (Nadia)

[While on rematch] I found a temporary family...I worked for them three weeks. They went to a vacation and wanted me to stay at home and look after the dog. My counselor told me, “They actually want to you get out from the house in three days before they return, you gotta find a family.” I guess it was the first time I experience this American style. They smile on your face and turn around and fire you. It was really harsh for me. They were very nice to me, and behind me they did this to me. I needed to find a family, which I did in three days. (Liza)

These two examples, in addition to the ones regarding au pairs who wanted their counselors to negotiate for better living and working standards but did not get help, clearly demonstrated how agencies applied a double standard in processing the rematch requests. On the other hand, when it was the families who requested replacements, the agencies violated the adjustment time rule and were not supportive or protective of au pairs. While two “kicked-out” au pairs lost their program enrollment status in less than a few months, two “ran away” from abusive families in less than six months, and three “drop-outs” left the program after their first year with their own consent due to inability of agencies in helping them. These au pairs found new families to work with through informal recruitment, which provided them with more control over their labor and autonomy, and kept their immigrant status “legal” by switching to student visa ($n=5$) and marriage ($n=2$).

5.4.2 Unequal Class-peers: Cultural, Ethnic and Class Hierarchies of Power

Huand and Yeoh (2007:200) explained that the superior-subordinate relationship existing between the domestic worker and employers “create conditions for the (ab)use of

power by those with superior status because of paid domestic work. Therefore, paid domestic work does “not only challenges the socially accepted meaning of the home and its association with the private and familial, but also makes plain the complex intersections of domesticity, class position and racial difference that distinguish women and create divisions between them.” (McDowell 1999:83)

The cultural assumptions on women’s unpaid domestic and/or reproductive labor¹⁵ as “ an unwaged activity carried for love, not for money” (Gregson and Lowe 1994:4) that is performed by women who “naturally possess the personalities to best carry out the content of this work” (Uttal and Teominen 1999: 760) naturalize and devalue women’s reproductive labor. Indeed, Parreñas stated that the commodification of reproductive labor contributed to its decline in worth within the society (Parreñas 2000). When performed by “hired hands” (Rothman 1989:43) it is called “unskilled labor,” while it is called “mothering” when performed by the mothers. Through the employment of domestic workers, women of more privileged class backgrounds “negotiate the contradiction between domesticity, requiring physical labor and dirtiness, and the cleanliness and the spirituality of feminine virtue” (Anderson 2000:18) and “redefine their domestic roles and to elevate their status as ‘household managers’.” (Cheng 2004:32)

The expectations from the au pairs to change the diaper, clean children’s bathrooms and bedrooms, carry children and their belongings when outside, and be

¹⁵ Reproductive labor, which is also referred as “social reproduction” by social historians, is defined as “the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical, beings. Thus, it involves mental, emotional, and manual labor.” (Glenn 1992:4)

present to feed and clean the baby during “family time” were manifestations of this division of domestic labor in my study. Yet, the au pair institution also let employers extract more than physical and emotional labor. Hiring au pairs was an instrumental strategy that enabled host parents to make use of au pairs’ high educational backgrounds for helping their children with their homework and tutoring for foreign languages and musical skills. Several au pairs with unstructured working schedules complained that their host mothers preferred to take the dog for a long walks, talk on the phone, or rest in their bedrooms when they arrived home from work rather than spending time with their children. While this “escape” might refer to the uneasiness of the double burden of work and family duties on working mothers, it does not necessarily legitimate the exploitation of live-in work arrangement of au pair in every instance.

In addition to cultural values attached to domesticity, shift in the class locations of au pairs put them in an inferior status relative to their employers. Although au pair programs target to match American families with their class peers, like Slovak au pairs in London, Eastern and Central European au pairs in America, when compared to their Western European counterparts, are “relatively unequal to their hosts because they come from economically less-developed countr[ies].” (Burikova and Miller 2010:191) The majority of study participants ($n=24$) defined their social class status as middle-class by considering primarily educational and cultural capital of themselves and their families. From their perspectives, due to rough economic conditions they might be earning ten times less as lawyers, managers, teachers or engineers in their home countries than their American employers who hold similar occupations or educations backgrounds. Yet, the downward class mobility, in Parreñas’ terms, “contradictory class position” (2000), they

faced when relocated to America did not make them lower class in their opinions. As Lan (2007:17) put it, the global movement of people has “reshaped class stratification on a global scale.” Drawing on Bourdieu’s class theory and thesis that “class boundaries are not fixed lines defined by the possession of economic capital but the sites of conflict that take shape in the form of symbolic struggles, Lan (2007:17) reasserted that different social groups deploy cultural capital and symbolic capital to impose their visions of social order as legitimate.”

In explaining the negotiation of class boundaries in the transnational arena, in order to display the articulation between class and nation on two levels, Lan (2007:18) coined the term *transnational class mapping*, which has two components:

The first refers to the structural process of *class positioning*. Globalization not only opens up the local market to capital, goods, and labor but also prompts cross-border movement of people for work and marriage. National disparity is converted into class hierarchy in these relations of production and reproduction. The second component of this concept is the consequences of *class becoming*, or more specifically, the durability or mutability of class boundaries. International migration has created a range of subject positions that allow individuals to negotiate multifaceted class identities across national borders and social settings.

The temporary material dependence (for accommodation, food, and stipend) of au pairs on host families created a class positioning for au pairs that located them at the lower level of class hierarchy due to their relatively, and significantly low economic capital and dependency on their employers to have a legal migration status. In addition, intersection of ‘perceived’ class positioning of Eastern Europeans and the low worth attached to paid domestic work, created a negative perception among some host employers that they were the agents of modernization or survival of their au pairs, as well as the conditions for legitimizing their exploitation:

When we fought, my host mother used to say, “You should appreciate us. Thanks to us, you know what computer is, what a cell phone is, you have access to this nice house and car.” I was like, “Listen, we don't live in a cave back home. I had a computer, a cell phone back home and my family had a car.” (Nadia, Ukrainian, 29)

Once you have four kids, you can't really afford a nanny. It is cheaper to get an au pair even after paying agency fees. It is great savings for them to get an au pair. When you are an au pair, they are like, “Hey we are going out, and would be back by 9 or 10 [p.m.] and they come home around 1 [a.m.] drunk and stuff and you can't say anything. They really save money [by] getting an au pair. They get their food cooked, laundry done, and you are nice to their children. Do you know how they accuse themselves? “Oh we are so nice, we gave you a home and everything like that.” I am not homeless or a slave! (Liza Ukrainian, 28)

Some au pairs, on the other hand, negotiated their class identities by emphasizing their educational capital and emphasizing superior social and moral values regarding family life, life styles, and parenting in their own culture:

“This White middle-class bitch [the host mother] who only speaks English is telling me that I can't even speak proper English. I speak four languages!” (Ivanna, Ukrainian, 30)

In their culture, they have nothing. Thanksgiving, for example, they cook all day, they eat all day and that's it. Family members don't do anything together. (Julia, Czech, 26)

Kids here can do anything and I don't think this is good. Parents spoil them... In my culture, couples talk with each other, they listen to each other and they live happily together. What I see in American families is that they come home and they don't talk to each other. The host father just watches TV in the evenings. The mother doesn't care. She just leaves him. I don't think that they are happy. I hear from my au pair friends [that] their host parents are the same. It is like two friends are living together. (Ema, Hungarian, 27)

They don't know what their problem [is]: They don't know how to live. The children are so spoiled. They do not have discipline and it is driving me crazy

because they think they are [entitled] to get everything. My oldest child, 6th grade, she thinks she can get everything she wants. They think it is supposed to be that way, they don't appreciate what they have. They are yelling at their parents, "I hate this family"... We don't talk like this to our parents. We respect them. We have a completely different relationship. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

This discursive resistance strategy is also relevant to, and indeed consistent with, Rollin's study (1985). In her study with African American domestic workers in middle-class American households, Rollins observed that domestic workers "retained a remarkable strong sense of worth based on morality." She further explained that "their most powerful protections against such treatments [attempts to lure them into accepting employers' definitions of them as inferior] were their intimate knowledge of the realities of employers' lives, their understandings of the meaning of class and race in this country, and their value systems, which measures an individual's worth less by material success than by "the kind of person you are," by the quality of one's interpersonal relationships and by one's standing in the community." (ibid: 212-12)

Another form of resistance strategy deployed by au pairs to resist employer abuses is what Parreñas (2000:188) explained as the acts of *immediate struggles*¹⁶. She observed that Filipina domestic workers in Los Angeles and Rome encountered immediate struggles "to take a turn against the contradictory class mobility and other

¹⁶ Parreñas adapted this term by Foucault (1982). Foucault called immediate struggles as a form of "anti-authority struggles": "In such struggles people criticize instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals. They do not look for the "chief enemy" but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date (that is, liberations, revolutions, end of class struggle)... "The main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much such and such an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power." (ibid: 780-1)

inconsistencies in domestic work, such as the authority of employers.” As shown earlier, once au pairs realized that their host parents seek to extract extra labor from them by inviting them to family’s quality time activities such as vacations or dine-outs, they avoided incorporating themselves into these activities, knowing they would not “have fun.” Two other strategies they deployed were to “teach” their employers not to take their labor taken for granted, and thus, take control of their labor and “subvert the authority of the employers” (ibid):

I heard ridiculous au pair stories. I never allowed these families treat me like this. Even I do something nice for them that I wasn't supposed to, I do it half as good so next time they wouldn't ask for it. I mean, how you really deal with this? (Liza Ukrainian, 28)

Nadia (Ukrainian, 30), on the other hand, requested to be paid for tasks that were not among her duties, and resisted extra service if not paid at all or on time:

I was at home by myself and ironed a pair of my host father’s pants. My host mom really liked it. So she offered to pay me \$2 for a pair of pants if I iron for them. I was trying to save some money and it was [an] easy [task] for me, so I said why not. I was ironing about ten pairs a day. \$20 wasn’t bad at all. She didn't need to take her husband’s stuff to the dry cleaner anymore. But then, she stopped paying me and I stopped ironing for them. She was like, “Oh, I will pay you, can you please?” but I didn’t do it. Then when she left money and asked me to do it, so I was doing it.

Finally, some au pairs chose “passive resistance” (Hess and Puckbaer 2004) when they were not confident enough to challenge the authority of their employers, due to cultural differences, or when they did not want to be “failures” by giving up. This group, as exemplified before, preferred to draw a clear boundary between their work hours and off hours by leaving the home or going to their bedrooms and spending their

time alone at the end of their shifts. When Arina was exploited by her single-parent host father, or when Nadia's domestic responsibilities increased every year and she stayed longer with her host parents, they both explained that because seniority is highly valued in their cultures, they were reluctant to question the authority of their host parents. When her host father sexually harassed Alena, she did not bring it up to her host mother because she did not want to damage their marriage at the expense of her host father's "temporary indiscretion." Because, in her culture, a man cheating on a woman is common, although it was a traumatic experience for her, she instead sought help from her agency consultant, which she could not get. Then, she switched to a student visa and left her host family. In an informal focus group conversation with four au pairs, Katerina, who was also exploited by her host employers, explained that giving up and returning home would make her a failure, especially after spending considerable amount of money and effort to participate into the program. Other au pairs confirmed her rationale during the conversation. The fee for the program costs is worth three months' income. Also, the time they spent for preparing the application documents and getting mentally ready to stay away from their countries for such a long time, were not negligible. Therefore, these au pairs performed passive resistance to in response to their abusive employers, while looking for alternative solutions to leave their undesirable working arrangements.

As these cases illustrates, au pairs recognized the exploitation "for what it [was] and [knew] their comparative powerlessness." (Rollins 1985:231) This knowledge of their comparative powerlessness, as a group temporarily dependent on their employers, both materially and for maintaining their legal immigrant status, did not necessarily lead to passivity, deference, or complete compliance. Their immediate struggles were also

combined with a “deep and pervasive *ressentiment*”, which attests to au pairs’ “lack of belief in their own inferiority, their sense of injustice about their treatment and position, and their rejection of the legitimacy of their subordination.” (ibid)

Having networks with other au pairs, with whom they could talk about their experiences, was rehabilitating for the study participants, as they could give strategic advice to each other or just have someone to listen to and feel empathy towards them, given that they were embedded in similar social and material conditions created by au pair placement. In the following section, I will describe how the au pairs utilized social networks as a support mechanism.

5.6 Social Networks and Support

If nothing else, the most instrumental function of the au pair agencies was to encourage networking between au pairs. Study participants reported that they could meet other au pairs, who became their first friends in the country, through the orientation in their home countries and then in the social activities organized by their regional, also know as “cluster,” counselors upon arrival to the United States. Au pairs were grouped into clusters based on the location of their host parents and were assigned cluster counselors. These counselors also put special effort into creating “ethnic networking” between au pairs from the same nationalities through spreading contact information to each other. The welcome call from a current or former au pair to a newly arrived au pair from her country was defined as an “arrival call.” Some older or former au pairs, like Natalka (Ukrainian, 27) were particularly interested in giving arrival calls to new au pairs from their home countries. She explained, “I know how lonely they feel when they come first, so I was always calling them, talking to them and trying to pick them up [from the

airport], because it [was] their first time in the program and in the country.”

Every month, new au pairs participated in the cluster meetings in the au pair agencies' regional offices, or at meeting places in public places designated by their counselor. The purpose of these meetings was to share experiences, get consultation from the counselors and meet other au pairs. In addition, newly introduced au pairs organized social activities through these meetings such as movie nights, shopping or coffee days and trips. Ema (Hungarian, 27) described her involvement in the au pair agency activities and ethnic networks, which exemplified new au pairs' engagement in such activities:

My agency plans meetings for au pairs and we will have a country presentation event in April. My counselor told me that I need[ed] to find other Hungarian girls. She gave me the list of Hungarians and I contacted them. It was a very good idea because I had no friends. I found four Hungarian girls. We all are around the same age; 26, and one girl is 21. I like them. We make weekend programs together. With Dora [a more experienced Hungarian au pair, who is also a study participant], we just met two times but if I have [any] question, I call her. She gives me good information. She is always looking for a meeting but she is very busy. Every Wednesday I meet with the girls in Bethesda at the same place and we meet on the weekends. Every weekend is very different. We went to Niagara Falls, Philadelphia, Great Falls and Atlantic City. (Ema, Hungarian, 27)

Some au pairs, however, were not able to or preferred not to regularly attend these meetings. Arina (Ukrainian/Georgia, 30), for example, could not participate to these meetings because she was living in the suburbs and her host father did not allow her to drive his car, despite the fact that he was obligated by the program to provide the means of transportation for her to attend these monthly meetings. Having no access to networks, particularly networks with other au pairs, made her feel lonely and isolated. It also contributed to her exploitation by the host father. Because she could not learn from other au pairs about their working arrangements, she did not have a chance to judge her own

situation by comparing her experiences to that of other au pairs. As such, she said that, until she met other au pairs, she thought that working around the clock in a single-parent household, where the father was treating her like a slave, could be the norm in an au pair live-in work arrangement.

For a new au pair, making friendships with other au pairs who were also new to the country and culture could be adventurous. These friends, who were placed in similar material conditions as other au pairs and faced several emotional and psychological constraints at their workplaces, were also the immediate contacts for sharing their feelings. In other words, sharing their emotions, concerns or problems with someone who could understand them was a coping strategy to deal with the stress, anxiety, resentment, or frustration led by downward mobility and their relative powerlessness in their relationship with their employers or children under their care:

I call them right away, it is like, right away and I get such a relief when I talk to one of my friends, especially with Maryana [an au pair from her cohort], when I [fought] with my employer. It is like an emergency call. (Nadia, Ukrainian, 30)

Sometimes in the weekends, close to me I have a friend, and she also works till 9 [p.m.] so after a hard day we just can meet together, smoke and drink coffee. It really helps telling each other what's inside us. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

When I came to Virginia, I knew no one from the Czech Republic. There are au pairs meetings but no one was from my country. Then I met this girl, the only person from the Czech Republic. But I became really good friends with her. We spend every night on the phone. When it is 9 p.m., we are free and we call each other and just talk about how our days were, how we hated it [au pairing], how our host families suck. That was tough but you deal with it. If I didn't have her, I wouldn't stay here at all. She knew what I was going through and she was going through the same things as well so she was really very supportive. [Julia, Czech, 26]

Compared to Ukrainian and Russian au pairs, au pairs from Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were more likely to connect with au pairs from different nationalities, as there were not many au pairs from their home countries in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area. The size of the Ukrainian au pair community was the largest and they were more likely to immerse themselves in the ethnic community, as well as networks, with au pairs from Russian-speaking countries such as Georgia and Russia. Being able to express their feelings in their own native language was a relief for the au pairs in their first months, as their English speaking fluency was not very strong. In addition, after spending the entire day trying to process new information in a foreign language, being able to express their feelings in their native language was very important for them. I also witnessed how expressing emotions in their native languages was an effective stress releaser during the participant observations. In a social gathering when Ukrainian au pairs all of a sudden switched speaking from English to Russian and talked intensively, with my limited Russian I could understand (and usually someone in the group usually informed me) that what they were talking about was an emotional issue related to their employers, dates or to a significant other.

New au pairs met older or former au pairs through email lists sent by their counselors, online au pair forums, and through their host parents, who were friends with the families of other au pairs. They also ran into each other while participating in social activities or classes, in nightclubs, or in church services. Although small in size, Russian and Ukrainian communities were more visible and established in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and thus had organized events such as the annual Ukrainian Festival (organized by the Baltimore Ukrainian Festival Committee in a Ukrainian church in

Maryland) and the Troika Party (defined as “the premier event portal for the Eastern European clubbers in the greater Washington, D.C., area” on its web site). Also, there were more Russian nightclubs and restaurants such as the Russia House and some nightclubs that regularly organized Russian Music or DJ nights wherein au pairs from Russia and Ukraine could meet each other.

Lamara was the only Georgian au pair among the study participants who had access to an ethnic network with non-au pairs. She explained that there were not many Georgian au pairs in the D.C. area. She knew one, who was in the same cohort and came to the United States at the same time. In her third month, she learned that there was a Russian Church in the city and that it had service for the Georgians on Sunday. She explained her first participation in the service:

It was at 1 pm, and the church was like full of Georgian people, even the priest was Georgian and I was in full of tears because it had been three months without seeing one. I didn't know the feeling that grew inside me...It was great and they have been so inviting. Apparently they knew each other for [a] long time. It is like a community, we are really close, because there are not many Georgians, and there are some that we knew but people who went to that church regularly. We celebrate like Easter or things like that, together, like New Year, and I think that it also makes my life easier here, like I am not away from everything. I have something. Because there are some people who go to other countries and they try not to keep their culture, but I do. On Sundays, when I don't have lots of homework to do, I always go stay with them. If I stay in one friend's house, the other ones would say “Oh you are not coming to my house?” They are like “Last week you stayed there, this week you stay here.” They are competing. They want me, too, and I really appreciate that...They always cook Georgian traditional food. It is not like that I miss Georgian food, but we don't have Georgian restaurants here.

Do you call them if you need help?

Oh yeah. I have friends but I really didn't need help so far, but if I need to borrow money from them, I would call and ask them. If [host parents] kick me out for instance, which they won't, I have friends whom I can go and stay, and I will not have to worry about whether I will end up [in the] streets. It is like, these people that I know, if they see that you need help, they really support each other, whatever they can do. I do have basic information, I know where I need to go, Georgian Embassy. But if I need anything like advice, anything, of course, they are the first persons. I usually never tell my problems to my mom, because I know that she [would] worry, so they are the ones to whom I express my feelings if I am having [a] hard time. They basically know everything about me.

Having networks with older or former au pairs provided new au pairs with instrumental knowledge, such as information about how to communicate with people back home or how to send them mail cheaply, where to go for certain needs (shopping, finding ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, obtaining a driving license, and so on), which courses to take and where to take them, preparing documents for the application for an associate's degree, and so on. These networks also provided safety nets wherein they could have a place to stay or borrow money if needed. Also, in some cases, newer au pairs could replace the position of an older au pair when the latter completed the program. When Larissa (Ukrainian, 25) completed the program, for example, she referred Polina (Ukrainian, 25), who was relatively a newer au pair, to her host parents who were good employers and offered a flexible working schedule. However, this form of informal recruitment was not very common among au pairs, as the au pair agencies were responsible for the recruitment procedure.

Since the older or former au pairs had more structured routines organized around studying for their classes or other work (extra babysitting jobs) and social activities, they could not spend much time socializing with newer au pairs. Kristina (Ukrainian, 26), for

example, spent most of her free time with her host family, and did not have many Ukrainian friends. She complained that older au pairs were not only busy but were also “Americanized” and not interested in having close relationships:

It is so hard to have real friendship here because all my friends here are like, “I am so tired, I am so busy.” Even Russian, Ukrainian people are becoming like Americans and are having American ways of friendship. Like, they say “OK, let’s have some party and brunch,” and that’s it. Friendship is not all about going out or partying. When I want to be close with a person, it is not hard to find time to do something together. In Ukraine, it is different. Here, I can tell you that I have friends but I only know them. I met a lot of Ukrainians because I went to [the] Ukrainian festival, Russian and Ukrainian meet-ups. A lot of Russians and Belarusians everywhere but they are not my best friends. They are busy and can’t participate in your life. I know Olga (a Ukrainian study participant who I am age-peer with her but she had long working hours and studied for her classes in the evenings). But we are not close. I want to be closer with her but she is so busy. She is very close with another girl, Maria. I have a friend from Argentina. When she was in Ukraine we were so close like sisters. I talk to her a lot. I email her or send messages.

Kristina further explained that, like all other au pairs, she was having difficulty maintaining regular communication with her friends who were left behind due to time differences. Her working hours overlapped with her friends’ free time. The communication with friends at home mostly took place on online social networking platforms such as Однокласники (*odnoklassniki*; the Russian version of Facebook), Facebook, Skype or through email. Moreover, the last thing au pairs wanted to share with their friends, who thought that they must have been having an amazing time in America, was how disappointed they were with their employers or living conditions. Likewise, they did not want to worry their parents with their own problems and concerns. They reasoned that their parents could not be of any help, and could only feel sorry and

become concerned for their beloved children.

The age difference between the au pairs was also an influential factor, in that the higher the age difference, the less interest the older au pairs would have in spending leisure time with younger au pairs. Still, a mentor-mentee relationship became common among co-nationals wherein the new au pairs knew that they could contact the older or former au pairs when they needed support or help. In addition, an intersection of age and nationality created distance between the au pairs. Western European au pairs were more likely to be in their late teens, as they were more likely come to the United States after graduating from high school. My study participants, on the other hand, were mostly in their mid-20s and thus were at a different life stage. The more time they spent in the United States, the more structured goals they had built. As such, a Ukrainian au pair who was in her second year would already be studying towards an associate's degree and would be planning on how to maximize her chances in the United States and thus perceived German au pairs as "kids" who were all about having fun, parting and getting drunk.

Former au pairs would also preferred becoming close friends with new au pairs either because they wanted to close "the au pair page of their lives" and have friends who were at the same life stage with them, because they did not see that such friendships would be beneficial for them. Among those, Kalyna (Ukrainian, 27) was studying in college and was married. She explained:

It is good to have au pair friends, but when you have the same problems like how to pay for the college, you are close, but your life changes, you start arguing and your friendship just falls apart. I met a friend in my first week here. We were the best friends ever but we are not friends anymore. We were doing everything together and then I got married. That time, she was dating someone and our plan

was to go to the same university and live in the same apartment. Maybe she felt like I cheated her, that I got married and stepped ahead. It is hard to explain why. And if you have some problems, they [au pairs] can't help you unfortunately. Like some of my friends, some of them lost their jobs, they needed a place to live and if I am an au pair how can I help you? I can barely support myself. So it is a nice thing to have au pair friends, but if you need help, they cannot help you. Like my friend Tanya, she was an au pair for 3 years for a family but they kicked her out of their house. Like in one day, take your stuff and go. Of course I have a studio and she was sleeping in my place. But if I [were] still an au pair, where would she go? I have another friend: Alena (Ukrainian, 22). She was an au pair for a year, and she changed her papers for a student visa and she met her husband and got married. So I have two friends who were [former] au pairs.

Adela (Czech, 27), on the other hand, completed the au pair program and had more international friends who were not au pairs anymore:

I have many Czech friends but we have a very international friend group here. I am tired of having au pair friends because it is the same story. They always ask the same questions, "When did you come?" It was one chapter of my life and it is over. I have my [new] life now.

In addition to these factors, language and cultural differences created barriers between au pairs from different nationalities, in that au pairs tended to talk in their native languages when they had co-nationals in the same cohort or when cultural differences created disparity among au pairs in terms of their expectations from friendship. When she completed the au pair program, Dora (Hungarian, 25), for example, explained that she had not had any au pair friends from different nationalities due to age differences and language barriers. Indeed, she criticized au pairs preferring to speak in their native languages rather than in English, which, she thought, was not good for practicing their English:

How come you didn't make friends with other au pairs?

First of all, they all are always very young, like 18, 19. I was 21 when I came here. I did not have my mom when growing up. I already had work experience and traveled a lot so I had a different life. They were going to shopping all the time or spending all day in Starbucks. They were at a different stage in their lives because of their age and also another barrier was the language. I believe that the most au pairs, the bigger groups like German, Swedish girls, not to mention any girls from Spanish speaking countries, would speak in their native language[s] and you don't understand a word. They keep talking and if you go out with a bunch of them, it is really annoying. I didn't come for that. If you go to a country, learn the language. In our cluster meetings, I am the one with whom they would ask, "Oh Dora can you help with college, with driving license, how to get this and that?" I couldn't decide if they were really lazy or it was the language but I was always like the information desk.

Jenya (Ukrainian, 24), on the other hand, explained that she felt more comfortable making friendships with Ukrainians and Russians due to cultural similarities in friendship and activities:

It is little bit sad to say that all my friends are from my culture. They are from Russian, Ukraine, and it is not like I am not a friendly person; I am. My experiences with girls from other cultures didn't work really well because we didn't understand each other. I have a lot of experiences with different au pairs from different countries. We are just different people. I would for instance, expect them to call me when they are going out, and invite me, and I would be offended if they don't, but, they would be like, "There is not a point for being offended." There is a point, so this is a different understanding of the situation, of the friendship. Also a lot of girls are coming here younger and they are looking for other things. I am friends with girls from my country, because they all are at the same age and we kind of share the same feelings and emotions. Girls from other countries are coming here to have fun, party, to get "loose" [laughing]. It is just different. I am not saying that I am not looking for these and I am not a party girl; I am, but it is just different understanding. I have been there already; I have been through that stage. I am not super older or something; it is a different point of view.

While having networks with older and former au pairs provided practical information for the new au pairs, they also became role models for the new au pairs, and thus were influential in changing new au pairs' initial settlement plans. I will explain this trend in the following chapter. On the other hand, having access to information about available opportunities, such as obtaining a college degree, increased anxiety and stress among some au pairs. One of these au pairs, Olga (Ukrainian, 25) explained that her hair grayed really fast in a couple of months after arriving to the United States because she learned from Maryana (Ukrainian, 28), who was the former au pair of her host family, that it was possible to stay longer in the country. She said, "I am thinking too much all the time. I learned that I can study here and I can get a job like Maryana [did] after au pairing. I am thinking how can I do these all; I am trying to find out the best opportunities I can get."

Although being from the same nationality was influential in forming friendships, it did not mean that au pairs would become close friends with their co-nationals. Indeed, many au pairs expressed that they would possibly not even be friends if they met in their home countries. Their material conditions and "shared experiences of domination" (Parreñas 2001) brought them together and they highly benefited from having au pair companions in coping with emotional stress, loneliness and isolation. However, as Burikova and Miller (2010) observed among Slovak au pairs in London, the study participants were coming from disparate regions and backgrounds. As such, their friendships could be fragile to fall apart easily in the aftermath of a dispute or conflict.

Another barrier for the au pairs in forming strong and lasting friendships was the distance created when their friends moved out of the city for a rematch or simply went

back to their home countries after completing the program. For those who valued quality over quantity in their friendships, losing their close friends could be very upsetting:

I met Yana in in Kiev in the orientation. When we came here together, I decided and tell her, “I really like you.” When I get to know one person, then I just don’t need [the] other person [since] I have been communicating with Yana so much. We were making decisions, like a boyfriend and girlfriend I would say [laughing]. We were together all the time. Then when she left for Ukrainian, it was a little hard for me. We are still communicating with her and she became really good friends with my family. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

I have a few friends. I have one friend from Poland and I have one friend from, I don’t remember her country, Pakistan maybe. The Polish one was an au pair and now she is a student like me. At some point we broke up because there was [a] misunderstanding...I have one French [au pair] friend and when I was [an au pair] in Connecticut I thought she was really close to me. She was sick and I drove her to the doctor. I thought that I was a good friend of hers. When I moved here, I was calling her, and I wanted to keep our relation[ship] but she didn’t have time... I [used to have] more friends but I have a few close friends now because I just don’t want my friend to be disappointed in me. It happens during your relationship. You can trust one person and it is hard to trust the other one, so I prefer to keep my [circle of] friends small so I can feel comfortable with them. (Irenka, Polish, 31)

As seen in the au pairs’ narratives, social networks with au pairs, particularly those made up of women from the same nationality, have been an influential means for coping with emotional and psychological constraints stemming from au pair placement. The shared experience of being an au pair –e.g. asymmetrical power relationships with their employers, their relative powerlessness and downward mobility, being new to a new culture and life style, and feelings of loneliness and homesick- brought au pairs from different nationalities together. Au pair networks empowered the au pairs, whose living and working conditions were undesirable or exploitative, through channeling information

about other au pairs' experiences with their host families. Thus, they could compare and judge the fairness of treatment they received and the material conditions.

Au pairs could meet recent, former or older au pairs from their nationalities in two forms of networking: An "enforced networking" (Burikova and Miller 2010), where counselors, host parents, or other third parties connected them after their arrival, and a voluntary networking, when they ran into au pairs from their nationalities in social and organized events. Different forms of friendships were established among au pairs and co-ethnics due to age, ethnicity, language barriers, cultural expectations from friendship, and length of stay in the United States. Au pairs could form a companionship, a form of relationship based on shared experiences, with other au pairs with who they could walk through the difficulties of au pair placement. This form of relationship was vulnerable to decompose due to distance created by relocation, cultural differences and changes in the status of au pairs such as switching from au pair to student visa or marriage. A mentor-mentee relationship was formed between older or former au pairs with the new au pairs due to age differences and structure of daily routines of the former or older au pairs. Nonetheless, this form of relationship provided instrumental support to the new au pairs and a sense of security that someone from their own country would never turn their back on them when needed help. Older and former au pairs, on the other hand, avoided establishing close relationships with new au pairs given they were at a different stage in their lives and, thus, did not share much common experience or have mutually supportive relationships.

5.5 Conclusions

The work schedules and hours of au pairs depended upon the number of children

under their care, ages of these children, work schedules of host parents, children's schedules for school and extracurricular activities, and other household duties assigned by the employers. The employment status did not influence their workload. However, au pairs worked longer hours for single-parent families and dual-parent families with long working schedules. Their work schedules and hours were also adjusted according to the children and employers' schedules, which had priority over au pairs' schedules for leisure time, travel, and school schedules. In addition to these factors, the content of their workload, which was defined as childcare and light housework related to children, also depended on what services their host parents assigned them and the ages of the children. Most host parents expected their au pairs to take on more responsibility by cooking, cleaning, and ironing for all family members, which was multiplied by the number of children, and thus their working hours exceeded the maximum of 45 hours of work requirement. In families with infants or teenagers, the au pairs worked a total of 45 or less hours and had more autonomy over their labor and schedules.

The living arrangements of the au pairs in the host families' households varied, with a common connection being that most au pairs were relegated to living in the basement. The distance created between au pairs and the rest of household members in an upstairs-downstairs allocation stood as a manifestation of spatial deference and confirmed the lower status of the au pairs in the family. However, for the au pairs, the comfort, decoration and size of their bedrooms were more important in shaping their satisfaction with this kind of living arrangement. In addition, as long as they had windows in their rooms and a separate house entrance, they were satisfied with this arrangement because it provided them more livable environment, privacy, and freedom of movement. Some au

pairs could tolerate lack of desirable qualities in their living arrangement if they were satisfied with other aspects of their placement such as having good relationships with their employers, the location of their families, having access to family car, and so on. On the other hand, au pairs who were provided with unbearable living conditions such as lack of provision of food or hot water refused to stay with these families and applied for a rematch or left the program completely.

Au pairs' relationships with their employers were diverse. Yet, most were structured by a formal relationship or an exploitative relationship. Among thirty study participants, only three experienced a familial relationship where they were treated like an equal family member by their first host parents. These au pairs were located in families with a single infant and shared a minimal age gap with their employers. Half of the au pairs developed more formal employer-employee relationships and stayed with families who respected their privacy and independence and treated them as equal "household" members. Seven au pairs were exploited as cheap workers under the cover of the part-of-the-family myth. While they were lured in by this discourse in the initial year of their employment and were involved in more manual household tasks as well as performed labors of love, they recognized their lower status and exploitation after several incidents and redefined their status in the family as maids, slaves, or cheap laborers. These findings were consistent with the literature on paid domestic work, and proved that when employers use familial metaphors, they do it for extracting unpaid labor, particularly in the form of labor in love. A final group of au pairs described their relationship with their employers as a master-servant relationship where their employers treated them as maids, servants, or slaves and did not respect them as human beings.

Intersections of domesticity, class position, ethnicity and immigrant status created vast differences between the au pairs and their employers and located the former at the lower hierarchy in the households of the latter, thus proving that au pairs were not equal peers with the family members. As suggested by transnational feminist scholars, the subordinated position of au pairs to their employers did not leave them powerless or passive. Au pairs resisted unfair treatments and working conditions in several different ways. Most first contacted their au pair agencies to ask for help, yet, most of these agencies followed a double standard in providing assistance to the au pairs and host families. If the au pairs were at the end of their contracts, they were more likely to get assistance. However, when they were at the initial stages, the agencies sought to convince them to adjust to their employers' working conditions and promised that they would help and they did not. These agencies could sometimes twist the program regulations to enforce the au pairs to stay with their families by informing au pairs that the adjustment period was three months while it was one month, or the au pairs must rematch with whomever picked them while the rematch was processed after two parties agreed, and so on. At the end, au pairs learned and also heard from other au pairs' experiences that the agencies were unhelpful to them and cared more about accommodating host parents, who paid them thousands of dollars. When the au pairs were in unbearable working and living arrangements, they simple escaped their families, and thus, quit the program or looked for new families through their own means.

Au pairs coped with the downward mobility they faced, as a result of transnational class mapping and the trauma of not being treated as like a guest or family member, through discursive strategies (retaining a strong sense of worth based on

morality by devaluing the social and moral valued of host parents regarding family life, life styles and parenting), attempts of immediate struggles (resisting to meet demands of their employers for extra additional service and keeping control over their labor), and passive resistance (drawing boundaries between their workplace and leisure time by leaving their workplaces after their shifts and not challenging their employers at the expense of realizing their goals for coming to the United States).

Seeking support through social networks was a crucial means for coping with dehumanizing aspects of their placement. Access to au pair networks provided them with companionship and built solidarity among au pairs. This opportunity helped them cope with isolation, loneliness and emotional and psychological burdens of their employment. However, age, nationality, language barriers, cultural expectations from friendship, geographical proximity, the size of migrant group, and length of stay (settlement) in the United States created diverse patterns of network formations and sustenance of these networks. Surely, au pairs tended to establish ties with their co-ethnics due to language barriers and cultural values governing the meaning of friendship. However, while Ukrainian and Russian au pairs could form networks with their co-nationals who were recent or former au pairs, Hungarians, Czech, Georgian and Polish au pairs tended to network with au pairs from various national backgrounds because the size of migrant communities from their nationalities in the Washington D.C., Metropolitan area was relatively smaller.

The access to networks was also determined by the work schedules of au pairs and geographical proximity and availability of means of transportation. A Ukrainian au pair, who conceivably would connect with other Ukrainian au pairs, was blocked from

doing so because her host family was living in a suburban area and did not let her drive their family car to meet her friends. Nor was she provided with a structured work schedule that would make it possible for her to know her free hours and thus meet her friends.

The sustenance of networks was vulnerable to distance created by relocation and changes in the status of au pairs. The relationships formed with older and former au pairs manifested a mentor-mentee relationship, where the new au pairs could have access to instrumental information for the betterment of their living arrangements. Having access to these networks was also the most crucial factor in changing au pairs' initial settlement plans at the end of au pair program participation. I will present more on this subject in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

SETTLEMENT STAGES, STRATEGIES AND REASONS

In the previous chapter, I presented living and working experiences of the au pairs in American host families. In this chapter, I describe the settlement stages, strategies and reasons of the study participants, and the influence of social networks, and push and pull factors in redefining their initial settlement plans in the United States.

In Chapter 4, I described two types of transmigrants: goal-oriented and explorer/escapee transmigrants, based on study participants' initial settlement plans and reasons for transnational migration. I explained that goal-oriented transmigrants comprised individuals who were recent students or graduates and individuals at the initial stages of their careers with clearly defined goals to achieve during their short-term settlement in the United States. Explorer/escapee transmigrants, on the other hand, perceived their short-term settlement in the United States as a means of distancing themselves from traumatic personal experiences, unsatisfactory working conditions, or as a chance to travel and explore the United States.

This chapter answers two research questions: 1) What types of settlement strategies do transmigrant women pursue? 2) Why and how do some transmigrant women establish long-term settlements while others do not? In the first section of this chapter, I describe the stages that settlement goal-oriented and explorer/escapee transmigrants experienced during their stays, and identify three distinct types of settlers: persuaded settlers, unsure/hopeful settlers, and permanent settlers. Then, I explain the influence of the legal system –the U.S. immigration laws- governing the settlement stages of the study participants; and, accordingly, the legal means the settlers pursued to keep their legal

status for extending their settlements in the United States.

In section two, I present the reasons for the return of study participants to their homes and their living and working conditions at home. Finally, in section four, I describe the settlement decisions of the study participants at the individual- and structural-level given push and pull factors in their home countries and the United States.

6.1 Types of Settlers

Demographically, goal-oriented transmigrants were significantly more likely to have their parents be currently married (78%) than were explorer/escapee transmigrants (33%), whose parents were either divorced or separated ($n=10$), deceased [at least one parent ($n=3$)] or absent [both parents were either deceased and/or estranged ($n=2$)]. In addition, the hometowns of goal-oriented transmigrants were more likely to be cities (89%), as opposed to small towns. While fewer explorer/escapee transmigrants originated from cities (67%), this difference was not significant¹⁷, perhaps because several study participants migrated from their hometowns to larger cities where there were more businesses and universities. Furthermore, the difference between the ages of explorer/escapee transmigrants upon arrival to the United States (mean age=21.8 and 22.5, respectively) was not significant¹⁸.

17 In order to test whether there was a significant association between parents' hometown characteristics and type of initial settlement type, I ran a Fischer's Exact Test, which yielded a p value higher than 0.05, indicating the home town characteristics was not significantly associated with one's initial settlement type.

18 In order to test if there were significant age differences between two types of settlers, I ran an Independent Samples T-test, which yielded a p value higher than 0.05, indicating that there were no significant age differences between two different types of settlers.

Throughout their stays in the United States, study participants' initial settlement plans were changed or redefined in relations to several factors, such as the desire to improve their English, involvement in romantic relationships in the United States, influence of host parents, establishment of close friendships in the United States, increased feelings of belonging, and the interplay of push factors in their home countries (e.g. limited access to jobs, higher education, livable wages and gender inequalities) and pull factors in the United States (more equal access to jobs, higher education and higher wages, and freedom). In addition, the legal barriers created by the U.S. immigration policy, as I explain in the following subsection, strongly influenced the achievement of settlement plans of the study participants.

Once all of these factors were considered, I identified four new settler types. I called the first group, *persuaded settlers*. Persuaded settlers were individuals who extended their stays primarily because they were convinced by their host families, parents, friends, or boyfriends to do so.

The second group I called *unsure/hopeful settlers*. Individuals belonging to this group were willing to stay longer in the United States, but unsure about how long they wished to stay or whether or not they could maintain legal non/immigrant status. Yet, these individuals were hoping that they could find opportunities to stay longer in the United States. This group did not have any concrete plans as to whether or not they wanted to stay permanently in the United States, but sought to make use of all educational and career-related opportunities to become more competitive, either in the United States or when they returned home. Thus, they prepared to “pack and leave” when they could no longer secure their legal status.

The third group comprised individuals who were qualified for, or determined to qualify for, legal rights of permanent residency in the United States. I referred to this group as *permanent settlers*. While not all permanent settlers were planning to stay permanently in the United States, they all planned to obtain permanent residency status in that it doing so would enable them to have freedom of mobility. Study participants who did not extend their stay, and thus, were longer transmigrant settlers are called *returnees*. These individuals either returned home due to their lack of a new visa or simply because they did not change their initial settlement plans. An illustration of the settlement stages of both transmigrants groups experienced is illustrated in Figure 6.1 and 6.2 below.

As shown, explorer/escapee transmigrants were more likely to move to the permanent settler stage after completing the au pair programs than were goal-oriented transmigrants. Conversely, goal-oriented transmigrants were more likely to be persuaded by their parents, host employers, or friends to extend their stays after the au pair program and consider obtaining academic degrees before returning home. For both groups of transmigrants, proceeding to the persuaded settler and unsure/hopeful settler stages was motivated by the difficulty of affording and obtaining a new visa prior to returning home. Thus, while still in the United States, both transmigrants groups extended their stays either to travel more or to invest in their human capital before returning home.

There were a total of ten goal-oriented transmigrants in the study group. Although all were planning to return to their schools or jobs, only two did so. Six of these individuals were persuaded to extend their stays, four by their friends and two by their host families. One participant returned home after achieving her goals while another

Figure 6.1 Stages of Settlement of Goal-Oriented Transmigrants

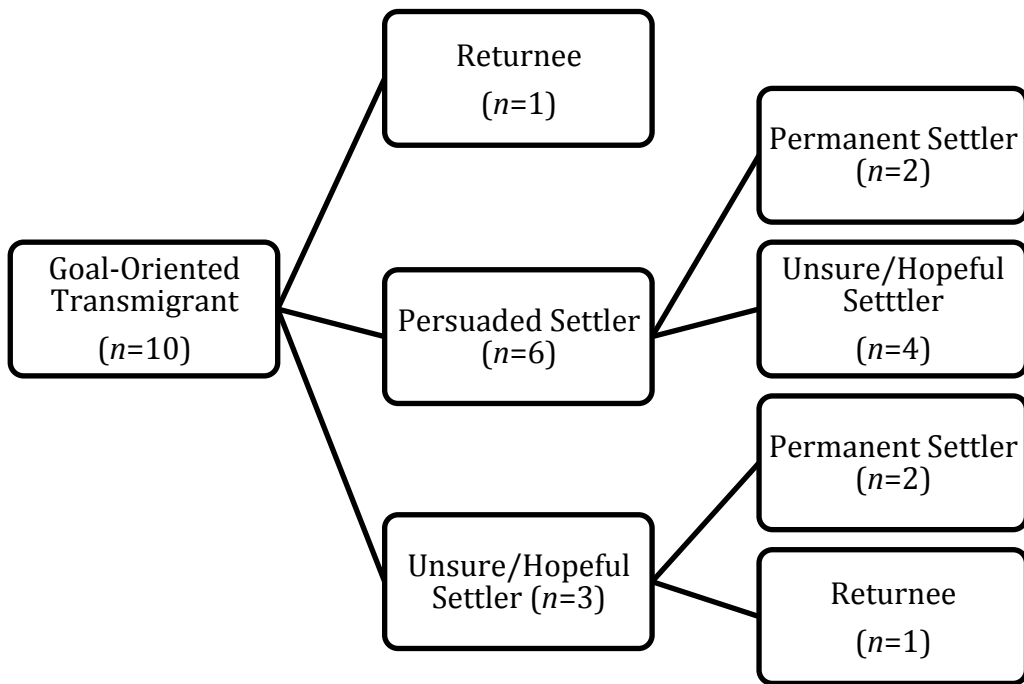
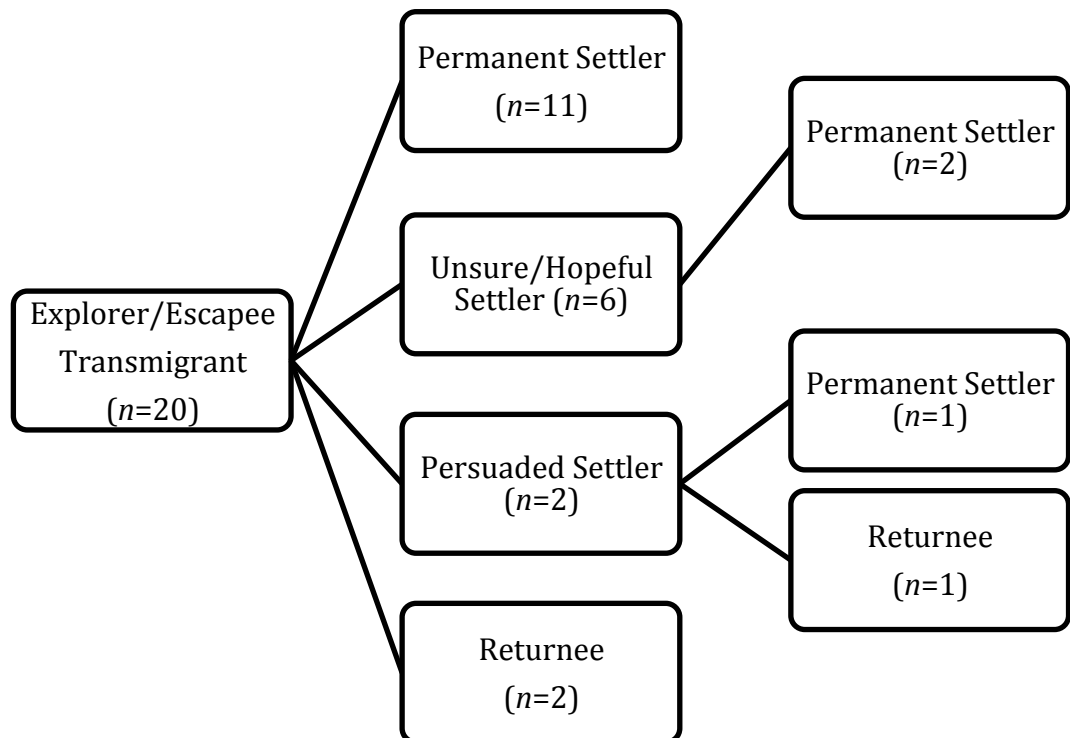


Figure 6.2 Stages of Settlement of Explorer/Escapee Transmigrants



returnee could not extend her stay despite wishing to do so. Two goal-oriented transmigrants became unsure/hopeful settlers

Among the twenty explorer/escapee transmigrants, 55% became or were determined to become permanent settlers immediately, 30% became unsure/hopeful settlers, 10% were persuaded to stay longer to obtain education degrees, and %10 returned home after one year of au pair placement. In the following section, I elucidate the legal means study participants employed in order to extend their stays in the United States, and how their access to these means were shaped by an interplay of individual and structural factors.

6.2. The Means of Extending the Stay in America

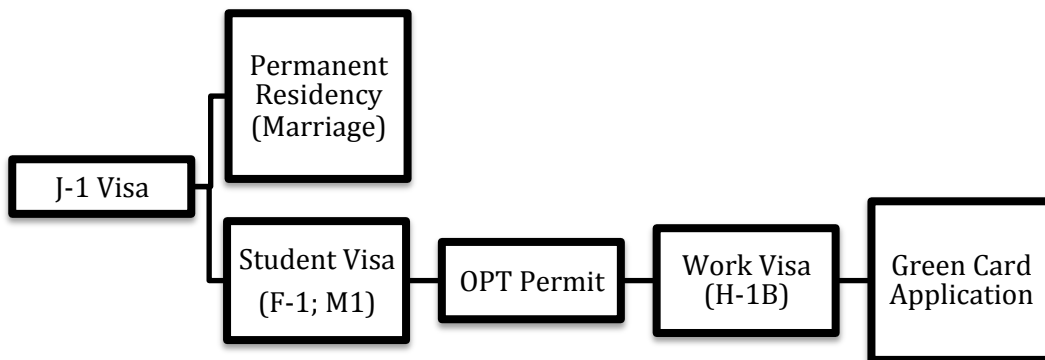
Although there were rumors about au pairs who ran away immediately after arriving in the United States or ended their au pair participation without switching to a different type of visa, thus becoming undocumented, none of the study participants preferred to follow these routes. Rather, these individuals sought to maintain legal immigrant status for two distinct reasons. First, if they overstayed their J-1 visa, they were informed by the au pair agencies or other au pairs that they would be barred from entering the United States for ten years. As such, they avoided overstaying their visas in order to have the opportunity to return to the country in the future. Second, if they overstayed, they would be denied a new visa, or have to adjust their status¹⁹. This would

¹⁹ “Adjustment of Status (AOS) refers to the procedure that allows foreign nationals already in the U.S., who are eligible to receive an immigrant visa and for whom immigrant visa number is immediately available, to apply for immigrant status with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).” Source: <http://usimmigration.visapro.com/>

leave them undocumented, and thus, prevent them from getting student or work visas in the long run.

There were two immediately available means of maintaining the legal status of J-1 visa holders: obtaining a student visa or marrying an American citizen, a Green Card holder or a nonimmigrant holding an H-1B work visa. While marrying an American citizen or a Green Card holder would grant them permanent residency and work permits, marrying a H-1B visa holder would change their status to dependents and provide them only temporary residence permits. Also, the length of their stay would be accorded to their husbands' lengths of stay. The consequent steps for maintaining a legal status is illustrated in Figure 6.3 (below).

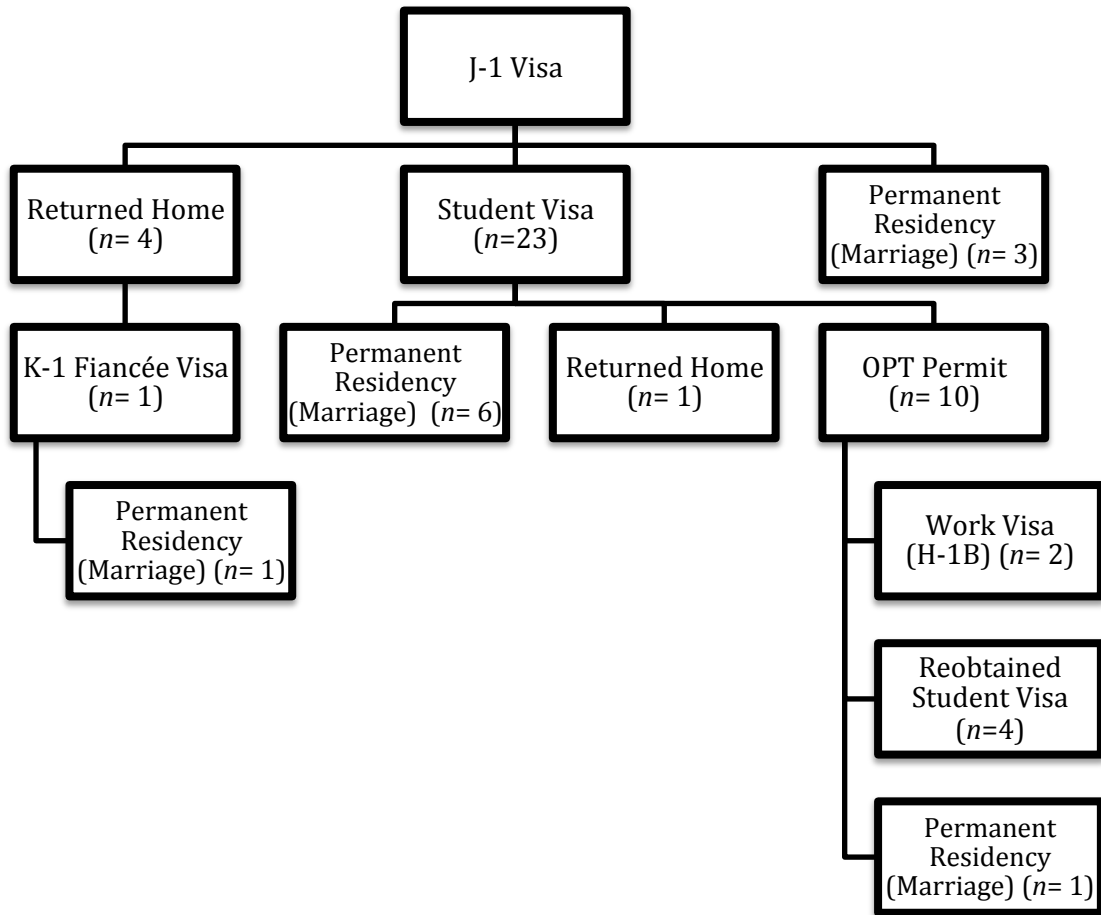
Figure 6.3 Paths to Maintain Legal Immigrant Status for the J-1 Visa Holders in the United States



The study participants who did not obtain permanent residency permits through marriage, the path from J-1 visa to Green Card applications did not evolve linearly. The transition from one settlement stage to another depended primarily on limitations posed by the immigration policies, and study participants' resources for generating the

necessary economic means to grant an official nonimmigrant or immigrant status in the United States. Resultantly, as Figure 6.4 (below) shows, they followed more complex paths, which I explain in the next subsection.

Figure 6.4 The Means Used by the Study Participants to Extend Their Legal Immigrant Statuses in the United States



6.2.1 Student Visa

A total of 23 study participants switched to student visas. 21 obtained F-1 (full-time student) visas and 2 obtained M-1 (part-time student) visas after completing the au

pair program. Thirteen of these participants obtained student visas at the end of their second year in the program, three at the end of their first year, three at the end of their 18th month, and one, who was a “kicked- out” au pair, at the end of her 4th month in the country.

In order to obtain a student visa, the study participants had to prove that they had access to requisite funds for paying tuition fees for the entire period of their enrollment (for an associate’s degree, a total of two year’s tuition plus book expenses), or they had to find a sponsor who would sign the sponsor affidavit form and submit a bank statement showing that they adequate means of financial support for student’s educational expenses. Due to economic disparities between their home countries and the United States, it was impractical for their parents to serve as their sponsors and pay for their school expenses. Their likelihood of having \$10,000 savings in their checking accounts was less than that of a typical middle-class American citizen. As such, having their host parents as their study sponsors was the most common method used to secure a student visa. Some of these host parents paid full or partial amounts for educational expenses of the au pairs. Others did not contribute at all, but rather become au pairs’ “paper sponsors²⁰” to help them obtaining student visas. When the host parents refused to take legal responsibility for their au pairs, such as government employees, the au pairs found paper sponsors, such as a distant relative, a friend, or a family member, and paid the educational expenses

20 Like in paper marriages, when study participants called their sponsors as “paper sponsors”, it refers to individuals who are officially their sponsors in the application documents submitted to the immigration services for obtaining student visa applications, yet, they do not take any financial responsibility to pay for the study participants’ educational expenses. In some cases, if the paper sponsors are study participants’ former host parents and/or were recent employers, they partially contributed to the payment of study participants’ tuitions.

through their own means (e.g. by working as live-in or live-out nannies).

The majority of the student-visa holders continued to work and live with their host families, or found new ones who financed their educational expenses, either partially or fully. When the host families were satisfied with the services of their au pairs, they wanted to keep them longer, because paying for their tuition was cheaper than recruiting a new au pair. If the host parents initially signed one-year au pair placement contracts, for each additional year they extended their contracts or signed new contracts for recruiting new au pairs. They also had to pay program fees and match fees to the agency. The annual agency fee, including the match fee, cost approximately \$8,500. On the other hand, the yearly out-of-state tuition for the international for an associate's degree cost between \$9,000-10,000, excluding textbook expenses. Yet, sponsoring host parents were reimbursed most of this amount because they could list their au pairs as dependents on their tax returns.

Also, once au pairs enrolled in an educational degree program (either an associate's degree, language study or a certificate program), they met other (former or recent) au pair students who informed them about getting an in-county tuition waiver, which reduced their total tuition to just \$4,500 a year and available tuition waiver scholarships. In some cases fellow au pair students also helped them find more affordable schools. In the end, the host parents financially benefited from having informal, verbal contracts with their au pairs to keep them working while sponsoring their educational expenses. In rare cases, this kind of work arrangement benefited employers even more when the au pairs managed to find full-tuition scholarships.

Most importantly, working with the same au pair, with whom they would get along well, was more convenient for the host parents than getting adjusted to someone new. Resultantly, out of the twenty-three au pairs who obtained student visas, twelve were funded by their first or subsequent host parents. Among them, Dora (Hungarian, 25) and Lamara (Georgian, 29) were two explorer/escapee transmigrants initially motivated to participate in the au pair programs in to explore educational opportunities. Both participants graduated with associate's degrees in hospitality management from the same community college, and were fully sponsored by their host parents. While Dora had experience in the hospitality industry prior to coming to the United States, Lamara decided upon this major while living in the United States. However, she could not quickly receive a full-time student visa (F-1 status):

My story is, once I decided to stay longer, my host family offered to sponsor me and stay here. Then they found out that I was not able to work officially for them on a student visa. I had these three months left in my visa and they decided and said, "We can not do it."

The neighbor of her host parents, who Lamara occasionally helped with childcare, volunteered to be her paper sponsor. Lamara had another au pair friend who switched to M-1 (part-time) student visa in order to take non-credit language classes in an affordable, private school. She followed the same strategy, and found a new family, who agreed to sponsor her for a full-time student visa (F-1). While working for this family in a live-in work arrangement for four years, she graduated and also completed the OPT program by working as a front desk agent in a small private hotel. Lamara explained that she was lucky to have her host parents, who let her stay with them even after their child was given to daycare:

I have been lucky [laughing]. They have been really supporting me as [if] I am really their family member, not like somebody [who] came from some another country. I used to work for them full-time because I started working when their kid was 3 months old and I went to college, then after seven months I switched my visa to go to X College, and I used to work, during the day, and I used to go to class at night. I don't count it as work. When he was two, they took him to daycare, and they offered me to stay there and I live there for free, but I helped them every other Saturday if they wanted to out and when the host dad traveled. The host mom works in Virginia and when her husband travels, she has to go to her work early and I have to come up early and take the kid to school, and that's what basically I do for them.

Indeed, a majority of the au pairs whose host parents sponsored them for a student visa had reduced and more flexible work hours than they had as au pairs. Like Lamara, Polina (Ukrainian) had an informal work contract with her most recent employer. Polina's first host family, who she did not like, offered to continue their working relationship for after her second year, but refused to be her sponsor. At the time, she had a boyfriend, a Ukrainian immigrant with whom she was deeply in love. While she had hoped that he would marry her in order for her to receive the needed papers, he was unwilling to do so:

Getting married is the best way to stay here but my boyfriend is not ready to get married yet. He thinks that he is too young, but it doesn't matter. I don't want to make kids with you; it is for papers. So he is not helping me with anything.

In her 17th month in the country, she decided that she was not going back home. In the first place, she did not have many strong ties there, other than a few friends. Additionally, her mother was an immigrant living abroad, she did not have any siblings, and she had lost contact with her father after her parents divorced. In addition, she had formed new strong ties with other Ukrainians in the country, who were former au pairs.

Therefore, she decided to continue her life in the United States when she left the au pair program at the end of her 18th month. She believed:

If I work here, I get decent money, and I feel safe here. It is a matter of papers now but this is the country where I want to live, the streets where I want to walk without destroying my shoes, and the service is always good.

As such, she obtained a student visa for preserving legal nonimmigrant status. Her immigrant mother sponsored her “on the paper.” Yet, Polina still had to manage school expenses and find a job. Her former au pair friend Larissa (Ukrainian, 25) referred her to her former parents. Polina broke up with her boyfriend shortly after our first interview and moved in with this family. Her second employer was a divorced, working mother with a middle-class background, living in a middle-class neighborhood in D.C. with two sons. She was a generous employer, inasmuch as she gave Polina a part-time assistant position in her office, a car, and paid for her cell phone bill and college tuition. Polina’s duties, in return, were to drive the children to school and other activities, and babysit when their mother was out of town or had date nights. She said that, as long as she had her privacy and kept her semi-formal relationship with her employer, she was content with this temporary living and working arrangement.

Unlike Polina, Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) was a goal-oriented transmigrant: she had been working in a prestigious international company at home and came to the United States for one year in order to enhance her English fluency. Indeed, she hid the fact that she was coming to the United States for au pair employment from her family and friends, because her parents would disapprove of her ‘irrational’ decision seeing as she had a “one in a million” job. In her second year, her host mother advised her to postpone her return for two years and offered to help pay for her college degree. Notwithstanding having two

bachelors and one Master's degree at home, Nadia was convinced to extend her stay for in order to obtain an associate's degree, since she had always dreamed of working in the hospitality industry. This dream had not been realized in Ukraine due to the expensive tuition fees of the university that housed a reputable hospitality management department.

However, upon switching to a student visa through her host parents' sponsorship, their verbal contract took a new term: her host mother started to deduct the tuition of the first semester (\$5000) from Nadia's paycheck. Nadia explained that she worked all summer without getting any stipend that year in order to pay off this amount. In her second semester, another au pair student in her cohort informed her about the in-county tuition waiver, which reduced the tuition per semester to \$2500, and Nadia obtained it. Then, because she worked diligently and earned a GPA of 4.0, she could get a full-tuition scholarship in her second year of study. Meanwhile, her host mother did not make Nadia's life any easier. She ordered her to complete more housework, and also began controlling her life outside of home. For example, her employer frequently called Nadia in the middle of the night, and on her days off, to ask, and at times yell about, why she had not emptied the trash before leaving home. She also accused Nadia of being a drug-user and forced her to take a drug test, simply because Nadia's belongings were stolen from her parked car while she was out with her friends.

During her extended stay, Nadia had several conflicts with her host mother. These conflicts began with her host mother's accusations and intensified when Nadia defended herself. Conflicts ended with her employer attempting, while in tears, to prevent Nadia from leaving. When Nadia graduated, her employer approached her and advised her that, because she liked hospitality management, she could transfer to a university and obtain a

Bachelor's degree. Her employer offered Nadia an opportunity to stay two more years, and promised to pay for the university tuition. Nadia "did not buy it" this time because she could no longer manage such an emotionally abusive relationship. Without knowing what she would do next, she left them. Having already obtained her OPT permit, Nadia reserved her return flight ticket to Ukraine. Meanwhile, she posted her resume on several online employment web sites for OPT employment. Her (former au pair) Ukrainian friends did not have or could not immediately provide her with a place to stay. Luckily my roommate agreed to accommodate her, and Nadia stayed with us temporarily until she secured an internship in a catering company. She spent all of her savings to buy a car and began going to job interviews. Then, she stayed with a fellow former au pair. Once she received her first paycheck, Nadia moved out and into a new apartment.

Four au pairs, including Nadia, who switched to student visa through their host parents' sponsorships, experienced deterioration in their relationships with their employers. The rest maintained formal or semi-formal relationships either with their first host parents or formed formal employer-employee relationships with consequent employers.

Informal recruitment for live-in nanny arrangements reflects an interdependent relationship between employers and employees. Although they did not need extensive hours of service, employers benefited from the flexibility and reliability of such an arrangement in that it costs less than hiring a nanny or new au pair. Having a reliable live-in helper who regularly walked their dogs, drove their children to school or extracurricular activities, and cared for their dogs and/or children when they were away for travel or attended an evening event/date, was more convenient than hiring multiple

live-out workers (e.g. a dog walker, a part-time nanny for the daytime during the weekdays, on-call babysitters for their evening arrangements, and a home-sitter while traveling) who could be less reliable and flexible.

This arrangement also secured the study participants' legal nonimmigrant status, helped them paying their education expenses, and also kept them unencumbered by the extra expenses for accommodation, food, and access to a car. When the sponsoring host families did not need them anymore, study participants were asked to leave their houses and look for alternative ways of making money. Many stayed with their boyfriends or got married.

Out of twenty-three study participants who switched from a J-1 visa to a student visa, one returned home after graduation, ten obtained OPT permits, six got married to citizens or Green Card holders (one husband was in the process of taking one), two were part-time students in language schools. The rest were still on student visas working towards degrees in community colleges or attending language schools. Out of thirty participants, two obtained educational certificates, one received an MBA, and eighteen completed associates' degrees (with a considerable number specialized in hospitality management or nursing). In the following subsection, I describe the settlement experiences of OPT permit holders.

6.2.2 Optional Practical Training (OPT) Permit

Upon competing an educational degree in the United States, nonimmigrants are entitled to one year of Optional Practical Training (OPT). An OPT permit was authorized by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) for the purpose of providing graduates with the opportunity to reinforce what they learned in the university and

college degree programs through temporary employment in the field of their study. Thus, OPT employment serves as an internship, with both paid and unpaid full- or part-time employment.

For the settlers who obtained student visas, OPT was the next step, aside from marriage, in keeping their legal nonimmigrant status in the United States. Otherwise, they would have to seek paper marriages in order to stay legally or become involved in a romantic relationship promising permanent residency via marriage before their student visas expired. In the study group, OPT holders' average length of stay in the United States was 4.7, with a range of 3 to 6 years. Regardless of whether they were initially goal-oriented or explorer/escapee transmigrants, at the end of data collection, three out of ten participants were determined to obtain permanent residency permits (permanent settlers), and seven others were still unsure/hopeful about their future settlement plans. In other words, these settlers were open to the concept of pursuing their careers temporarily or permanently in the United States, but were unsure about whether or not they would be able to secure an H-1B visa after completing their OPT employments. As such, their back up plan was to "pack and leave," and continue their lives at home.

In order to apply for an OPT permit, a student must have been enrolled full-time, for at least one academic year, and hold a valid F-1 status at the time of application submission²¹. Eligible students file their OPT requests to the USCIS through their international student advisors in their academic institution, along with paying a \$380 application fee. Upon filing their application, an OPT permit was usually approved and

²¹ As this definition implies, M-1 (part-time student) visa holders and language study students were not eligible to apply for an OPT.

issued within 2-3 months. Consequently, OPT permit receivers have a 90-day period to find employers in order to keep their legal nonimmigrant status. If they fail to do so, their OPT is cancelled, and they violate their F-1 status, unless they have a) applied for a new degree program, b) departed the United States, or c) taken some other action, such as filing a change of status application, in order to have a legal nonimmigrant status.

Acquiring an OPT permit was relatively easy when compared to obtaining a student visa, as it was more affordable. However, there were three challenges commonly faced by the OPT permit receivers. First, as explained above, study participants lost OPT permits if they were unemployed for more than 90 days. Although the purpose of issuance of OPT was to enable the student to practice their training, some participants had to accept positions that did not appeal to them in order to show that they were employed prior to the expiration of their permits.

Second, most OPT candidates were seeking paid employment as they were ready to live independently or had already moved out of their employers' or host parents' households. As such, independent participants sought full-time, paid OPT positions in order to be able pay for rent and other living expenses, unless they shared these expenses with a boyfriend or husband. Sasha (Russian, 28), for example, had been working for and living with the same host family, who also sponsored her for an F-1 student visa, over five years when she applied for an OPT permit. When I asked if she was planning to stay with them any longer, she responded:

I might, I don't know. Here is the thing: If OPT is going to be full time, that means I will make more money so I will be fine to pay rent. If they only need me part-time, which is the most likely to happen, then I will do part-time there and in the afternoon I can be with the kids, still live in their house so I won't have to pay rent. So I will have to see how it is going to be.

Later, through her friend Ivanna (Ukrainian, 30), who was an H-1B employee in a non-profit organization, she was able to obtain a part-time OPT position and keep living with and working for her host family. She was then eligible for an H-1B work visa, which she used to, in her own words “buy more time,” through re-obtaining a student visa in order to study for a bachelor’s degree. By her 5th year in the country, she had decided that she was not going to return home because she did not have the energy to start a new life from scratch:

I think I can’t go to another country because I am pretty old. I am 27. I just don’t think that I can leave everything I did and go to a different country, start to learn another language, getting to know everything. I just can’t do that [any]more. I like it here; I don’t think I want to leave.

The third challenge faced by the OPT permit receiver was the difficulty of finding a well-paying position, as Alisa (Russian, 30) explained below, because employers usually did not pay well for internship positions:

Some companies doesn’t really care if you are an OPT. They say, “We will pay you \$10.” That’s what they offer to anybody who applies. It depends on your luck. Some companies are looking for interns, so they pay less or none. But they say that they are so generous that they give you the chance to experience but basically it is free worker for them.

According to Alisa’s description of finding a good OPT position, Hanna (Ukrainian, 28) was a “lucky” study participant because she found a well paying OPT position that matched her field of study. Hanna was an undergraduate student in a foreign languages department in her home country. At the end of her junior year, she decided to become an au pair in order pass the degree completion exam, which was in English. She arrived in the United States in 2006. At the end of her first year in the au pair program,

she traveled back to her home country, passed the final exams and received her degree. After achieving her primary goal, she decided to extend her stay in order to explore additional opportunities in higher education in the United States. Luckily, her employers offered her a student visa. Because she knew this was a rare opportunity, she decided to continue working for them and switched to a student visa. She studied for an associate's degree in hospitality management, because she thought that this field was broad enough to practice along with her chosen profession. After graduation, one of her friends referred her to the owner of a law office that was in need of a Russian-speaking event manager for hosting Russian clients. Unlike other OPT interns, she was paid a satisfactory salary in her internship, which enabled her to afford living independently in a one-bedroom apartment, buying a car, and traveling frequently. Additionally, she saved enough money to afford the tuition fees for an MBA degree. She was determined to obtain permanent residency permit in the United States:

I want to get my Green Card by myself and I want to do it right. I want to get married once and I want to do it for love. This is one of my values; I want to do it right and I will do everything to do it as long as I can. Studying buys you so much time, but it is coming closer and closer and the options are getting more and more limited, right? What an I gonna do? Have two, three masters' degrees and no experience? But I don't want to get married for papers unless there is no other option is left. It would be with another immigrant or someone whose family is in another state because you don't have to deal with the family and you don't have to lie to the whole family. Because I can't put a fake face for three years and hide that I am paying your son under the table to get papers. And I can't lie during the [Green Card] interviews. So I want to do it myself, and I want to do it right. So far it is working. ”

Hanna was lucky to find a well paying OPT position. However, she was hired for a one-year position only. Because her employer did not need her after his Russian clients

were gone, he did not want to sponsor her for a work visa. For this reason, if OPT holders were planning to stay longer than a one year internship, they were better off being highly selective about the field and future potential of the OPT positions, because these employers could be their future H-1B work visa sponsors. Some OPT holders were strategically pursuing positions that were both commensurate with their future career plans and promising longer employment opportunities.

Maryana, for example, had studied for a bachelor's degree in accounting at the second biggest University in Ukraine. She was initially a goal-oriented transmigrant, as she was planning to return home after improving her English in order to work in one of the four biggest international auditing companies. Before she left her host family's house at the end of her second year, however, she wanted to explore opportunities that might add to her resume, so as to improve her chances to get her dream job in Ukraine. She decided that it would be a waste of time to start all over and study for an associate's degree. Instead, she decided to get a certificate degree in business administration. Her Ukrainian friend, who was a former au pair married to a business executive, sponsored her for a student visa "on the paper." For one year, Maryana worked as a live-in nanny and followed her church leader's advice and taught Russian language to Americans of varying ages. In the end, she saved enough money, combined with savings from au pair placement, to pay the \$6,000 tuition fee and move out of her employer's house, and into an apartment in downtown D.C. Towards the end of her F-1 visa expiration date, she started to look for an accounting position, because she thought having work experience in the United States would make her more employable when she returned home:

I had been looking for the job... I started looking for jobs at craigslist. I sent my resume to thousands of places. My email broke down, Yahoo was not working anymore [laughing]. I don't know why, maybe because of so many files. Since I completed a certificate degree in business, I was looking for administrative and accounting assistant job. I I was interviewed by seven companies, and three of them offered me jobs. Only one of them was willing to sponsor me for H-1B work visa, and I started working for them a year ago as a accounting assistant.

What's your next step going to be?

Well, I don't have any plans, it's been three years, more than 3 years, so I am looking to get a work visa but I am not sure if it is possible. There are some difficulties to get it. My company, not financial difficulties but they are selling the company so they need to get a new owner and, there is some difficulties over there. So I started to look for a new place to work. Right now it is more complicated because I tell them that I am looking for sponsorship, people step back, "Oh, sponsorship!", so basically it is complicated. Basically I am looking for a work visa, because you are thinking, "Wow, if I have a work here and when I go back, I have a lot of stuff in my resume. So nice!" I can get a good job at home easily but right now my dream is to get a job in one of the biggest auditing companies. Over here, it is kind of impossible, so over here it could be possible.

However, it was not easy for all OPT candidates to find a position that matched all of their expectations in such a limited time, especially, if they had financial constraints, as exemplified in Adela's story (Czech, 27):

When I was an au pair and started to go to school, I knew I had two more years. It is a long time. Then, two years were gone. It is hard because you need to be here legally and you need papers. Every time it is getting harder and harder. I was planning to transfer my associate's degree credits for starting an undergraduate degree in hospitality management but my host parents didn't want to pay for it. I am still with them but I am moving out because it is not working out anymore. Two kids are in collage and there is only one left...Our deal was that whatever they pay to the agency, \$8000 for a year, they would rather pay it for my tuition. Then, they told me in February, "We can't sponsor you anymore but you can stay here. You find another job and pay your tuition yourself." I will find another job,

and I can still live there. That was OK. But I can't still pay my tuition because I can't get in-state tuition. I don't have the money right now. So I decided to do OPT for one year, and after that I would go back to school, or just go back to Czech Republic. I would love to stay here but I just don't have that many options.

What is your OPT in?

My OPT is in a catering company, but it is not something I want to do in the future. I just wanted to try because I was a server, and worked in front desk and I never worked for a catering company before. What I basically do is to take order calls from the clients. There is no [face-to-face] contact with people. It is only on the phone. I am working there since June. It is still a good experience for me. The company is great and everybody is fine but it is not something I want to do in the future. I just needed to start from somewhere. They said that they would sponsor me for a work visa [H1-B] but I have to have a bachelor's degree for that so I need to go back to school. I can't work in a full-time OPT if I go to school full-time. I don't know what I am going to do because I don't have money for the school. I am going to be 29 by then and it will take like three more years to get a Green card and I am going to be 32. I just want to settle down. I want to live in a nice apartment, get married and have kids. I don't want to be 35, single and have no kids. I am saving money now and I will see.

Including Adela, a total of four study participants were living with their host parents when they worked as OPT interns. Like her, Lamara (Georgian, 29) and Irenka (Polish, 31) wanted to continue their associate's degrees. Due to the same financial constraints, they postponed these goals, and continued to work for their host parents while fulfilling their OPTs. On the other hand, they could work in positions relevant to their majors, given that they were unencumbered by the cost of living expenses by living with their host families:

I wanted to go to university but I didn't feel comfortable asking to my employers, the family I [used to] babysit when I was going to school and helped me to get student visa before. But they let me stay with them if I get an OPT and I was helping them with their children. It was a favor for me because I wasn't paying

rent. Actually, when I went to a hotel for interviewing them for my homework, they asked me if I was interested in working for them. I said, “Yes, why not?” Although I was graduating from hospitality management I never worked in a hotel before and I thought that it was a good opportunity for me to start from somewhere. I interned there for a couple of months without being paid, then my OPT permit came and they started paying me. But the owners of hotel didn't want to sponsor me for work visa; they didn't want to help me. (Lamara)

Here, I finished two associate's degrees: first a business administration degree, and then accounting. I did go back to school for a second degree because I wanted to work as an accountant. I did not have qualification for an accounting position. My other goal was to get CPA; it is certificate for public accountants, and to be able to take the CPA I decided to have a degree in accounting. I would like to have bachelors but I am not sure how many of these classes I can transfer for a bachelor's degree, and honestly, I don't want to be full-time student. Bachelor's is very expensive. When I checked with some friends, they told me that it would cost me \$15,000 just for semester. I don't have this money and my parents are retired so they won't be able help me. So, I started my OPT. I was supposed to start in August but I couldn't find any company to hire me. I was asking everyone I knew and sending my resume to everywhere. After two months, I got one because I gave my resume to one of my neighbors and she left my resume in her work to the accounting department. I am on a part-time OPT and still living with my host family. (Irenka)

Irenka had been living with her second host parents over six years. Her duties decreased once the child under her care became a teenager. She was working part-time in a household where she was treated like an “older sister” to the teenager. Her duties, included driving the teenager to her activities, walking the dogs, and watching her and their two dogs when the parents were not at home. Unquestionably, such a live-in part-time “nanny” arrangement was a good one, as she did not have the financial ability to afford living independently. I wondered for how long she planned to maintain this work arrangement. She explained that she viewed it as temporary because she found it challenging to balance OPT employment and her nanny responsibilities:

I can't stay here after my OPT is expires. To be honest, I would like to be on my own. I like [her host family] very much but it has been such a long time. On Friday nights, I go to my boyfriends' place and I just want to relax, have a break; have no kids, no dogs around... I am just her [the eleven years old child teenager under her care] driver. Because of her age, she has so much drama right now. Also, she [has been] acting weird recently, like, she started to correct my pronunciation. She didn't have any problem understanding me for all these years, and now she does! Nihal, it is just killing me when she says, "Oh, you are not [pronouncing] this work correctly. You are supposed to say it this way, not that way." I think it is an adjustment issue because since I started to work [OPT], I don't have much time left for her. I am trying to be nice even when I am very stressed and tired after work. It is hard. I come home from work, take care of the dogs and drive her and sometimes even driving is so hard because some people don't know how to drive...Driving is really stressing me out.

In comparison to a student visa, OPT permit was issued for only one year. As illustrated in these cases, OPT interns had to consider ways to maintain their legal status after completing their OPTs. Five out of ten OPT interns could work in positions commensurate with their career goals, and were seeking H-1B visas afterwards. However, only two of the OPT interns could proceed to this step. Three had to step down to student visas due to American employers' unwillingness to handle legal procedures and face the cost of hiring international employees, or because they were ineligible to apply for H-1B visas. As a result, among ten OPT interns, five had to re-take student visas (two for studying MBA programs, two for bachelor's degree and one could not afford a full-time F-1 status so she got part-time M-1 student visa) in order to maintain their legal status. While studying, in order to generate income, two study participants kept working for their OPT employers, one worked as a live-in home-sitter for a family who was frequently traveling, and one kept working for her home family while only one study

participant used her savings from OPT and also worked part-time on-campus job²² to generate income.

Five out of ten study participants, on the other hand, had obtained OPT permits to extend their legal stays in the country. Consequently, in this group, one study participant married her boyfriend, who was a Green Card Holder. She could then get a work permit through her husband. One was enrolled in an MBA degree program, and one in a bachelor's degree program. In the following subsection, I explain the experiences of H-1B visa holders.

6.2.3 H-1B Work Visa

One explorer/escapee transmigrant, Ivanna (Ukrainian, 30) and one goal-oriented transmigrant, Maryana (Ukrainian, 28) could obtain employment through H-1B visas at the termination of their OPT internships. Interestingly, they had several common experiences in their stories. Both arrived in the United States in 2006, were trained as accountants, had a close friend and a relative as their paper sponsors for their student visas and financed their U.S. education themselves. Neither started their education all over again. Instead, they built upon their previous educational degrees and obtained their H-1B visas where they were hired as OPT interns. Ivanna received her H-1B visa one year earlier than Maryana because she started her OPT earlier than did Maryana. In

²² Student visa holders, by immigration law, are allowed to work up to 20 hours only in on-campus jobs. Therefore, they were not allowed to work in any other type of off-campus employment. However, because the pay is low for student employees (less than \$1000 per month), only one study participants on student visas preferred to get an on-campus employment while the rest worked in off-campus positions and were paid “under the table,” which violates their F-1 visa terms and risked their legal statuses.

addition, while Maryana had become a persuaded settler before reaching unsure/hopeful settler stage, Ivanna transitioned to the unsure/hopeful settler stage directly because she changed her unification plans with her family in Canada. Maryna, on the other hand, was not sure whether or when she would return to Ukraine, but was “ready to pack and leave” if she could not get her H-1B renewed at the end of her visa term. Finally, and most importantly, both of their employers violated H-1B visa employment terms.

H-1B visa is a non-immigrant work visa for specialists and professionals who hold at least a bachelor’s degree in majors related to the position title and from accredited colleges and/or universities in the United States. This visa type is initially granted for three years and can be extended to a maximum of six years. It is subject to annual numerical limits for the extensions of employment. H-1B employers are enforced by law to “pay the nonimmigrant workers at least the local *prevailing wage* or the employer's actual wage, whichever is higher, offer benefits on the same basis as for U.S. workers” and “provide working conditions for H-1B workers that will not adversely affect the working conditions of workers similarly employed.” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013)

In order to employ a foreign worker through H-1B visa, an employer files a petition for the H-1B visa application along with I-29 form and pays the application and processing fees. The total fees²³ for sponsoring a foreign worker for a small American company cost between \$1,575- \$2,800 and \$2,325-\$5,560 for a larger company.

²³The employers pay \$325 base filing fee, AICWA (American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998) fee (\$750 for employers with 25 and less; and \$1,500 for employers with 26 or more full-time equivalent employees), and \$500 fraud prevent and detection fee. Since the Public Law 11-230 passed in 2010, the employers who had 50 or more employees in U.S. and more than 50% of their employees are non-immigrant worker, they have to pay additional \$2000

Study participants explained that most of their employers were discouraged from hiring foreign workers either because of the financial and bureaucratic processes employers have to bear; or, in the case of small business employers, they were unaware of the H-1B procedures. In addition, when employers were experienced H-1B petitioners, they asked foreign employee candidates to pay for the financial cost of their visa petition (which is a violation). In these cases, foreigners were more desirable than native workers as Maryana explained, “Because they think foreigners will work harder than Americans.”

Although finding H-1B visa sponsors was highly perceived as a matter of “luck,” many OPT interns could not find work sponsors upon completing their internships for three key reasons. First, for an H1-B visa, the undergraduate field of study must match the field of employment and qualifications required for the positions to which they would apply. Ninety percent of the participants held at least a bachelor’s degree when they arrived in the country. Yet, undergraduate and/or graduate degrees they earned in their home countries were not accepted as being equivalent to American degrees either because of 1) inadequate accreditation system in their countries of origin, 2) different course credit calculation system in their universities, which made cumulative credits of their degrees lower than the total number of credits required for the same degrees in American colleges and universities, or 3) incompatibility of the majors they earned at home with the ones offered in the American colleges and universities. For example, Irenka (Polish, 31) studied a bachelor’s degree in company management and a master’s

fee in their petition for H-1B. The evaluation of the H-1B petition applications would take from 2-6 months, and a premium-processing fee of \$1,225 can be paid either by the employer or employee to accelerate the processing of the application.

degree in European business relations. She got her transcripts translated and approved by a well-known translation company; yet, it did not help her to transfer all course credits, as the titles of the courses were incompatible with ones offered in the United States.

In addition, like most study participants, Irenka chose to pursue an associate's degree because, for an international student, the cost of community college tuition was significantly lower than that of an undergraduate or graduate degree. As such, most study participants started out pursuing an associate's degree. Some could also get partial course credit earned at home deducted from the total number of credits they had to take for completing this degree. In addition, a majority of the study participants studied new majors rather than continuing their previous majors in the American colleges, because they did not know that they would seek jobs in the future in the United States. Therefore, they had to complete a bachelor's degree in their new majors in order to be eligible for an H-1B employment, which, as mentioned above, was financially burdensome for the study participants. Furthermore, lack of work experience in their professions negatively influenced eligibility of study participants for H-1B employment. This type of visa is given to specialists and professionals. A majority of the study participants did not have lengthy work experiences after graduation. Thus, they were not eligible for obtaining H-1B work visas.

Ivanna and Maryana were able to find H-1B sponsors more easily because their accounting degrees were considered to be equivalent to U.S. educational degrees, and because they did not change their majors when obtaining new degrees. Ivanna studied an MBA and Maryana received a certificate in business management. Because they took strategic steps in finding OPT positions relevant to their fields of study, worked diligently

during their internship, and established good relations with their employers and colleagues, their employers agreed to become their H-1B visa sponsors on the condition that they pay for their own H-1B visa petition fees. Given the difficulty of finding new employers, they hired immigration lawyers to process their applications. Additionally, after obtaining their work visas, their employers did not pay the prevailing wages to them. Ivanna, for example, worked in a non-profit organization. She explained that she was shown as a part-time H-1B worker “on the immigration paper.” However, she worked 80 hours per week for a part-time salary and was under too much pressure to keep her job. In her first interview, Ivanna had one more year of employment in this company and described seeking settlement in the United States. Although she had not built strong ties in the United States, she felt a sense of belonging after living here for five years:

I feel at home here. I feel safe, and I know where to go and what to do here. Back at home, I am lost. I don't feel like I was even born there. I got used to everything here so much. I don't see myself in Canada either. It is a complete strange country. It is better than Ukraine but...It would be probably an option if I had to, but I don't really want to.

As explained before, an H-1B visa is issued primarily for three years in length. Ivanna worked three years for her first employer. Her employer could file a petition to extend her work visa, but this time she did not have enough money to pay for the filing and legal fees. After paying the rent, utilities, car insurance, down payments for her car, and occasional trips to visit her father in Ukraine and mother in Canada, she did not have much left in terms of wages. Therefore, she started to search for a new employer. While she was invited for several interviews, once the hirers learned that she needed a sponsor

for work visa, they did not call her again. As she approached the end of her three-year work permit, she was getting more distressed and hopeless.

Her feelings about returning “home” were more pessimistic when she visited Ukraine last year. She told me, “I would lie on the ground and let myself die rather than go back home.” Her father was living in Ukraine and she had a good relationship with him, but returning to her country after staying in the United States was not a choice for her anymore. She knew that her living and working standard would decline and she had lost contact with most of her friends. She was not planning to join her mother in Canada because she thought that her mother and relatives would intervene in her life.

Towards the end of her H-1B visa, she applied to a school in Canada, in a city far from her mother. Her cousin was living there, and she was planning to live with him and find employment while attending school. Meanwhile, in the United States, she had an interview with another nonprofit organization for an accounting specialist positions. The organization had been looking for an accountant specialist for over six months, and they were very interested in hiring Ivanna because she was an experienced accounting specialist. Yet, the organization was doubtful as to whether or not they would have enough funds in their budget to afford a H-1B petition. Shortly after, Ivanna was admitted to the school in Canada. A few days later, she called me and said, “Don't tell anybody yet, I am hired! I will not tell anyone until I get my papers.” It is worth mentioning that there is a superstitious belief in “evil eyes” in Ukrainian culture. That is, many believe that if others know that you have received good fortune, they will plot against you. Fortunately, Ivanna's new H-1B arrived soon, and she started her new job in a company where she was paid a prevailing wage.

Unlike Ivanna, Maryana had strong ties in the United States. Her older sister had been living with her for the last three years. She first came to visit Maryana on a tourist visa, then extended her stay in order to study English. She had acquired an H-1B visa and started working as kindergarten teacher. Maryana explained that her sister was easily hired because she was a preschool teacher at home. They lived together in an apartment close to their workplaces. In a year, their father was diagnosed with cancer. Although Maryana used all of her savings to pay for his treatment, he passed away shortly after receiving his diagnosis. Since then, their mother had frequently visited her daughters in the United States.

At the end of my research, Maryana was in her second year of employment as an H-1B visa worker. Her immigration lawyer advised her to acquire permanent residency through marriage as a final and practical solution, rather than struggling with her employer to extend her H-1B visa next year. Maryana was not sure if her company was going to extend her work visa; and, if they did so, whether or not the USCIS would approve the extension. She explained that there were more qualified and experienced international accountants in line ahead of her hoping to obtain the limited number of H1-B visas offered by the USCIS. Her limited education- she held only bachelor's and certificate degrees- would make her a less competitive candidate. As such, she was currently taking graduate level courses and seeking to pass Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam in order to increase her employability. Maryana was still an unsure/hopeful settler as she was ready to "pack and leave" if she could not secure a new H-1B. Like Ivanna, she had never considered getting a paper marriage. She wanted to

stand on her own two feet and be an independent woman. If she did marry someone, it would not be for the sake of staying in the country.

6.2.4 Marriage: Paper, Real, and Real-Real Marriages

Obtaining permanent residency through marriage was a hot topic among the study group. For some, it was the only practical option for finding and/or keeping their sponsors for a student visa, OPT, or work visa, for resolving their worries of being stuck in an endless cycle of physical, psychological and financial torture. However, it was not easy to find or afford an eligible candidate for marriage. Contrary to the common rumor that “girls are paying an immigrant for papers,” none of the two study participants, who accepted a paper marriage, paid for their “husbands.” One single study participant, for example, considered a paper marriage as an option and sought to find and pay someone to get married. Yet, she ended up having a pool of candidates who wanted to be “friends with benefits.” She gave up because she would only get married for love or for papers, but not to someone with whom she had no emotional involvement.

Another common concern was whether married co-nationals in their friends’ circles were engaged in paper marriage arrangements or not. Such a concern was particularly common when the husbands were from Spanish-speaking countries or African Americans. Given that study participants were from countries where almost the entire population was Caucasian, interracial marriages were unusual, and racial stereotyping for non-White people was prevalent. Contrary to this perception, interracial marriages were as prevalent as marriages to Caucasians—Out of 13 married study participants, 2 were married to White Americans, 1 to an African American, 5 study participants were married to Latin American immigrants (originated from Bolivia, Haiti,

Costa Rica, Dominique Republic), and 1 to an Moroccan immigrant, 2 to Russian immigrants, 1 to a Ukrainian immigrant, and 1 to a Czech nonimmigrant.

In the interviews, Russian and Ukrainian study participants classified three types of marriages: paper marriages, real marriages and real-real marriages. Paper marriages refer to marriages where the spouses do not live together, and the wives pay the “hired husbands.” Real marriages are also paper marriages arranged for providing permanent residency to women, but are done without payments. Spouses live together, and thus, have the potential to transform their partnership into a real-real marriage. Real-real marriages are the ones established on reciprocal love between spouses. This categorization, however, was not applicable for defining the marriages in my study groups as women who got paper marriages were living with their “paper husbands” and had more complex types of relationships.

Among all married study participants, eight married their husbands after at least six months of dating, and their marriages were established on love. Among those, five study participants married their husbands quickly, four had a short dating period whereas one participant married a friend of hers and defined her marriage as a paper marriage. In this section, I explain the marriage stories of so-called “real marriages” and “paper marriages,” which helped the study participants obtain permanent residency.

Four study participants got married to their husbands after a short-term dating period when their current visas were about to expire. Marrying the men they were dating and attracted to, as Liza (Ukrainian, 28) explained, was a good “package”:

Getting a student visa after au pair visa is not a long-term [solution]. Everybody is looking for a husband. So I met this guy. First time we were really passionate. He was driving an hour to meet me. He is American. I met him last summer. After

four months, I told him what was going on with my status. He told me, “You are actually with me for me because you need papers.” Yeah, that’s what they usually say. I said, “Not really, but it would be nice if we are ever going to get married.” Everything came with the full package. We actually got married after that but we didn't have a wedding; we just went to the courthouse and got married.

Including Liza, eight married study participants continued to work as live-out part-time or occasional babysitters for pocket money, and some contributed to payment of the utilities. Yet, their husbands were the breadwinners of the family. Only Liza complained that her husband expected to share their living expenses equally, which was not acceptable for her and led them to have their first fight:

First time we fought... When we started dating, he said, “I actually want to remind you that in dating and marriage everything is [shared] fifty-fifty. I was like, “Excuse me?” In post-Soviet countries, it is not fifty-fifty even when women have jobs. Fifty-fifty kind of sounds like we are roommates. I heard about this thing in America...I told him how I was raised, and how my mother was like. She was earning money but asking my stepfather for [paying] the expenses of the house, but not for buying dresses. I told him that man must be the provider. That's not gonna work with me. Maybe he wanted to try to push the idea to see how it is gonna work. Then we moved to an apartment and he was like, “What are you gonna pay?” and I was like, “OK, I am going to pay the bills.” Now I am paying for the utilities and he is paying the rent.

Liza’s marriage did not last long because, although they were in love in the beginning, her husband’s extreme possessiveness and mental problems were overwhelming. Yet, they did not get a divorce, and he agreed to cooperate with her until she received her Green Card.

Alena (Ukrainian, 22) got married to her husband one year after she arrived in the United States. She explained that, although she was too young (20 years old) to be married in the American context, in Ukraine women get married in their early twenties.

Alena's experience with her host parents was not a desirable one; her host father sexually abused her. She met her husband when she was vulnerable and needed love, care and protection. Here he was:

I met Carl at a common friend's house party. In two days he invited me to movies, and we dated again. Then he left half a year for his army duty and went to another state; he is a soldier. We stopped communicating because it was hard. Then he came back. He called me and said, "I am back. Let's get together." I told him, "I am sorry, I got engaged." I got engaged with someone else; it was really fast again. He was surprised, but told him, "Well, you never called me." Then, I got sick and I stayed at a hospital for the first time in my life. That fiancée wasn't visiting me in the hospital because he was busy. "I live in Virginia, it is too far to driver there baby. I will see you when you get better." But, Carl was visiting me, One day he asked, "Alena, I love you. Maybe you would marry me?" I was like, "Maybe." Then in the Halloween, he actually proposed me: "Let's get married in two weeks." I said "Yes," and we got married. It was actually a really fast marriage. I have this person who cares so much about me. I had to stay in the hospital many more times while staying with my host parents, and Carl was always coming to the hospital. Man wants somebody who is healthy and successful. I was very miserable that time, and he was taking care of me so I decided that he was the one.

Since then, Alena has been in a happy marriage, and has started to study for a nursing degree. Two study participants²⁴ got married mainly for acquiring permanent

24 One of the study participants in this group requested me not to mention too much detail about her demographics, which would lead the readers, who included their friends, to identify her easily. Their concern stemmed from the fact that I informed them that I would share my dissertation with the study participants when I completed the project. Thus, she did not want to be identified by her friends, who did not know that she was on a paper marriage. Therefore, I will refer to her as "the first study participant" in this section. For the same reason, although the second participant who was on a paper marriage did not request me to do so, I will refer to her "the second study participant."

residency. The first study participant arrived in the United States without any plans. She had no particular desire to travel to the United States or learn about American culture. She wanted was to distance herself from a traumatic personal experience at home. She did not have many strong ties, besides her close relationship with her mother and sister in Ukraine, because all her friends moved out of the country long ago. She explained that at the end of her second year as an au pair, she decided to stay longer in order to continue her relationship a her new boyfriend, and to maintain friendships she had established here. She married a co-national immigrant as a means of acquiring permanent residency. Her marriage story and long-term settlement plans were as follows:

Can you tell me your marriage story?

So, we just are friend so he is just helping me; we don't have a marriage relationship. He is [an immigrant] from [her country]... I just had one date with him; it was on a Saturday and on Monday we got married. I was joking and telling him, "Find me someone who can help me with papers", and he was like, "I can help you." I said, "Really? OK." "Are you serious?" He said, "Yes I am." I said, "OK." It was like that. I was lucky [knocking the wood]. For the time, I had my student visa already so we got married and I changed papers [visas].

How could you trust him?

I don't know. I just didn't feel like he [could] hurt me. I have pretty good friends here. I knew that if he would do something to me, he would regret it. I said him once, "If you ever do something to me, I will call the police, sorry but I will." He loves me, which is the problem...But we are still together for the last one and a half years. He is still hoping that I will change my mind. No; but I wish I could. He is just not my type. He is a really nice guy. He is really loving, supportive... I am babysitting 3 hours a day to pay for my car, and something else if I need to. I make maybe \$1000 a month. He supports me. He pays some of my bills, and my school. But he is just not the one for me. It is really sad. I wish that I would love him. I know that in this case, I would be the happiest woman in the world, but I just don't.

Can you date other people?

I just broke up with the boyfriend I [have been] with for three years here. But the whole time I was married to him, I was in relationship here.

Why you didn't consider marrying your boyfriend then?

No, I didn't tell him that I needed papers and I wanted to stay here. We were in a relationship, and were like, "Let's go we will decide something later." And he didn't take the step to help me with the papers. He is an American citizen, and he is [originally from her country]. So we had a fight and we didn't see each other for one or two months, and I met my husband, and married him. Then, I called him, "You know what, I got married." One month later, we got together again. I was with my husband and I had a relationship on side. I know it is not right and all these stuff, blah blah blah. I didn't have relationship with my husband, and he knows that I don't love him. I never lied to him. I didn't tell him, "Oh, I love you so much." I told him, "I need papers, if you are going to help me, that's great, if not I will find another way."

Why did you decided to stay in the United States?

I didn't care about it; I don't care about it even now, really. I have a lot of friends, and at that time, I had a pretty good life here, having fun. When you live in a country for two years, it is hard to go back. But [returning home] didn't scare me in a way like, "No way, I will stay here illegal, I will find anyway, but I will stay." The illegal way wasn't an option; in that case I would go home... I am not going to stay here illegally, [referring to the undocumented workers] to work in three jobs all day and then come home and sleep; no. To be honest, I don't understand why people are doing that. Some of the girls, who finished the program and stayed here, they have 3-4 jobs, and working as a babysitter, they can just pay the rent, gas, and food; that's it. No savings. They never want to go back home, why? You have nothing here and you will have papers only through marriage. It is a pretty difficult to find a guy that will love you and help you. I know some couples, they love each other there is always this [suspicion] in the husbands' minds; "Maybe she doesn't like me, she is with me only for papers?"... I am still thinking that if something will not work out, I will leave, not to [her country] but somewhere where my friends live.

Although her marriage arrangement might appear to be convenient, she expressed that it was emotionally challenging being stuck in a tiny apartment with someone who continuously expected that she would love her back some day. At the end of the interview, she mentioned that she was going on a vacation soon, and she was looking forward to it because she would be alone.

The second study participant was married soon after her first date, when she was weeks away from losing her J-1 status. She brought her husband along to our first interview, and let him describe their marriage status:

How did you meet?

[The husband] In [a night club]. I was standing up, smoking a cigarette. She walked down, looked at me, turned around and asked for a cigarette. I had this stupid line, “You have a perfect back for a back tattoo.” She looked at me and said, “What should I get in there; your name?” and then it was over [laughing].

[The second study participant] He kissed me right away.

[The husband] When I met her, I told her even before we kissed, “You know what? We are gonna get married one day. It can be months from now, but it will be one day.” She was a very pretty girl. It was a Thursday, and we went out on Sunday... We got married in a month.

[The second study participant] I still believed that eight months after coming here, I was going back home. People were waiting for me there. [The visa status] was a problem because I quit the program. And I went to California, to Las Vegas, San Francisco, Grand Canyon, and I loved it so much, and I came back, and I was like, I can try, I can go to school here, try to stay here. When he proposed me, I just kissed him...He was hot. I already found a guy to marry me for papers.

How did you decide that you wanted to stay here?

I visited home twice. First time I stayed for two months and I was craving for America already...I just realized that I was excited about living here. I was

getting used to live here: I got used to the great American service, clean streets, nice roads, and everybody is smiling at you. When I got back, I didn't like anything there, even people's attitude.

Months after our interview, the couple invited me to their house party. While we were having a conversation about their marriage, the husband again talked on her behalf, saying: "We are just friends with benefits." For two years, she disappeared and did not attend any social gatherings with her co-nationals. When I finally arranged a follow-up interview with her, she informed me that she broke up with her husband:

You were holding hands with him last time I saw you together. What happened with him?

I should have never come with him to the interview. But I had to because he would not let me go anywhere without him. He was a paranoid. We were really in love in the beginning, and then we had the domestic violence situation. One day we started fighting and I was in the shower, and he beat me, choked me, and threw me down from the stairs. I cleaned the blood on my body and it took me forty minutes to call the police. He is a salesman so he is good at lying. When they arrived, he told them "Listen. She is only with me to get a Green Card. She is a prostitute." The police officer did not believe me and did not arrest him. He is an alcoholic and a really crazy person. Because he was so eloquent and good-looking, people like him. I stayed with my friend that day, and I decided that they that I won't have feelings for him anymore. Only for the Green Card, I need him for my future to get where I want to get, so I had to stay with him. When I met you for the interview, that was after all these happened, and I did not have any feelings for him anymore.

She explained that her husband was in love with him and expected her to love him back. However, she was seeing someone else. In tears, she explained that her husband was jealous and also abused her physically. When she called the police, she could not get help because she was an "alien" with a Russian accent:

I went to the cops when my husband literally burned all my cloths in the backyard, and they said, “We can’t do anything you are legally married. Everything belongs to you belongs to him.” I wasn’t seeking to get him paid for my clothes. I was seeking some kind of protection because he was really angry; he threatened me multiple times and I was seeking a restraining order but I couldn’t get one. When I was sitting outside, an American woman came for the same thing, to file a restraining order for her husband, and they gave it to there. I heard them. I have an alien number, isn’t it so humiliating? A year later, he broke into my house with a weapon.

She explained that she had to let her husband stay with her and sleep on the couch, so as not to risk her Green Card application. But, he became more violent and she eventually left him. She ended her communication with him because she said, “You have no idea how much he ruined my life and how intoxicated he was. I would rather pay lots of money to the lawyers rather than trying to convince him to cooperate with me.” She added that he was threatening to get her deported. She was told by her lawyer that this was not realistic, since their marriage was real in the beginning and she had plenty of supportive evidence. Because she mentioned the cost of lawyer fees, was studying towards a bachelor’s degree in a well-known university and living independently, I asked her how she could afford all these expenses. She explained that her boyfriend, whom she also called her “sugar daddy,” “role-model” and “best friend,” was supporting her financially. She explained that having such an arrangement was a better strategy for making a living and paying for school than working in unsatisfactory workplaces:

I even wrote a paper on sugar daddies for my class, “Is sugar daddy really sweet?” Actually, some girls, like myself, use them as a strategy to get to the places they want to reach. Some other girls use it just as a way of [making a] living which is a problem; that's when a sugar daddy get sour because you constantly depend on him and you are not moving forward in your life. You get 40 years old and you are nothing but a sugar daughter. But some girls use their sexuality and work in

strip clubs to get their PhD. So I evaluated it: I would have to go work in a club like all my friends do, and they make really good money but they don't go to school or do badly in school, and they have a night life style [which] is very detrimental for their health: You are exposed to alcohol all the time and you start drinking and using drugs. This is not the way I want to live. Maybe having a sugar daddy is not that bad. I am living in a really nice apartment, he pays for my school and I really like hanging out with him. He is actually a big role model for me. He is my best friend right now.

As illustrated in the stories of Liza, and the first and second study participants, when au pairs perceived marriages as a better option than depending on host parents, and as a quicker step towards securing their legal status, the marriages frequently resulted in an even more complex dependency relationship. While the first study participant had a good relationship with her second host parents, she prefer not to take the longer and less secure legal steps (student visa->OPT->work visa->Green Card) for obtaining permanent residency. Other study participants who married quickly, on the other hand, had worked under less desirable and even abusive working conditions in their host parents' houses. Thus, fast marriages, when viewed as “a whole package,” were perceived as a better solution for their financial and legal concerns. In the following section, I described how four study participants decided to return home rather than take these steps to extend their stays.

6. 3 Returnees: Reasons for and Life After Returning Home

In the study group, two goal-oriented transmigrants (Jenya and Nina) and two explorer/escapee transmigrants (Julia and Galya) returned home. Jenya and Nina returned after working as au pairs for two years. Julia was persuaded by her friends to stay longer but returned home after completing an associate's degree. Galya returned after working as an au pair for one year.

Nina (Ukrainian, 21) had moved to Germany with her mother when she was 15 years old, because her mother believed that the educational and career opportunities were better in Germany. Nina came to the United States in order to have better English fluency for the private international university to which she was planning to enroll. Although she wished that she could have traveled more, she returned home at the end of her second year, after realizing her primary goals:

I would love to stay longer but not as an au pair. It is a great experience and I am glad that I did it but I don't want to be an au pair anymore. Both of my families have been really nice but it is hard to live with a family that is not your family. Their life styles are different. Everything they want is not what I want. Like, I want to have my own space, my own area, and my rules. So I never thought about extending my visa. And also my mom really missed me. Maybe I will come back later to study here; I don't know. I really like USA. At the beginning, the first I was like, "it is cool to stay here but USA is not my country." Then six months later, I was like "USA is a nice country, I really liked it here but I want to go back to Germany." Now I am like, "I would love to stay here longer because I haven't seen many places I would like to see, so I would like to come back later." I want to go back to Germany and stay there for a full year. One of the universities I will apply has an exchange program with USA; maybe I will pick that one."

As she had planned, Nina enrolled in the international university in Germany. She explained that she missed America and hoped to visit in the future but was happy to be back with her family and friends. She added, "When I am thinking about my life, it has two parts: before [the] USA and after [the] USA. I came back as a new woman. I am very happy to have had this experience."

Like Nina, Jenya (Ukrainian, 24) came to the United States in order to improve her English fluency before beginning a profession as a language specialist. She worked as an au pair for two years. When I met with her towards the end of her second year, she

explained that her parents persuaded her to stay longer and seek jobs in the United States, as the labor markets in Ukraine had not improved since she left. Indeed, she decided that settling in the United States would provide her with better opportunities to practice in her chosen profession:

My parents told me that I should stay one more year, and maybe the economy would get better. It has been two years since I am here, and they are still optimistic and hoping for the best. Me too, I am hoping for the best. My friends are writing me, “Don’t come back!” At this point, my return tickets are already ordered by my agency for the end of August. I don’t have any plans so far. Unfortunately or fortunately, it is not that easy to stay here. I don’t have a lot of options. I asked my current host parent to sponsor me for student visa and they said “No, you are not allowed to work for us when you are on the student visa, it is illegal.” A lot of families would say no, too, because they wouldn’t want to do something illegal...

What are you going to do?

I am still looking for a family, but so far, I found only one [who was willing to sponsor her] but I don’t think that I will go with them. This family seems to be very nice, but I just don’t feel it is the right family, you know? When I was looking for a second year family, I followed my [inner voice] and I am very glad that I did because I had a great experience. I try not to be too superstitious, but I just don’t want to make a mistake by getting any family just to stay here for the sake of staying here. Because this is not my desire, my wish. I would better go home.

What would be an ideal situation for you or your wish?

Getting a Green Card. I would like to work in an interpretation job and study for a Master’s degree. I just wish that nothing [could] limit me. I want to stay here and bring my parents here. Even they [may not] want to live here I just want them to see how life is here. I just want to have the right to do everything and not [being have to] think about what I am not allowed to do; but I don’t have that opportunity. I want to explore because I am sure that I can do a lot. I just need

another country for this. This country [would] give me more options if I [could] stay here legally.

At the end of her second year, Jenya could not find a sponsor with whom she would like to work. She obtained a tourist visa in order to stay an additional six months. During this period, she stayed with her friends, traveled, and then returned home. For her close friends here, who knew that she really wanted to live in the United States, her case was an unfortunate one.

In a follow-up interview one year after she left, she explained that she returned home because, “I was sick and tired of being an au pair. I missed my family, and staying for an unknown number of years without seeing them was not an option for me.” Upon returning, she found a job as an English teacher in a private school. She explained, “I guess my U.S. experience and my accent were the reasons I got the job. I am not saying I am satisfied with my salary, but it's definitely bigger than in a regular school.” Adapting to her home country was not an easy transition after being away for two-and-a-half years. In addition, she could not reconnect with her close friends because of the discrepancies between her and their lives. I asked what her future plans were. She stated that she was unsure because she was still trying to adapt to her new life:

For while, I think I didn't understand that I [was] back. Since I am here, I didn't have time to straight my feelings up. It wasn't an easy transition at all. Everything seemed different. Society and culture in my head was American-oriented; I was expecting people to be nice all the time and say, “Hello, how are you?” I am still considered to be half-lunatic for smiling at strangers [laughing]. I still don't feel like I belong here; I am in between... Well, my friends and I have a gap of 2.5 years between us, we hang out, but I don't think that we are that close anymore. My parents live two hours away from where I live and how often I see them depends on my workload. My life style has changed a lot. I am swamped with work, I don't have time to work out, and this upsets me a lot. Also gym is super

pricey here... Au pairing definitely changed my life in a good direction. I have no regrets and I am thankful for every seconds of it. I miss the people and the country a lot; I miss my friends, my families I stayed with, the variety of food, the opportunities...

What would be an ideal living situation for you? You said a year ago that you ideally want have a job that you can travel around o world.

I am still looking for that job, such as a tour guide. I am looking for the options. I would like to own apartment in a capital city with a job that pays well and allows me to travel the world - sounds very uncertain but that's an image in my head. It can be Ukraine or any other country, but with an opportunity to visit Ukraine and my parents.

Similarly, Julia (Czech, 26) decided to return home because she missed her family and friends, with whom she maintained strong ties while in the United States. In contrast, however, Julia believed that she would have limited options and freedom if she stayed longer and that her opportunities in her home country were comparable. When Julia left home in 2007 for au pair placement in the United States, she did not have structured goals to achieve in the United States, other than traveling and practicing her English. She extended her stay after completing the au pair program because she said that her friend convinced her to study hospitality management. At the end of her fourth year in the United States, she obtained an associate's degree, deciding not to take an OPT permit. Most of her Czech au pair friends had returned home. She believed and observed, through her friends' experiences, that it was pointless to get an OPT permit when there was no guarantee that she could get a better job in the United States than in the Czech Republic. Thus, in 2011, she decided that it was the time to return home:

I can start working legally now [with an OPT permit]. OK, I can get a job as a waiter with this degree, but then what? I am just wasting my time here... Now, I

have this degree now but I am still at the same place where I was four years ago. My friends at home are already moving on with their lives. I will have to babysit if I stay...

What are you planning to do when you return?

My plan is to rest at home for a while. I can definitely count on my mother if I can't find a job immediately. I am planning to travel with my friend [who] has friends in England, and then maybe we go to Australia, or New Zealand and pick apples, who knows. After traveling, I want to find a real job at home.

What are your plans for the next 5 years?

I would like to work in a hotel. It would be cool. I like hospitality and event planning. But I don't know and I don't want to think about it right now.

We had a follow-up interview one and a half years after Julia returned home. As she planned, she went to England. While there, she applied for a flight attendant position with British Airways. However, her unfamiliarity with British, as opposed to American, English, discouraged her from pursuing work in England. Then, she went to an employment office in Prague with her associate's degree diploma. Contrary to the common belief that U.S. educational credentials would increase her employability, she found that, because the American community college she attended was not an accredited university, her degree was not considered viable. She was advised to add her degree to her resume as "training." After six months, she began working as a server in a restaurant in Prague, which was recently selected as the best restaurant in the country. She explained that her associate's degree did not help her get a better position, but that the knowledge she acquired in the United States helped her perform her duties more readily. In addition, her advanced English language skills helped her communicate with English-speaking customers. She was expecting to be promoted within a year, and reported that, if

any better opportunities presented themselves in other European countries, she was willing to consider living elsewhere.

Unlike their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts, two study participants from the Czech Republic were more optimistic about the work opportunities in their home countries. This optimism existed for two key reasons: First, because the Czech Republic became a European Union member in 2004, Czech citizens have the freedom of mobility to travel and work in other European Union member countries. Second, among post-communist countries in the Eastern and Central Europe, the Czech Republic was one of the most developed industrialized countries, with a GDP per capita at purchasing power parity close to 85% of the European Union average. Therefore, the chances of Czech study participants making a living and finding jobs in their home country were higher than that of Ukrainians and Russians, as the economies of these latter countries were less developed and because these countries were not E.U. members. However, Julia stated that as long as she stayed in Prague- the cultural, political and economic center of Central Europe- with her family, not in a small town like her hometown, she would be able to have a good job and quality of life. The other Czech study participant Adela, was living with her family in a small town prior to migration and had recently married her long-term boyfriend, who was also a Czech nonimmigrant, in the United States. The couple was optimistic about the quality of life they could attain if they had to return home. However, because she did not have an established family similar to Julia's in Prague, and had stronger ties in the United States, Adela was more optimistic about staying in the United States. Like the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary became E.U. member states in 2004. However, the study participants from these countries originated from small cities

where the unemployment rates were high. Thus, one Hungarian participant married her boyfriend and settled in the United States, and the other Hungarian study participant and the Polish study participant were seeking long-term settlements in the United States.

The return of Galya (Ukrainian, 23) to Ukraine after her first year in the United States was an extreme case, given those previously mentioned. Galya had graduated with a degree in psychology, and was seeking to practice her profession in Ukraine. However, because the demand for therapists was extremely low in her country, the only job she could find was working as government hotline operator. She decided to become an au pair to travel to the United States and take a break from her “boring” work. Based on other Ukrainians au pairs’ reasons to extend their stay, as an explorer/escapee transmigrants, Galya would, in theory, have been expected to decide upon staying longer in the country, given that she had undesirable working conditions and limited chances for better employment opportunities in Ukraine. However, she never imagined there would be other means to stay longer because she never met an older/former Ukrainian au pair during her stay in the United States. Her host family was living in a suburban area 40 miles from downtown D.C., and she was spending her free time from work with her four au pair friends; two Thai, one French and one Brazilian, who were also in her cohort. Although she liked her host parents and the infant under her care, and had good friends, she was not happy with living in such a calm, slow suburban city after living in Kiev by herself for six years. Yet, she liked the experience of living in the United States in general:

I like it because everything is easier here. Everybody here can have a car; it is not very expensive. In Ukraine, nobody has a car in my age because it is very expensive. We have the same prices but the salary in Ukraine is smaller than [it

is] here. Even some things are cheaper in Ukraine but you always do not have enough money. I don't like that everything is very easy here. In the one side it is good, but on the other side it is so boring. In Ukraine, you have to work hard. But life is more interesting in Ukraine...Everybody is smiling to you [here]. Even the cashier packs your stuff in a bag. This is so unusual for me. In Ukraine, if somebody smiles and say you “Hi” in the street, I would think, [unless] it is a handsome man, that person is crazy.

A couple of months after our first interview, Galya returned home. One and half years later, I arranged a follow-up interview via Skype. I asked her how she felt about being at home, and she explained that she was not at home. Her story, after leaving the country, went as follows:

I regret when I returned home. I had a real cultural shock. Everybody on the street was so rude. I used to see strange people smiling at me all the time. I was smiling to everybody and they were looking at me as if I was crazy or something. A lot of homeless dogs; in the U.S. you never see homeless dogs. When a lot of small things got together, coming home was a serious cultural shock for me. I was really depressed and crying. I tried to figure out how I could go back to America because I didn't want to stay any longer in Ukraine. I just wanted to go back. I went to the au pair agency and they told me that I can go back as an au pair again but I had to wait two years to get a new visa. I also tried to go move to Canada but it was almost impossible. The agency told me that there were couple of countries I could go as an au pair, and I picked Holland.

I asked her, why she did not extend her stay for a second year au pair placement, if she indeed liked the United States so much. She explained that she was in love with the country (she had the chance to see more of it in her last month) but that she did not want to be an au pair anymore. She thought that it would be a waste of time in that she would have to return when her contract was over. However, while searching online for ways to come back to the United States, she learned that Ukrainians could be “more than just au pairs” when they stayed longer.

Galya's return story provides a nuanced explanation for understanding the access to and the extent of social networks, and the roles of these networks in shaping settlement patterns of au pairs in the United States. In accord with my findings in the previous chapter, the access to networks was limited by the geographical location and the mobility of the au pairs. Host families with infants did not have to provide family cars to their au pairs for their personal use. Several other au pairs were living in suburban areas, but had access to a family car to drive to D.C. and participate in ethnic events. Older/former au pairs, who attended these events, were new au pairs' role models and sources of information about the opportunities in the United States and the means to reach these opportunities.

Having no information about how other au pairs extended their stays, Galya said, "When I came back, I already knew that I made a big mistake." She stayed with her friends in Kiev but could not find any jobs in her profession. Thus, she worked in irrelevant positions (salesperson, English teacher, office "manager") to pay for expenses. That was, until she found a host family in the Netherlands. She liked her new life in the Netherlands. She was working 25 hours per week and she could make very close friendships with Ukrainians, Russians, as well as other internationals. She also explained that she liked the straightforwardness and open-mindedness of Europeans more than the "fake-friendly" and conservative Americans. At the end of her third month, she decided that she would rather stay in Europe. Galya's au pair contract was limited to one year. However, she had already begun looking for ways of staying longer. She was planning to pursue a Master's degree. For non-E.U. nationals, the tuition fees for a Master's degree totaled €12,000. Because she was unemployed at home for a while, and her au pair salary

was even less than what she earned as an au pair in the United States, I asked how could afford the tuition. She explained:

I don't know, maybe I will make a fake marriage. It is the easiest way especially for the Eastern European girls. I never thought I could do such a thing but I started to think about it recently. You can actually pay someone to make a fake marriage and it costs around €10,000. I can't pay that money. I found this website when I was searching how Russian girls can marry European men, and there was a link for a dating website²⁵ and I registered. I actually wrote in my profile that I am trying to find a husband because I want to stay in the Netherlands. I didn't say that I am seeking a fake marriage because who knows; maybe I am going to find a guy.

At the end of the interview, Galya added that if she were not be able to extend her stay in the Netherlands, her back up plan was to return to the United States through a new au pair visa when the two-year waiting period for reapplying to the program ends.

6.3 Settling in America: Push and Pull Factors

The interplay of individual and structural level factors determined the settlement decisions of study participants throughout their stays in the United States. At the individual level, type of ties and strength of transnational ties were influential in their decision to stay. At the structural level, access to opportunities for educational study and well-paying jobs, the better quality of life and liberation from social and cultural

25 The dating web site she registered is fdating.com, where people from all around the world and all ages can look for dating and/or marriage partners. Interestingly, in the homepage, there were direct links particularly to see women's profiles from Russia, China, Ukraine and the Philippines whereas for women, the direct links were provided to see the men from Canada and the United States.

pressures in the United States were the pull factors. Lack thereof, in their home countries, were the push factors that shaped their settlement plans in the United States.

6.4.1 Individual-Level Explanations: Social Ties and the Strength and Size of Transnational ties

As illustrated in returnees' stories, if study participants maintained strong ties with their countries, they were more likely to return home. However, the strength of their strong ties was more decisive. The longer the study participants stayed in the United States, the more likely they were to establish strong ties in the host country, and the more likely it was that the number of strong ties at home would decline. Yet, under certain circumstances, such as loss of strong ties and/or establishing stronger ties in the United States, strong ties interacted with the economic climate at home and lead to diverse settlement outcomes. A comparison of two Czech study participants demonstrated this hypothesis. During her first two years, Julia built strong ties with other Czech au pairs in her cohort. One of these ties persuaded her to stay longer in order to continue her studies after the au pair program. However, most of her friends returned after a while. Meanwhile, Julia maintained her strong ties at home with her mother, brother and, most importantly, best friends:

Nobody really needs me here. I will definitely miss my friends that I met here but I really miss the ones at home. No matter how far you are, the real friends always stay. I Skype with them, and I see what they are doing in Facebook; it is not like I am not in their lives anymore...

The other Czech study participant, Adela, on the other hand, started dating a Czech (nonimmigrant) boyfriend she met in the United States. They soon married. As such, she built new strong ties in the country. She was working and studying at the same

time, which made it difficult for her to regularly communicate with her friends at home, even with her friends she met while she was an au pair. She was an unsure/hopeful settler; she knew that she could get a job if she returned home, but decided to stay in the United States longer because her OPT employer sponsored her university expenses and was willing sponsor her for an H-1B visa after graduation. Because she could not afford university tuition when she was in her home country, she accepted this offer.

Study participants' settlement decisions were influenced by the strength of strong ties with the parents in different ways. When the study participants were not close with their parents, lost their parent/s before or after migration, or when their parents imposed a strong parental authority on them and they did not have many strong ties with their friends or relatives at home, they were more likely to extend their stay, and if possible, become permanent settlers. Kristina (Ukrainian, 26), for example, was an explorer/escapee transmigrant. Her parents had strong authority over her life. For example, they decided for her that she should pursue an undergraduate degree in international relations. She neither liked that profession, nor could she find stable employment in that field while in Ukraine. She had been planning to move to another country with her boyfriend, but they broke up towards the end of her second year in the United States. Although she did not have strong ties in the United States, she had no reason to return home, given the lack of strong ties and lack of opportunities for quality employment. Thus, she decided to stay in the United States as long as possible and pursue a new degree. This time, she could decide upon her own major. She also explained that her relationship with her parents was healthier from a distance:

I am not that close with my parents. My mom is not like my girlfriend. My relationship with my parents was OK before I came here, but I felt too much pressure from them. I always wanted to be independent and do what I want to do. I am not a person who likes to go out at night, but being independent is not going out and coming home at three [a.m.] in the morning. It is more about personality. It is so hard when you are living with your parents. You are always in conflict. They are always hearing advice from them, but right now, we just have a wonderful relationship. All my life, it wasn't like this... It was so hard to go back to Ukraine because I feel like, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe." Too much pressure...

What are you planning to do here after the program?

I would like to go to Alaska. Not like a trip. If I can do this, I would like to go as a volunteer to work with animals there. Then, I can find some opportunities there. I haven't decided where I would like to live so [it is in the air]... Now, I am thinking what makes me happy? What should I do in my life? What's my mission? I am good with and I like spending time with children, but I don't want to work with children. I want to work with animals. I would like to do research about animals, like science work.

Parental authority was uncommon in study participants' relationships with their parents because more than half of the study participants were not living with their parents, and the other half had good relationships, at least with their mothers, prior to migration. Those who had been living with their families prior to migration, on the other hand, expressed that they had outgrown their parents, developed new life and personal skills, and felt more like adults through the experiences of au pair employment and bureaucratic paper processes. The au pair program allowed them to learn how to manage people and crises. Indeed, regardless of the quality of their relationships with their host parents, none of the participants regretted participating in the au pair program. Rather, they were glad that they could learn how to survive under personal, economic or social crises.

Study participants were talking with their parents through Skype or international calling cards very regularly. Through these communications, several study participants were persuaded by their parent/s not to return home “yet,” because there had not been a drastic improvement in economy. Nadia, for example, had very strong ties with her parents and three siblings. She was concerned that her parents were getting older, and she would lose her relationship with them when she was in the United States—a common concern among the study participants, which made them hope that they could bring in their parents to the United States once they secured stable incomes. Nadia reserved her return ticket home twice in her last three years; the first time was before her student visa expired, and the second time was before her OPT permit expired. Her parents convinced her to seek employment in the United States, as the labor market in Ukraine was not promising. She canceled her tickets, but recently reserved a third return ticket because she was not sure if she would secure an H-1B visa employment. This time, her mother was supportive because, although Nadia had a good circle of close friends in the United States, she was not happy that in her sixth year she still did not have access to full-time employment. However, she also became accustomed to a better quality of life and was unsure if she could adapt to living without certain amenities when she returned from America. As was the case with Nadia, when the length of the stay grew, study participants developed fears about returning home, mostly because their purchasing power and quality of life would decline at home. In the following subsection, I elaborate on the structural push and pull factors that interacted with individual level factors to shape the settlement plans of the study participants.

6.4.2 Structural-Level Explanations: Economic, Social and Cultural Factors

When asked why they extended their stays in the United States, the most frequent answer given was “I have more opportunities here,” referring to their access to full-time employment that pays well, is stable, and promises promotion in the long-term. All but two study participants, who had working experiences in their countries, either could not find jobs that were relevant to their professions, or did not have job securities, livable wages, and/or opportunities for advancement. In addition, due to high levels of corruption, their access to desirable jobs were extremely limited or blocked. As such, they believed that they had more employment opportunities and had equal access to get jobs. In addition, although their access to their ideal jobs were blocked by legal or financial barriers in the United States, they believed that, once they overcome these limitations, they could reach their goals in the long-term:

I like the opportunities. If you are smart, if you are hardworking, so you will get something. It is not because, “OK, USA is the country of dreams.” You can’t just come here and chill out, and you will get everything you want. (Olga, Ukrainian, 25)

My parents think that communist country is good because everyone had jobs. Right now, they fight for the job. The only thing in Poland we have is the health insurance covered by government. (Irenka, Polish, 31)

I decided to stay here because first of all you have opportunities here no matter who you are, where you came from, your skin color, religions, gender; you can always realize yourself in some ways. As I told you, if you don't have your parents with a lot of money or factories, you will not be able to succeed in Ukraine because everything is corrupted. This country gives you the opportunity to do whatever you want to be. If you want to be a microbiologist, a nurse, or work for government; you can go for it. I like how the country handles it here because our government doesn't care about its people but cars about how to fill their pockets. (Larissa, 25)

Ukraine is a very beautiful country but you can finish an awesome university but you can't find a job there. (Nina, Ukrainian, 21)

The economic situation is still not good [in Ukraine]. We have a different government. We have such a stupid president. The previous one wasn't any better but this one really sucks. Now we are going back to 1990's; people are killing each other and nobody cares. If you won't give money to the right person, you will get nothing. My plans; I have no idea. When I go back, I won't have any problem in finding a job. The problem [is] how much they are going to pay me. I just don't want to work for \$400 or \$500 a month. I have very good skills. I am fluent English and Spanish. I am looking for the opportunity to find a job here. Nobody is hiring you if you don't have a visa but I will keep looking. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

In addition, due to the large gap between the actual cost of living and real incomes, study participants explained that they would not be able to have a good quality of life, even if they could get their dream job, because their wages only provided enough income for basic living expenses, such as rent, food and utilities:

If I [were to] return home, I could get a job but it is hard to get a job. I mean, it is not easy here too, but it is harder over there. Even if you get a job, you can have two bucks, which you would be like, what should I buy? Shoes, food or what? It wouldn't be enough. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

I always dreamed to have my own house with family, husband, children. A house close to the city, two cars and two dogs, a husky and a golden shepherd...Now I am thinking I will do these all here [although] I want to have them in Ukraine it is almost impossible because it is very hard. Here, it is easier here. Because if I could do in Ukraine that would be great, because I like my country. Yeah, but you do not have another choice. Now there is a huge crisis, there is no work, everything is hard, and even [if] you work, you can't buy a car or own an apartment. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

Furthermore, study participants' consumption patterns had changed drastically after they moved to the United States. In the United States, they could travel frequently,

get good customer care service, and afford a wide range of consumption goods, including designer cloths and accessories. They could do so through shopping during sale seasons and in off-price department stores, and by buying online deal coupons. As such, it was not only the limited variety but also the high cost of consumer goods and services in their country that led them settle in the United States:

My dad was like, “Just stay there, there is nothing for you in Russian.” He doesn’t think that life in Russia is as good as here, which I agree. If you are not making good money, you are gonna live from your salary to salary each month. You save two months to get a pair of jeans. First of all it is very expensive there; it is like \$300 for a pair of jeans, just normal jeans, something from Turkey maybe. It is good, but it is still not designer jeans. It is too much, so people cant afford or go out a lot of the time, like we do here, so it is a different level of life. (Sasha, Russian, 28)

If I will have to return home, I will miss three things most: (having) a car, Starbucks and Barnes and Nobles. We don’t have Starbucks it in Ukraine. We have cafes but they all are expensive. It is cheaper here. It is more common for people there. You come with your paper, you take your coffee and you need to sit there. Normal cup, completely different. Here we take and go. I like it, it is also something we don’t have in Ukraine. You can come, look, sitting and reading there, and also they have Starbucks in the bookstores. We only have expensive stores. Also the clothes are much more chepear here, and you can find everything you want. In Ukraine, there is not much variety. You can buy a fashionable cloth here for cheaper.

The economy was refreshing but I could see the situation. There were so many malls, the people don’t have enough money to buy those stuff and the prices for food is really expensive. (Irenka, Polish, 31)

Being able to afford goods and services in the United States also contributed to a sense of upward mobility among the study participants:

In Georgia, you have nothing. They like to buy expensive phones but they don't have money for clothes. I had the same attitude when I was there. I [had] spent my three-month's salary to buy a phone. Now, here, I can buy an iPhone tomorrow if I want. It is different here. People don't show off their clothes of phones. (Arina, 30, Ukrainian/Georgian)

In Ukraine in my age, I would never be able have a job, all these opportunities to study and have a car. It is easier here. If you want to get it in this country, you can get it here. At least you have the opportunity to get it. And people are more equal. In Ukraine, people are either poor or rich; there is no middle class. I like that people are more equal here. I don't feel poor here. I don't look at this rich woman and say, "She can go to the store, but I can't." Everybody can go and do shopping here. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

Among all consumption goods, a car was the most expensive good in their countries. Besides its affordability in the United States, the convenience and the freedom of movement a car provided was a new consumption style that they would not want to be deprived of:

In Poland, I wasn't driving a car and here it is a must. I feel very comfortable and free when I am driving [her host parents'] car. (Irenka, Polish, 31)

In Ukraine, if you can ever afford to buy a car, you don't it to anyone because people would get jealous and you will get evil eyes. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

I was thinking maybe I will come here and make some money, and I can go to Poland and buy car because it very expensive in Ukraine. It is the most expensive thing [in Ukraine]. I try to save, buying some clothes not too many, and spend it for traveling. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

I never drove at home at all. I got my driving license when I was 18 because everybody gets it at that age. I never needed to drive because I was using public transportation. I really didn't need a car. It is a luxury for people at my age to have a car because it is expensive. If you don't get a car through your parents, you can't get one by your part-time job. When I came here, since I wasn't driving, I fell in love with driving. Automatic car is a lot easier to drive than [the cars with] shift

stick. I was very proud of myself when I drove on the highway for the first time. (Julia, Czech, 26)

When you have your own car, you are more independent. You can get a job anywhere and move everywhere. It is easy to buy a car and drive here. That gives you freedom and actually it gives you more mobility than freedom. (Alisa, Russian, 30)

Gendered consumption habits were very prevalent among the study participants. Study participants explained that the number of marriage-eligible men was very low in their countries, which created competition among women who were at marriage age. As such, women felt a constant pressure to look attractive, dress-up and be well-polished in their daily lives, even when walking to the grocery store in their neighborhoods. Indeed, consumption of high quality and “flashy” clothes and shoes were perceived as the signs of women’s social status and class position in the society, which influenced their desirability for marriage, as illustrated in an informal focus conversation with Nadia (Ukrainian, 30) and Maryana (Ukrainian, 28) below:

What is it to be a woman in Ukraine?

Maryana: There are several things different. To be a woman in Ukraine, there are several things. First how you look, second education, third age, experience, and work. One of the probably most important things is where you came from; are you coming from a wealthy or poor family? Fashion is very important for us.

Can you tell me about the importance of fashion?

Nadia: It is about being in a position. In Ukraine, by the non-spoken rules, you have to get married at a certain age. So it is all about competition. By statistics, there are more girls.

Maryana: Usually as far as I remember when I was in school there were more girls than guys. There is definitely competition.

Nadia: It is all about status. If you dress up better than other persons, it might seem like that you have a better job and that your parents are rich. It seems like people respect you more because in Ukraine you judge somebody by the way they dress up. I would say that has been like these for centuries.

Is it the quality or the quantity of dresses that is more important to have?

Nadia: It is the flashiness. The [flashier], the better you are, the faster you get into the cream; to the top. I came from that small village. You try to be one of those people who have better status than you have. There is only one way, the cloths. I will finish school and I will make better money, than I will get what I want. But it is a long way and it is hard to deal with this, the competition. In the college, it is not even about the guys because we didn't have many guys. It is just between us, women, to be better than each other.

Maryana: Flashy doesn't mean wearing short skirts. You have to dress up nice. You go to school, you wear heels.

Nadia: It is more about intelligence; you look more intelligent when you dress nice. You can go to school and dress like a second grade, but they have the sense of fashion. A girl in second or third grade would never pull green shoes and a purple shirt together. We already had a sense of fashion when we were little kids. If I go to school, and if I wear things that do not match, my mom would say, "You know what, that doesn't match your dress, you are not gonna wear this." Your parents want their kids to be better than other kids. They want them to look better. Here, it is completely different because, she is like 6 years old, and she is putting on whatever she wants on and her mom would never say anything it doesn't match. Whatever you like, you put it on, and your parents are fine with that.

Can you tell me how a flashy look would look like?

Nadia: It is like high heels, because it is more noticeable. When I started to work and live on my own, I was different. In working environment, you cannot dress flashy. It is more about being dressed up, so that people will respect you. You put on professional kind of clothes, like a blazers, dresses, but still wear high heels, everywhere, and make up, your hair is done. Depending on how you dress, people respect you differently. Probably when you get older, you gain a sense of dressing up not as just colors and better but it is more about [having a] professional style.

So you want to spend your money on clothes. But when you live on your own, you can't afford much because you have to pay your bills, and then, maybe or maybe not, you buy one item per month. It depends on your salary. I know girls in Ukraine who starve themselves to death because they spend all their money on clothes, to get husbands. But here, it is like putting upside down what I said. It is for me, I came here, and I brought couple of suits, and they are hanging in my closet. I cannot recognize myself sometimes. I wear sweat pants, sneakers, no make up when I am going to school.

Like Maryana and Nadia, Polina believed that their increased ability to afford consumer goods and services in the United States made her feel more confident and equal. At the same time, she believed that people in America, particularly men, would not judge her based on what she consumed:

That's also the good thing about this country; you can buy yourself whatever you want. Even being a waitress, you can afford to buy yourself Gucci shoes and you won't feel yourself worse than anyone else because here from a millionaire to a waitress they can wear the same shades, and drive the same car. You don't say, "Oh, I look so bad and I can't go to this party because I can't buy a new dress to put on." Maybe you won't buy something for \$40,000 but you can afford something nice. Here, you can feel yourself confident enough. Even you don't have a lot of money, you can still buy food to eat, and go to a restaurant if you want to go there without making a huge hole in your bank account and say, "Oh my God, I spent so much money on food." Here in the Unites State you have more chances to meet a man who won't judge for you what you look like.

Finally, study participants expressed that they felt freed from gendered social control that they used to experience in their everyday lives in the home countries. They explained that people in their countries felt the entitlement in intervening each other's businesses and personal lives. For example, Maryana (Ukrainian, 28) explained that since her father passed away, her mother's neighbors were watching who was entering their house, and wondering, when male guests came to their house, if her mother entered a

romantic new relationship. She was really upset that her mourning mother had to deal with these awkward investigations. Similarly, single study participants complained about being questioned by their neighbors and relatives about when they would get married. Indeed, Nadia explained that people's close involvement in each other's private lives stemmed from Soviet-Russian housing structure. During communist era, citizens used to live in communal housing projects—so-called *kommunalka* (КОММУНАЛКА), which posed unique challenges (Boym 1994). Residents in communal apartments used to share responsibilities and rely on each other. However, their private lives were publicized as their living space overlapped with their “neighbor's” in that they were forced to interact with other and were informed about personal lives, relationships, opinions, habits as well as daily work and family routines. Referring to a classical Russian movie depicting the life in these housing projects, Nadia described a scene to explain the lack of privacy in her culture:

There is one phone machine in each floor, and when the phone rings, this old lady picks it up before everyone else and asks, “Who are you? Who are you calling? Why? Are you her boyfriend? What are you going to talk about?” This lady asks everything before she actually calls the person who was called. People still have this habit in questioning you when they run into you, and tell their opinion even you don't ask for it.

As such, study participants explained that they preferred personal distance in their everyday interactions in American society and felt freer of social pressure and control that they used to experience in their home countries.

As illustrated in these cases, living in the United States could release women from the oppressive gendered norms and expectations governing consumption patterns. Yet, study participants continued to perform the expected behaviors when they visited home.

Maryana, for example explained that the day before her flight home, she bought a pair of jeans worth of couple of hundred dollars, which she would usually wait to buy until they were on sale. She also put on flashy, high-heeled shoes in the airplane on her way home. Because, if she was not dressed up when she arrived, people would think she was not doing any better in the United States than at home.

Living in the United States, however, did not release these young women from the gendered cultural expectations about marriage in their home countries. Several single participants, especially those whose length of settlement was more than three years and those in their mid- to late-20s, were discouraged from returning home. All but one study participant expressed a desire to get married, have children and own their home in the near future. For many, women were made to be mothers. However, they believed that their chances of getting married were extremely low if they returned home because marriage-eligible men in their home countries were already “taken” by other women, or because they would be viewed as too old:

A lot of girls want to stay here because it is easy to find boyfriend and a job. Believe me, when you are 26 and single, it is a huge problem because you are old to get married. You are supposed to get married by 20, 21. (Kalyna, Ukrainian, 27)

Here, I feel independent from social expectations about marriage. Because I am 30 and I am still not married. Every time I go back home, people ask me when I am going to get married, and especially older people say, "I feel so sorry for you even though you are so beautiful, you are not married." Even when I was 25, my grandmother were used to “Baby are you that bad that nobody wants you?” You can't even explain them why you are not married. One of my friends went back and told me that her mother drives her crazy. She can't stand it anymore, because of the pressure that she is 25 and not still married. She is highly educated, speaks 4-5 languages, but she just couldn't find the right guy. She doesn't go to dates

because nobody can meet her expectations. And most of the good guys are already married. (Ivanna, Ukrainian, 30)

The pressure to get married was a concern among Ukrainian women because they were relatively older than the study participants from other nationalities. Conversely, older non-Ukrainian did not express much concern over this issue because either they had already got married in the United States or were in serious relationships with boyfriends who they had already introduced to their families and friends at home. As such, by living abroad in a country where the average marriage age for women is higher, the study participants felt liberated from the pressure to get married and also gained more freedom in deciding when and with whom they would get married:

When I went to Europe and then came here, I [felt] like people are more intelligent. They respect your personality. You feel free[r] here than in Ukraine. For example, people would say, "You should marry before 25 or you will be so old to find a husband." It is people thinking this way. It is so hard to explain why. Like my grandmother, she is always like, "You should create your own family. Why you are doing what you are doing?" I tell her that I am happy because right now I need to do this. I can't just get married to anyone because you want me to be married. (Kristina, Ukrainian, 26)

Arina (29) was a Ukrainian study participant who was raised in Georgia. She had stayed only one year in Ukraine during her entire life. She explained that women were not only oppressed from the pressure get married at an early age, but also relieved from the double standard gender roles in the Georgian society:

My dad was very strict, he used to say "You shouldn't work; you should stay at home." Even now, he is saying "Don't you stay at home? Your husband should be taking care of you." In Georgia, men do not have sex with their girlfriend; they go to prostituted. It is OK for a man to cheat, but if a woman cheats, she is a whore. They don't usually have sex before the wedding. People get married at a very

early age in Georgia. I lived in Georgia for 24 years, almost all my life but I never fell for a Georgian.... My decision to stay here happened gradually. I started liking it here slowly. I just didn't like what was around me when I came here. There are more possibilities. I never rode a roller coaster in my life, and it was so much fun when I rode it for the first time here. I never did skiing before, now I am skiing. I am driving. In Georgia maybe 10% of women are driving. Everything is completely different in here.

Another cultural push factor was the difference in people's attitudes in their everyday lives. Study participants explained that, when they visited home, they felt culturally alienated from their own people. They explained that they started to perceive people in their home countries as being rude, jealous, or pessimistic. On the other hand, American people, even the strangers, were always kind and cheery with them. The study participants expressed that, even though Americans would not be sincere in their friendly attitude, they would still prefer to have such positive attitudes in their everyday interactions with people:

I like people in here. Everybody is positive and smiling. Customer service is usually really good. In Ukraine if you go to a simple store and ask, "Can I get this brown box?" and they would tell, "It is not brown, it is green, don't you see?" It is nice in here. You see smiles every day. People are friendly here. Sometimes you don't know if their smile is honest or not, but I think it is even better to get the smile even it is not honest. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

I like people's attitude; they say, "Hi, how are you?" In Poland we don't say that to strangers'. It is just "Hi", and then the conversation is, "How do you feel?", and they would say "I am bad." Here, people say, "I am fine" or "I am great!" which is optimistic... Poles also don't trust each other. I was talking to my mother, and she told me the story of one of her friends who was working as a masseur to a rich family in our town. Her employer asked her if she needs a cleaning lady and she referred her friend. When [the cleaning lady] was leaving, the employer took her purse and flipped it upside down to check if she stole anything. Can you believe this? (Irenka, Polish, 31)

My mentality has changed here. When I talk to people in Ukraine, if you question them, they would scream at you. This negative attitude around; it is so depressing, that it would be hard to live there. Yet, over here, everybody smiles at you but inside they are not that nice, so you don't even know where to be. (Ivanna, Ukrainian, 30)

However, the norm of “distant but friendly” attitude of Americans, as Ivanna mentioned above, could be, in their words, “fake-friendly.” Because they could not read the actual thoughts and feelings of Americans, which I will explain in the following chapter, study participants were less like to actively establish networks with Americans.

6.5 Conclusion

In explaining the types of settlement strategies study participants pursued, I categorized four types of settlers, based on their settlement patterns after completing or leaving the au pair program in the United States: persuaded settlers, unsure/hopeful settlers, permanent settlers, and returnees. I found that goal-oriented transmigrants were more likely to postpone their return to their home countries when their parents, host families, or fellow au pairs convinced them to stay longer. These transmigrants, who proceeded to the persuaded settler stage, gradually set new short-term goals to achieve in the United States, such as investing more in their human capital through obtaining degrees from American colleges and gaining experience through OPT permits. They did so in order to increase their employability in the labor market upon returning home. However, once achieved these goals, they did not return home immediately because they developed new strong ties, a sense of belonging in the United States, and new consumption habits that elevated the quality of their lives. Simultaneously, through their frequent communication with their families and home visits, they felt alienated from their

culture, and developed fears that should they return to their home country, they would encounter a decline in their quality of life, employment scarcity, and scarcity of men eligible for marriage. When the size and strength of their strong ties were higher in their home country and their access to keeping legal nonimmigrant status was limited, they either returned home or became unsure/hopeful settlers.

Explorer/escape transmigrants, on the other hand, showed more readiness to seek permanent residency in the United States. In comparison to goal-oriented transmigrants, they had weaker ties to their home countries and more reason to explore opportunities in the United States. In particular, those au pairs who sought short-term settlement in the United States in order to escape from traumatic personal experiences or undesirable working conditions were more likely to pursue long-term settlement in the country. As such, more than half of these transmigrants were married soon after leaving the au pair programs; some for love, some for securing permanent residency. The rest became unsure/hopeful settlers, persuaded settlers, or returned home.

The ability to move to the proceeding settlement stages and implement settlement strategies was primarily influenced by the immigration law, and study participants' financial resources and social network. First, both transmigrant groups were concerned about the possibility of returning or visiting the United States in the future if they left after the program. Since reentering the country was very difficult, due to strict visa regulations and unaffordability of travel and accommodation, the study participants were determined or convinced to extend their settlement for as long as possible.

Second, access to social networks with the older/former au pairs provided them with instrumental information about the means to extend their stay, and to finance their

education, find employers, and locate accommodations. Thus, lack of access to more experienced settlers negatively influenced their ability to achieve long-term settlement.

Third, the ability of single transmigrants to maintain a legal status was constrained by their limited finances, incompatibility of educational systems between the home countries and the United States, and the U.S. immigration laws, which postponed or blocked their upward mobility in the legal domain. As such, for the sake of preserving their legal status, some participants pursued degrees that were irrelevant to their professions or began working toward associate's degrees, despite the fact that they already held undergraduate or graduate degrees at home. Thus, a majority of OPT interns were blocked from obtaining H-1B work visas.

Finally, in order to preserve their legal statuses, study participants became economically dependent on their host parents, employers, or husbands. This dependency was manifested in varying forms of emotionally or physically abusive, or exploitive, relationships. For example, a paper husband could provide legal and/or financial security, but this relationship could be emotionally or physically damaging for the study participants. In the same way, a host family could provide free accommodations, but also manipulate the mobility and freedom of the study participants and become emotionally abusive. An H-1B sponsor could exploit the labor of the transmigrants, due to their legal dependency, but also enabled them to generate twice the money, in terms of income than that of au pairs/nannies, or ten times more than what they could earn if they returned home.

On the other hand, living in the United States emancipated transmigrant women from oppressive cultural and social expectations in their home countries, increased the

quality of their lives, enabled them pursue higher education, widen their visions of different life styles, develop new personal and practical skills, and meet their future husbands. While they experienced downward mobility in their social status as they worked as nannies and au pairs (which they did not perceive to be real jobs), they experienced an increase in their social status as they could perform gendered consumption patterns in the United States. In conclusion, against all challenges and limitations for upward mobility and long-term settlement, study participants generally believed that, if they worked hard enough, settling in the United States would provide them with more stable, rewarding, and desirable lives in the long-term.

CHAPTER 7

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INCORPORATION PATTERNS

In the previous chapter, I explained the roles of networks in shaping the settlement patterns of the study participants, and demonstrated that while weak ties with older/former au pairs were instrumental in shaping their settlement plans and strategies, strong ties with fellow au pairs and significant others increased the likelihood of their long-term settlement plans.

In this Chapter, I describe the determinants of how study participants form and sustain social and transnational networks in the later stages of their settlement in the United States, and the influence of these networks in their social, cultural, and economic incorporation patterns. As I explained by in Chapter 2, immigration scholars argued that for newcomers, networking with more experienced co-ethnic immigrants in the countries of reception could both manifest positive (e.g., adaptation and incorporation) and negative social capital (e.g., competition, exploitation and social exclusion). Regarding incorporation patterns of transmigrants, transnationalism, scholars argued that continuation of strong ties with families and close friends in their countries of origin were natural and evident among contemporary transmigrants, which was eased by the availability of high-speed communication and more affordable transportation technologies (Basch et al. 1994; Schiller 1999; Guarnizo 1994). They further explained that transnational migrants also “redefine” rather than break their ties to their countries of origin (Levitt 1997; Bash et al. 1004; Landolt, Autler and Baires 1999). However, Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002) argued that emergence of transnational ties and activities can be determined by several factors such as the strength of emotional ties immigrants

have in their countries of origin, immigrants' economic resources, and perception of their experiences (e.g., negative perceptions such as racial discrimination) in the countries of reception. Thus, they claimed that transnational migrants will build strong ties and engage in transnational practices when they have stronger emotional ties at home, high economic resources, and have faced racial discrimination in the countries of reception.

However, I found the networking experiences of the study participants with their co-nationals and people left behind in their countries to be considerably different than these explanations for two major reasons. First of all, study participants' modes of entrance to the United States and their consequent settlement stages led them to have unique networking experiences. Au pairs were not economic migrants; rather, they were "cultural exchange students." As such, unlike economic migrants who connect with older co-ethnics for jobs or accommodations, au pairs automatically found themselves to be economic and legal dependents to their host family sponsors. In addition, they were primarily channeled to network with other co-ethnic au pairs by their au pair agencies. Moreover, because they lived with American families and were motivated for cultural exchange, their interactions with Americans were a part of their daily routines.

Second, au pairs got motivated to become economic immigrants in the later stages of their settlement in the country, as they decided to seek opportunities for employment. However, as explained in Chapter 6, due to limitations posed by the U.S. immigration law, some study participants—the ones without permanent residency rights—were blocked from taking formal employment in the U.S. labor markets. The study participants with OPT permits or work permits, on the other hand, did not necessarily look for co-ethnic employers, given that their primary concern was to find eligible employers in a limited

lime period. A majority of the participants with permanent residency permits were still studying in American colleges or universities and were holding part-time babysitting jobs. Therefore, due to legal framework governing the immigrants' settlement patterns and the nature of au pair placement, study participants did not need to connect with more experienced co-nationals for obtaining accommodation and/or jobs upon arrival to the country.

Last, and most important, in the context of American society and the home countries, study participants' social statuses were redefined in relation to the social statuses of Americans, their co-ethnic migrants, and people left behind, which in return manifested complex and diverse patterns of network formations. In the light of this contextual background, in this chapter I answer three research questions: 1) What type of social networks do transmigrant women participate in, in their daily lives? 2) Why do they build certain types of networks and not others? 3) How do their social networks influence their incorporation to the countries of origin and destination? In the following section, I explain the characteristics of social networks that study participants formed in the United States.

7.1. Formation of Social Networks in the United States

As addressed by Cranford (2005), the Bourdieuan approach to the relationship between social networks and social capital implies that individuals deliberately seek to create social relationships “for the purpose of generating cultural and economic capital.” In order to understand study participants' networking behaviors and the types and sizes of social ties they had built during transmigration, I asked them to identify the people they interacted with on a regular base in their daily lives, the frequency and content of their

interactions (such as the kind of activities they are involved with together), and the meaning of these interactions (the strength of their ties) for them. Their responses indicated that their networking behaviors were generally shaped by the lines of class divisions, gender, age, ethnicity, lifestyles, and occupational differences. At the transnational level, study participants were more likely to maintain their strong ties with their families, primarily with their mothers (if alive, or had good relationships with them prior to migration), siblings, and a few old, close friends, whom were like sisters to them. Their relationships with most of their “good” friends at home tended not to transform into strong transnational ties. I will elaborate on these networks in the following section.

Study participants’ networking patterns in the United States, on the other hand, showed that they were more likely to build strong ties with their female co-nationals, who were former au pairs and thus shared similar material conditions, everyday struggles and lifestyles with them. Study participants avoided forming or were solely forming weak ties with Americans because the study participants were perceived as class inferiors, and experienced discriminatory and exploitative practices in American host parents, employers, or the institutions that created negative perceptions about Americans. They were also discouraged to form strong ties with their non-au pair co-nationals from different genders, immigration, occupational and class backgrounds because their co-nationals perceived them as ethnic inferiors mainly due to their mode of entrance –au pair employment-and immigrant statuses in the United States.

When all these factors considered, based on their networking behaviors performed in the United States, I define the study participants as “discouraged networkers,” whose discouragement for actively building social networks stems from contextual factors that

were experienced by Buss and Steven' (1988) "discouraged workers." In the following section, I first describe the meaning and characteristics of the discouraged worker, and then, describe the discouraged networker phenomenon in my study group.

7.1.1 The "Discouraged Networker Phenomenon"

The term *discouraged worker*, as it is used to refer to a distinct type of unemployed individual, was popularized by Buss and Stevens (1988) during the Reagan Era in order to explain the presence, within the labor force, of individuals who want to work, but are neither working nor actively seeking employment. Buss and Stevens argued that when individuals believe that jobs are available, as evidenced by low unemployment rates, they are more likely to enter the labor force. Conversely, when unemployment is high, individuals— particularly those with limited qualifications—come to believe that jobs are untenable. Thus, these individuals are less likely to actively seek employment. In other words, the discouraged worker, as characterized by Buss and Stevens, is an individual who is interested in working but has simply given up.

In contrast to the conventional view, in which the term discouraged worker has been used to identify unemployed persons with criminal records or insufficient prior work experience, mothers with dependent children, and individuals susceptible to discrimination and homelessness, Buss and Stevens offered a countervailing view. They argued that many discouraged workers are "weakly attached" to the labor force because, when compared to unemployed individuals who are actively seeking jobs, they are less dependent on wages. They (1988:17) also noted that unemployed individuals tend to "weigh their current available income against their expected income in the job market." As such, unemployed individuals with greater access to familial income or public

assistance are considered less likely to pursue employment, particularly if they believe they lack sufficient skills.

In a more recent study, Heslin, Bell and Fletcher (2012) noted that a disproportionate number of discouraged workers are minorities—the members of an identifiable group with limited power who are subject to discrimination, and are aware of belonging to a denigrated group (Dworkin and Dworkin 1999). According to Heslin et al. (2012), minorities experience career frustrations, and consequently withdraw from the labor force, due to discrimination, minority socialization, minority identity, limited self-efficacy, and learned helplessness.

Discrimination refers to “unfair and negative treatment of workers or job applicants based on personal attributes that are irrelevant to job performance” (Chung 2001:34). For example, Heslin et al. (2012) related the high rate of African-American discouraged workers to their frequent experiences of discrimination—directly and vicariously—and their consequent increased vigilance toward and guardedness about potential threat in the environment. This maladaptive response to discrimination fosters minority socialization and minority identity, which in turn adds to difficulties with building and maintaining self-efficacy.

Additionally, minorities are susceptible to *learned helplessness*. According to Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978), one’s level of vulnerability to learned helplessness is based on whether the individual views the adverse event as internal or external, stable or unstable, and global or specific. Their theory implies that learned helplessness is a result of attributing negative experiences to internal, stable, and global forces. In response, they are more likely to give up when confronted with adversity.

Finally, minorities are more vulnerable to becoming discouraged workers due to their limited self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy, or an individual's beliefs in his or her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce desired attainments in a given domain, is determined by the degree of mastery they have previously experienced in that domain and by observing the mastery, or lack thereof, among salient role models in that domain.

In my study group, just as discouraged workers are interested in being employed, au pairs wanted to establish social networks with their co-nationals and Americans, and face a similar predicament. As non-Americans, they view themselves as less skilled in social situations than are other Americans with whom they are competing to establish social networks. They perceive themselves as being handicapped by their immigration status and lack of material resources in their social interactions with Americans and co-nationals who were not au pairs. In addition, like the discouraged workers who were minorities, the au pairs faced discrimination due to stigmatization of Eastern European women and the au pairs in American culture. Meanwhile, the au pair experience allows for access to a satisfactory social network with other au pairs. Like the discouraged worker, it seems likely that au pairs' current social networks, which consist of fellow au pairs, and perceptions that social networks with Americans and non-au pair co-ethnic immigrants would be difficult to establish, inhibit them from expanding their social network to include individuals from whose material conditions and social locations were higher than theirs.

7.1.1.1 Networking with Americans

The first encounters of the study participants with Americans took place when their host parents picked them up from the airport and brought them to their families. When they entered the houses of their so-called class peers, they were expecting to be treated as guests (who had equal status with the family members) and/or older sisters and daughters. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the majority of the study participants, rather, found themselves in superior-subordinate relationships due to the complex intersections of domesticity, gender, class position and ethnicity, and immigration status, which also made them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Their inferior status was also solidified in their interactions with the au pair agency consultants, who generally favored their host family clients over them in accommodating their needs. The double standard of these agencies was reflected viciously in Alena's case (who called her counselor to report that her host father was sexually abusing her, but was told to call them back if it gets worse) and Ivanna's case (whose agency ended her contract after being told that she came home drunk and threatened her host parents). As such, at the expense of realizing their goals for coming to the United States and maintaining their legal status, au pairs developed a sense of learned helplessness and limited self-efficacy as a result of discriminatory, ignorant, and exploitative practices of their host parents and agencies.

In addition, their feeling of helplessness was reinforced through their encounters with institutional power figures and their limited legal rights as immigrants and/or unfamiliarity with the law and regulations in the United States. When the second study participant could not get a restraining order against her alcoholic and abusive husband,

she explained, “Americans don’t really help you when they hear your accent. We are basically a minority here.” Similarly, Ivanna was shocked how her host family could easily get one against her, claiming that Ivanna came home drunk and threatened them. She added: “You have to be very careful here. I learned that as a foreigner you can’t go against an American. It is risky even when I was right, because there is no guarantee that I will be able to prove it, plus, I wouldn’t be able to afford a lawyer.” Alisa also noted that although she had not get into any trouble here, she was very cautious: “I don’t feel more freedom here than in Russia because I can accidentally break some rules here.”

Furthermore, as au pairs spent a majority of their time in the houses of their host families, they explored the quality of relationship among the household family members, the parenting styles of the host parents, and their lifestyles in general. Their intense observations in these families also structured their perceptions of the American way of living, “mentality” and friendship, which differentiated in less desirable and moral ways from their cultural and social values governing family, gender relations, and friendship. As such, their perceptions on the “positive American attitude” that they experienced and valued in their daily interactions did not translate into a valuable and desirable quality to have in their friendships. When these experiences and interactions are considered, regardless of their length of settlement in the country, the study participants were generally discouraged for actively building new social networks and ties with Americans after their au pair placements were officially terminated.

Study participants regularly encountered other Americans in innumerable occasions and contexts they attended—in academic institutions, parties and night life, extracurricular activities and trainings, at the workplace, and so on. In these contexts,

they engaged in new forms of interactions with Americans, which could form different types of relationships than the ones that they had with their host parents. However, study participants reported that their reasons for not actively networking with Americans stemmed from their negative perceptions of “American culture and people,” which they mainly related to their experiences with their American host parents and observations of their lives. For example, Alisa had been living in the United States over six years and had no American friends. All her close friends were former Russian au pairs. When I asked how come she did not even have friends in the college, she explained:

You know what? When you live with an American family, it makes a difference. I worked for over ten different American families. The way their household is and their family relationships are different than the way we have our households and our relationship with our family [members]. The way they raised their kids, for example. Their kids are mostly spoiled. They don't know how to do many things by themselves but they already know their rights. They can tell their parents, “You can't yell at me,” “You don't have any right to do that.” Seriously? I am your parent. Even the way they feed their kid is different. They don't even get together for dinners or lunch. How they talk to each other, how they raise their kids, their culture, mentality; all is so different.

Why do you assume that spoiling their children or the way they feed their children can shape your friendship with other Americans?

I think it is more about prejudice. Because when there is something they do that I don't like, I feel like, I should rather stay away from Americans. It is not that I don't like Americans; I changed my mind. And I actually think that in some cases, they are good. They are nicer and more polite than Russians. They would help you even they don't know you. But basically, because they are so different, you try not to get close with them. People are friendly but it doesn't mean they like you. They would smile at you and say, “Hi, how are you, everything is good?” but they don't feel that way. It is nice to see smiling people around but at least in my country you see what people think in their face. When you ask, “Hi, how are you?”, the person would know that you really mean it, and they would exactly

[describe] you for fifteen minutes how they are doing. That's a cultural difference. That's why we can't sometimes understand them and why they do such things. And they can't understand why we are so crazy about our friends, want to know how they are doing, let them stay in our houses and give them money. You will do everything for your friends; you will find them jobs, you will go to their houses in the middle of the night if they have a problem.

Other study participants who were attending American colleges and universities explained that their American classmates were mostly younger than them. In addition, the feeling that they were behind the Americans in their educational careers created a feeling of inferiority, as exemplified in Yeva's (Russian/Ukraine) narrative:

I am already 26 and I am still in community college. Sometimes I feel that I am not good enough when I want to make friends. I am going to school with people who are 18 years old, and there is nothing common between us.

All study participants agreed on the difficulty of decoding the true feelings and thoughts of Americans, whose ambiguous sincerity stood as a sharp contrast to people's straightforwardness in their cultures. In addition, they found the American style of friendship more casual and distant than the friendship styles in their cultures:

In the U.S., everybody is asking "Hi, How are you, it is very good to see you, let me give you a hug." But they don't really mean it. They are not really happy to see you. They are distanced. In Ukraine the people are not that open, but when they want to give you a hug, they mean it. (Nina, Ukrainian, 21)

I don't have close American friends; you know how it is here. They keep you away. They meet you sometimes for a party or for a drink, but they don't get close friends. That's their culture. They are not cold. They just don't know that there are other ways of being friends or friendships exist. (Arina, Ukrainian/Georgia, 24)

Indeed, Julia (Czech, 26) and Yeva (Russian/ Ukraine, 27) made a distinction between White Americans and immigrants living in the United States, where the latter is perceived to be more amiable than the former:

Do you have any American friends?

It depends. If it is a real American, I don't trust them. Because of my host parents, I know that Americans are pretending, and all their life is about money and work, work, work and nothing else. (Julia)

I can't relate to White Americans at all. One of my really good friends is, he is Vietnamese, whose mother first-generation immigrant Americans, completely White. People who are completely White, [whose] parents are Americans and grandparents are Americans as well, and because of the kind of money they had; I can't really get them and they can't get me. They are too narrow-minded for me. I am way too crazy and open-minded to them. (Yeva)

In addition, study participants from Ukraine and Russia expressed that the stereotypes about Eastern Europeans created social distance between them and Americans. No matter how advanced their English skills were, their Russian accents and names immediately signified their nationality in the social encounters and gathering, which "otherized" them as economically and culturally inferiors. General stereotypes about the Eastern Europeans went as follows:

It is the [differences in] culture and lifestyle, because they don't get how we live. If you say somebody we have chickens, they are like, "Are you kidding me? Where do you live, where do you have the chickens?" We have it in the backyard, we have a pool in the backyard and we have chickens in the backyard. It is like a different world for them, seriously. We sound like aliens, really poor stupid people, which we are not. It is the country that doesn't really give us possibilities. Immigrants in this country either go to school, or they already [had] finished schools and accomplished a lot, and they can have way better jobs than some Americans, and they would still think that because you came from the Eastern

Europe, [which] is not a rich company, they think that we don't have schools or if you go to school; your diploma is bullsh*t. (Hanna, 28)

My name, the way it is spelled is so different than American names. They kind of stigmatize you; because your name tells that you are Eastern European. You will always have people here, who will treat you as a second class because you have an accent. It is racism and comes from lack of education. The more narrow-minded and ignorant they are the more racist they are. If you speak proper English, and have a proper accent, [then] people actually think that you are smarter because you are a foreigner. (Yeva Russian/ Ukraine, 27)

Furthermore, the intersection of nationality and gender created more distinct stereotypes about Eastern European women, who were popularized and represented as “mail-order brides” in the media. Additionally, the study participants expressed that Americans did not see Eastern European au pairs as “cultural exchange students,” but rather as “easy women who were looking for fun” in the United States. When study participants concealed that they came as au pairs to the United States, then, their “flashy” outfits or facial features signified their nationalities:

People always ask first if I am Russian, and I am like, “Why are you asking that?” I know that they ask because I look different. I am proud of being different; I wouldn't like to look like somebody else...There is a stereotype that Eastern European women come here to find husbands and a lot of it is true; I don't want to say we are not like this. I know that a lot of Russian girls or women would support this stereotype. Also the stereotype that Eastern European women are “easy to get [physically] close”, and a lot of girls would be that type. I think is really offensive, because I don't like people judging me without knowing me. I understand that it happens, but it can happen to a person of any nationality. You cannot generalize and say, “You are like this, because all Eastern European girls are easier to get, and I can see it everywhere.” I am not judging those girls; it is a way of life, but you don't judge me, [either]. (Jenya, Ukrainian, 24)

I am not really keeping it [being a former au pair] as a secret, but lately, I am not like that anymore, and it is not something that I want to scream about, “Hey, I was

an au pair, yay, I just did this.” If I have conversation with somebody, I would say it but if I see somebody once, and I am more than 100% sure that I won’t see them again, why would I even mention? It is a stereotype in a stereotype. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

When they hear that I am Russian, I think that American guys think that I am easy that I came here to get married. They think that Russian girls always wear short skirts, no bras. They have this idea from Russian women who come here for a couple of months for vacation and they don’t care what people think, so they can easily have sex. Then guys here expect you to act the same way. I don’t believe that we are easy. (Yeva, Ukrainian/Russian, 27)

Ukrainian and Russian study participants, in return, had criticized American women for their lack of sense of fashion and casual dressing style. Some believed that American women, who were their age-peers, did not like them because of their more feminine, “flashier” look. Conversely, a feeling of superiority over American women stemming from Eastern European women’s more sophisticated sense of fashion was very common:

They do not try to look very good. Our women go out, they put make up, heels, and skirts. Here they walk in sneakers, in Ukraine women always wear high heel shoes. I like heels and skirts. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

I know many American people, but I don't make friendships with them. Those American girls, they don't like us much. They don't like that we are looking good all the time. They are like, “Oh, look at her. She is all dressed up.” When Larissa and I go out, and if we tell someone that we are babysitting, they would look at us and say, “Girl, you are wearing all these stuff?” We say, “We are always finding good stuff on great deals.” I bought something for \$30, which was \$600 before the sales. Of course I would never tell them how much I actually spent on it. (Polina, Ukrainian, 25)

I don't care what people say or think about me. It is just their opinion; if they choose to think this way, OK. You know a lot of people are like, “Oh I have an accent so I shouldn't be speaking” or “I don't want to wear this skirt because it is

gonna tell everyone that I am Russian.” I don't care. Of course people know that you are not from here even before you open your mouth, “OK, Eastern European, German, Poland,” or whatever. When I came here, first, everybody seemed to be American. Spending time here, you start recognizing the differences in facial features and dressing styles. I don't want to be mean or sound weird but I can't stand seeing a pretty American girl; she has a nice skirt, hair is done, nails are done, and she has these ugly plastic shoes, and they look ugly. OK, you got tired sitting at the office chair but get flip-flops or something. (Larissa, Ukrainian, 25)

Finally, two study participants reported that their capacity as students or coworkers was underestimated due to their nationalities. Nadia (Ukrainian, 30), for example, had a bachelor's degree in English, passed TOEFL (a test measures test-takers' ability to use and understand English at the university level), graduated from an American college, and was recently studying for an MBA degree. She explained that her first paper was graded with a D, and her professor explained her, “You can be an international student but you must learn how to write papers in English because you are in an American university.” After Nadia explained her educational background to her professor, then, her professor started to call her out in the middle of her classmates, and expressed how surprised she was with Nadia's command of English, which Nadia found very embarrassing. Similarly, Maryana (Ukrainian, 28) told that once Americans learned about her country of origination, they did not believe that she could succeed to be an accountant. In addition, she commonly hears overgeneralizations about Ukrainians at work as well as in her daily life:

When I tell Americans that I am working in a company as an accountant, they don't believe me. They say [cynically], “Yeah? You are working in a company?” in a way that they don't believe I am telling the truth. Even my coworker is telling me, “Oh I have seen one of you guys yesterday; Natasha or Olya, she was our waiter in the restaurant.” Or people say “Ukrainian girls like Black men.” I don't

like that girls don't try harder to stand on their own feet but [rather]] get married to Black guys for papers, because they promote this bad reputation about Ukrainian women.

Nonetheless, there were two exceptional cases where the study participants had positive perceptions about American people. This difference stemmed from, in Irenka's case, having an American boyfriend, and in Dora's case, having a good relationship with her host parents. Dora, as explained earlier, was among the only three study participants that had "a family-like" relationship with her host parents, who were age-peers with her. She spent her entire time with her host parents. Indeed, her intense interaction with the host parents advanced her fluent English to a degree that, if not for distinct facial features, nobody could tell she was a foreigner:

People ask me where I am from, but I think I am lucky because I do have an accent but it is not always strong. They actually think that I was born here, so they are surprised when they hear I wasn't. So it takes a while for them to believe me. They asked my step-mom, and when said I was Hungarian, they were "Wow!" Some people don't even know where Hungary is. They don't even understand and ask, "Are you hungry?" and I say, "Not hungry, Hun-ga-ry!" I never felt discriminated or something. People usually tell me, "You look like an American, you act like an American" in school. I think most people are friendly. What I noticed though, because my husband is from Bolivia, he faces a lot of discrimination. Actually, he doesn't even have a dark skin. When he went to the parking garage, a lady came and asked, "Can you get my car, please?" She she was so embarrassed when he said he could not...I see people saying where they are from very silently [as if] they are embarrassed of their nationality. That's one thing I don't like about this country. Except Native Americans, everybody is an immigrant here. Americans say, "They come here and take our jobs!" They take the jobs you wouldn't care to do.

Irenka met her American boyfriend, who had Irish and German descendants, when she was touring D.C. They have been together over two years. Irenka also had a

good relationship with her second host parents, whom have been very supportive to her during the last four years she lived with them. Through her host parents and boyfriend, she developed weak ties with many Americans, whom she thought to be “so amazing.” She also explained that her boyfriend was helping her understand the American culture, and giving her advice about what was acceptable or not in her relationships with the coworkers at her OPT workplace:

I hear stories that American people are thinking too much about themselves and they are snob[s]. I [have] met so many Americas who are really nice and try to understand your culture.... I always ask [her boyfriend] what I should do at work, how I should behave; such as, “Do you think that if I do this, they would be offended?” and things like that. For example, I wanted to bring something Polish to my workplace, and I was first [hesitant], but he said that it should be OK. I brought some Polish chocolate, and they liked it. Then, I brought Polish tea, and every time I see someone in the office drinking that tea, I fell happy, “Oh, they like it.” I don't want to offend anyone. To my boyfriend, for example, I always say, “You are mean,” but he knows that I don't mean it in an American way. It would be translated as, “You are not nice.”

Indeed, Irenka expressed that her American employer and coworkers were treating her as if she were “equals” with them. Although she had not had work experience with Polish people in the United States, she explained that she felt more “warmth and support” in her relationship with Americans. The social distance au pairs experienced within the same ethnic group was as prevalent as their interactions with Americans, which I explain in the following section.

7.1.1.2 Networking with “Other” Co-nationals

In comparison to Russian and Ukrainian migrant groups, Georgian, Polish, Hungarian and Czech immigrant communities in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan

area were smaller in size and/or less frequently organized ethnic events. Two Hungarian study participants, as explained before, only knew each other and had not heard of any Hungarian institutions (e.g., churches, ethnic organizations, or social events) or restaurants in the area. Two Czech study participants reported the only Czech people they had met, other than the fellow au pairs that returned home, were former au pairs who had been living in the country for long, and had different lifestyles because they were already married, had children and were living in the suburban areas. Similarly, the Polish study participant reported that she had not encountered many Polish immigrants other than a few Polish au pairs in her cohort.

The Russian and Ukrainian migrant communities, on the other hand, were large and organized ethnic social events frequently. However, the social interactions between former/current au pairs with their co-nationals (except three participants whom married Russian immigrants), who had not entered the country through au pair programs, were almost non-existent. Indeed, after they arrived, study participants sought to involve in their ethnic communities and organizations. However, due to initial negative interactions they had and other reasons I explain below, they were discouraged to further network with “their people.”

First of all, the study participants started the race behind these individuals, who were economically and socially in more powerful and advantaged positions in the United States. In addition, as Irenka explained below, immigrants from their countries of origin carried the characteristics of the conflict and competition between social classes and “negative attitudes” with them to the United States:

I am kind of scared of being friends with Polish because I [have] heard many bad stories about Polish people, who have good positions here and still have the negative characteristics of Poles; that they are jealous, and they don't want to help you. I met a few who are really nice but I feel more helped and warmth from Americans. I think it is the cultural differences. But you can't be different. You have to melt in to the society because if you are different, you will get depressed. Here you see the new perspectives; that you need to have each other because you help each other. You help them, and when you need help, they will help back, and you grow something bigger. In Poland, you are afraid that you would miss your job, and people are not nice to each other.

When I asked what they thought about their non-au pair co-nationals in country, the Ukrainian and Russian study participants also referred to them as “jealous,” “snobby” people, who thought they were better than them. Similar to Americans, their co-nationals greatly disesteem them because they were au pairs:

In my first year, I kind of moved towards Ukrainian community. Because one of my friends works for the Ukrainian Embassy, and I used to go to all these Ukrainian festivals just to meet people there. But those Ukrainians, who came here with Green Cards or marriage, they don't really understand what you go through. For them, you are just some kind of different sight. I used to go to the Ukrainian meetings, but I didn't get much of support from them. So, I have my kind of close circle, really dearest friends, and that's whom I hang out with. Basically, those people encourage me to move forward, like they say, “Don't just get stuck with this idea that you do babysitting job, just look forward, there's going to be new stuff forward, and it's gonna be better.” My friends are kind of example for me. That girl [was] doing babysitting job for years, and now she is working in the office. If she could make it, I can make it too, right? So, when I talk to other Ukrainians, I just tell them that I came here to study. Because being an au pair embarrasses me. I am 27 years old, I have masters' degree, and I am babysitting [she was not in au pair program by that time anymore]. That's crazy. I have to just suck it up, and find blessings in my life, and just don't concentrate on my trouble. [Nadia was in her 4th year with her host family during this conversation].

Similarly, a Russian study participant, Alisa (30) explained that in her first years here, when she heard someone speaking in Russian around her, she would go and talk to them. Like Nadia, she had several strong ties with former au pairs from her country that she knew for long. Because she learned by experience that “other Russians” would disrespect her, she was not actively seeking to network with them:

I didn't get to meet many Russians who are not au pairs, because honestly, I don't know too many Russians in the area. I don't go to Russian festivals or events. But, I [had] met many. Like Russian guys, who came here at a young ages, finished high schools and went to universities, and got good jobs; they might have lots of American friends. They look at you, especially the guys, and say, “Au pairs, hah, do not even have papers!” They don't see you as equals; they are snobby. I met a couple of Russian guys. They showed me what they think about me or my other au pair friends. It is not that bad to be an au pair [she was not anymore]. Most of my au pair friends have office jobs now. They were au pairs. Some got married, some became kindergarten teachers, and got their papers, and a couple works in dental offices. Why look at us as if we are nothing? I would look at those people and say they have everything because they came here earlier, just a couple of years ago, and how much he achieved? Even those guys who came here and work in McDonalds feel like, “Oh, I am so cool I live in America and have a real job.”

How about Russian women who are not au pairs?

I know a few Russian girls who came here through marriage and have kids now. They are really nice. Russian mothers have their own groups. Most of them are stay-at-home mothers because they did not have education here and can't get jobs. Some of them work in the restaurants in the weekends. I actually met a Russian girl who came here. We [hung] out together couple of times. I didn't really like her because she was snobby. She was looking at us and like, “Oh, au pair girls, you are just babysitters.” She was an architect and came here from Moscow on an internship because she has a friend here, who knew the boss of her company, and got her here. She is like, “Um, I don't make much because I am on an internship. I make only \$28 per hour.” She was going on vacations, and she didn't want to hang out with us because for her, who are we? Why she [had] to be so snobby? Is that because she is from Moscow or she came here through her friend who knows

the boss of her company, and [thus] she has a good job? I just met her couple of times for that reason.

As illustrated in Alisa's narrative, variances in marital status created differentiated interactions between the study participants and their co-nationals. As she explained, Russian "mail-order-brides" were more approachable, due to the same legal barriers faced by the study participants. However, married women's lifestyles were different, and therefore, study participants formed weak ties with them.

Two Ukrainian study participants, Larissa (25) and Arina (30), were married to Eastern Europeans-to a Ukrainian Green Card winner and a Russian American; respectively- had more frequent contacts with non-au pair co-nationals through their husbands. Yet, they were economically dependent on their husbands, attending universities, and were working as part-time babysitting jobs on the side. As a result of their lower occupational status, they formed weak ties with other co-nationals, and sustained their strong ties with their female co-nationals, who were former au pairs as them.

As illustrated in these examples, intersection of gender, immigration status, marital status, "perceived" social class status, and occupational statuses created social hierarchies within the same ethnic groups. Although the study participants held high academic degrees at home and were highly skilled transmigrants, they could not utilize their education and skills for employment due to their immigration status. Therefore, they were ranked lower in the social hierarchy than their co-nationals, who held full-time official employment or Green Cards. As a result of double-discrimination they faced from Americans and "other" co-nationals, study participants were discouraged networkers in the social encounters and gathering when they met "other" co-nationals

and/or Americans, and thus, tend to sustain their strong ties with the fellow former au pairs, as I explain in the following section.

7.1.2 Networking with Fellow Co-nationals

Study participants, particularly the discouraged networkers, maintained their social ties with their fellow co-nationals, who can relate to their life experiences and daily struggles. As I explained in Chapter 5, Russian, Czech, Ukrainian and Georgian au pairs were more likely to form social networks with au pairs who were their co-nationals in the initial stages of their settlement in the United States. Differently, two Hungarian and one Polish study participants formed more ethnically diverse networks with other—mostly Eastern-Europeans because the number of au pairs from their countries was relatively small.

The sustenance of au pairs' initial networks depended on several factors. First of all, the mobility of their fellow co-nationals was critically influenced their long-term interconnectedness. Not all au pairs were determined to extend their stays when their au pair program contracts were terminated. Two Czech participants reported that fellow co-nationals in their cohorts returned home after the program. One of these au pairs, Julia, also returned home in her fourth year, while the second Czech participant, Adela, married her Czech boyfriend and extended her stay. The Georgian study participant, Lamara (29), on the other hand, reported that all her Georgian friends moved to New York City, and she followed them after graduating from the college. She expressed that her friends were like her family members and had been very supportive:

When I moved here [NYC], I didn't have a job and I was short with money. I had to pay rent. My Georgian [former au pair] friends helped me. I can't say that they are just friends; they are like my family. I am really blessed that they are in my

life here. I also have couple of Georgian friends in Connecticut, and one in New Jersey. I have ten Georgian people that I am really close with. Whenever I need something, I can always rely on them. I found this family through my friend; she works for this family. The host mom is Ukrainian and the host dad is Moldavian. They have three houses; [one] in Miami, [one] here and [one] in London. They are not always here so they need somebody to take care of their house when they are away. Now they are in London. I live here and I take care of their house. They are paying me as much as the au pair salary.

As such, Lamara 's relatively less strong ties in the D.C. with non-Georgian au pairs transformed into weak ties–based on communication through Facebook–after she moved out.

Second, demanding work and school schedules of the study participants, especially of the married ones with children responsibilities, negatively influenced the sustenance of strong their ties with their fellow co-nationals. As such, these strong ties transformed into weak ties–staying in contact through being Facebook friends and irregular instant messaging–due to scarcity of leisure time. Adela, for example, explained that she did not have time from her school and part-time job to maintain her ties with former au pairs, and she could even hardly see her husband.

Third, the changes in the life styles and marital status negatively influenced the maintenance of previously built strong ties. Singles tend to group with other single fellow co-nationals while married study participants grouped with married fellow co-nationals, or the ones with boyfriends. In the study group, only three participants had children–three Ukrainian women had one child each–and they were spending their leisure times with each other and their children. They were still connected to the larger Ukrainian former au pair community and were celebrating the birthdays and holidays together, yet, they were

not, for example, going out to clubs at night on Fridays or in the weekends with their single friends—which was a major group activity among single study participants.

Finally, the sustenance of previously formed strong ties with the fellow co-national was susceptible to dissolution due to personality \ and demographic differences between the study participants. As I explained in Chapter 5, friendships of au pairs were more characterized as “companionship,” which were founded on their shared experiences of being au pairs and oppression, rather than the compatibility of their personalities, tastes, or demographic backgrounds. As such, at the later stages of their settlement in the country, the disparities between their individual backgrounds, material conditions, and social locations could lead to conflicts, and even in some cases, to competition, which could end their relationships or create vast social distances. During my research, I witnessed termination of five close friendships between the study participants either due to competition originated from the betterment of one party’s legal status (through obtaining an H-1B) or higher performance of one study participant in school than that of her fellow conational classmate, and conflict arose from personality differences.

One particular issue regarding the characteristics and dynamics of the social ties between co-nationals was the difficulty of defining the strength of strong ties. During the course of my three-year research, for the same friends, a study participant would first state, “I have really good friends here and they make me wanting to stay here,” and after a while, she would say, “it doesn’t mean that we are best friends because we are hanging out all the time,” and then, at the times of indecisiveness about returning home—due to legal barriers to maintain a legal status—the same participant would refer to the same friends and state, “there is no one here that bounds me here, they are not my real friends.”

According to Grattnover (1973; 1983) the strength of interpersonal ties was determined based on a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services. As such, immediate circle of family members and close friends represents strong ties. These characteristics were evident in the friendships of the study participants with their fellow co-nationals: they were emotionally and financially supporting each other, they were taking care of each other when got sick, spending most of their leisure time together, and were in daily conversation with each other. Yet, they measured the intensity and realness of their friendships in relation to the ones they use to hold in their home countries. In addition, they were doubtful about whether their friendships with their fellow co-nationals were born out of mutual dependency versus reciprocal love and care. Moreover, the insecurity and unpredictability of maintaining a legal status in the long-term created frustration among the study participants without permanent residency rights in that they could not foresee their mobility and the mobility of their friends in the long-term—either or both parties might unexpectedly decide to or force to leave the city or the country. Resultantly, because they were unsure about the durability of their friendships, they were reluctant to get closer with their friends, or call them as their best friends. These anxieties were unquestionably the manifestations of practicing transnationally mobile lifestyles, since the meaning and strength of friendships were conventionally framed by the durability of the relationships. These anxieties were also manifested in the dynamics of their ties with their friends left at home.

7.1.2 Transnational Networks and Practices

The strength and the dynamics of transnational networks of the study participants showed diverse patterns. Yet, unlike proposed by Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002), the

social discrimination they faced did not lead them to engage in transnational networks and practices intensively. The majority of the participants reported that their strong ties, excluding their family ties, were either lost or transformed into weak ties steadily for several reasons. First of all, most of their friends left behind got married, and thus, for the single transmigrants, everyday concerns and lifestyles of their friends were incompatible with theirs. Second, the study participants, who worked long hours during the weekdays, due to time differences and scarcity of leisure time, could only have time on weekends for international communication. Similarly, married study participants reported that they did not have time from work and family responsibilities to have regular communication with their friends at home. As such, they were occasionally updated about the lives of their friends through online social networking platforms such as Facebook, and its Russian versions; *odnoklassniki*.

Conversely, communication through Skype and/or phone calls with their family members was frequent, and was more occasional with a couple of very old friends or close relatives. For migrants, Skype was a vital socio-technical revolution (González, Castro and Rodríguez, (2009) in facilitating interconnectedness between home and host countries and maintaining long-term relationships. Through Skype video calls, the study participants felt less homesick because they could have emotionally more expressive and intense communications with their family members, given they could get each other. The frequency of the Skype conversations depended on the study participants' work and/or school schedules. If they had smart phones, they had set up the Skype application in their phones. Thus, they could have more flexible communication and daily interconnectedness:

I get homesick but I talk to my parents twice a week through Skype or phone calls. I do miss them but I am OK. Skype helps. (Sasha, Russian, 28)

First I haven't seen my mom for a while. We just talk over the phone. Because my sister set up Skype I do see all of them now and keep in touch with my family and cousins. It helps a lot. (Lamara, Georgian, 29)

My mother didn't have Skype before; and I didn't even know what it was. My host parents showed it in my first day. I have Skype so most often I communicate with my mom. She is sitting in front of computer all-night and waiting for my call and sometimes I Skype with other relatives. I am very happy that I can see and talk with my mom. I can be really myself with only with my mother: I can trust her 100% and I always tell her everything; not I spent time in the clubs, of course [laughing] not, but more about my life here. She always cries. When we say good bye, she is in tears. (Yaryna, Ukraine, 25)

When I talk to my parents, they make conference call with my grandparents. (Kristina, Ukraine, 26)

I Skype with my family every day. I have its application in my phone. So when I feel like talking to them I just call them; because it is hard to be in two places all the time. So they are asking, "What happened to the neighbor?" [Laughing].

At the same time, parents would get less concerned about the wellbeing of their distant daughters when they had virtual communication. For the same reasons, study participants preferred to call their parents over the phone when they were sick (because they did not want their parents to see them and get concerned for their health), and were upset or homesick (because seeing their parents would make them get too emotional and cry, which would also upset their parents).

Since Skype offered more involved forms of conversations, study participants preferred to talk only with their best friends on a less regular basis on Skype, and stay in touch with their other friends through online internet social networking platforms. When I asked them why they had lost contact with their friends, they explained that their lives

were vastly different than their friends' lives back home, who could not understand the everyday struggles and/or new lifestyles of the study participants in the United States:

I have one best friend in Hungary, and she has two sisters that I love. We don't Skype but we send messages to each other. I have another Hungarian friend working in Netherlands. I have some friends in my hometown. They are very busy with their work so we sometimes email each other. They have boyfriends, jobs. When I was in Hungary, I used to work a lot. I had two jobs and I worked 6-7 days a week. I am little bit sad that we don't talk but I know if I visit home, they will call me. They like me, but I live here and I have new friends here. (Ema, 27)

I talk mostly with my family. I just called my grandmother on Sunday and we talked for two hours. My communication with my friends vanished away. Because I am living my life here, and it is kind of different from the lives in Ukraine; it depressing. (Larissa, Ukrainian, 25)

I still talk with my friends in Ukraine but because of the time difference it is hard. Also, everyone has their own lives. Sometimes when I Skype with friends, they asks more about my life here; they don't care how I do. Are they really my friends? I don't talk to my best friend Tanya on Skype but if I go back to Ukraine with no money right now, she would be the person who suggests me a place, money, everything. She doesn't text me much but that doesn't mean anything about friendship. Going out every day for drinks doesn't mean [that] you are friends with these persons. (Polina, Ukrainian, 25)

I lost contact with the ones that I was friends with before I came here. I made new and more friends here from there. You don't have so much in common after living away for so many years. I try to contact them, sometimes sent them emails, but then our lives [went] into different directions and there was not much to talk about. (Yeva, Russian/Ukraine, 27)

I don't really use [the] Internet much. I have social network accounts but I don't even check them. I don't really care what other people are doing and what's going on with them. If I do, I [rather] call them. I open my Skype every Saturday. From 8 [a.m.] till 12 [p.m.], and that's it. I talk to my sister, and if some friends are online, I talk with them. I don't really have time for that. I have a baby now, and after work I go to school. I come home and sleep. (Karina, Ukrainian, 27)

Two study participants, Lamara (Georgian, 29) and Arina (Ukrainian/Georgia, 30) had never visited Georgia, and thus, lost contacts with most of their friends. Arina moved with her parents to Ukraine, and stayed there for one year before coming year. As such, she preferred to use her vacations for visiting more interesting countries and occasionally communicate with her friends through online social networking platforms. On the other hand, Lamara (Georgian, 29) could never leave the United States due to the difficulty of renewing her student visa in Georgia. She explained that she did not want to risk her chance to re-enter the United States, and thus, could not visit home in the last five years at all. As such, it was not possible to maintain ties with her friends at home:

I don't t really talk to anyone. I have one really close friends that I still keep in touch, but other ones, I hear about them from my sister from time to time. That's why this is I guess hard for me. I have friends here, but my family is there, and I don't have any friends there anymore. It is tough. My friends here are from my country and one day they will go away, too, probably back. So, it is tough. I mean, after 5 years, you really get used to be here. The hospitality industry has been developing in Georgia and I can find a job at home, I guess. But, there is the possibility that things may not work as I planned if I return home. It is kind of hard for me. At the same time, I am trying very hard not to lose my legal status in the U.S. I don't want to make this mistake. If I go back and I don't want to live there anymore, I can come back for another opportunity. So I don't want to mess with my visa by visiting home now. (Lamara)

My mother lives in Ukraine. I haven't visited home at all. It has been 4 years. I lived in Ukraine for one year only before coming to [the] U.S. and I don't have many relatives in Ukraine so I would visit Georgia if I would visit...It is not fun. I would see my friends, and that's it. I have them on my Facebook and *odnoklassniki*. I see all their pictures. In the beginning when I posted my pictures, they were like "Oh, you look so good. You have been to amazing places." Now they don't say such things because they got used to it. All my classmates are married back there, and raising their children. They don't have any jobs or careers in Georgia. They live for their kids. I feel sorry for my friends in Georgia. It was

difficult to get here from Georgia. It was a long journey; going through terrible families, and then to be married happily ever after. We rather go to cruises, to some fun places when we want to go to vacation. (Arina)

Some of the study participants were discouraged from forming transnational networks with their formerly good friends. They explained that they stop communicating with them, who were jealous or judgmental towards them due to increases in the quality of lives, consumption patterns, and new live styles of the transmigrants:

I used to have a lot of friends. First time I [visited] Ukraine for the face time, I wanted to see all of them. Not anymore though. I just want to spend all my time with my family. Because people are thinking that I have a lot of money because I live in America. But I have a friend that I talk on Skype all the time. We know each other since we were 3 years old, from the kindergarten. She is pregnant now as well. With others, it is not like I don't want to communicate with them but there is no such friendship as it was before. OK, I will give you an example. First time I visited home and met my friend. I came from the USA, I wasn't at home for a year and she was supposed to ask me, "Natalka, how have you been? How was your half year in America?" No, she didn't ask me anything. She was telling me about her life and her boyfriend, and I spent almost half a day with her, and when I decided to go home, she didn't even say, "OK, I hope to see you soon." (Natalka, Ukrainian, 27)

We are communicating, chatting, Skyping but I feel like they don't understand me anymore. I feel like, they feel that I am another person and they don't like it. They know that I have this huge experience and excitement in my life now, unfortunately it is said that they do not share my excitement. When I visited home and met my friends, I could feel their judgment inside, because when I was leaving, they said, "We don't understand why you are doing this." (Jenya, Ukrainian, 24)

I am not the same Karina I used to be. My friends at home think that I am all American now. I am really scared of that. I think they think differently about me. I disappeared from their lives. I don't reply to their messages. [Not] because I don't want to talk to them but because they don't really know about my life here, they don't really what I am talking about and I don't really have time for that.

When I visited home, they think I am acting like an American. I had a lot of bad habits when I was in Ukraine, and I changed; I don't drink or smoke anymore. I grew up mentally. I matured a lot. (Karina, 27)

Two study participants, on the other hand, were discouraged from building transnational networks with their formerly good friends because they had hidden their current living arrangements in the United States from them:

It is hard to speak with my friends who are at home because they don't know my life here and it is hard to explain. It is not like, "You know what happened in the club yesterday?" She doesn't know it here. The life is completely different in Ukraine. I only speak about my [paper] marriage to Katia here, she knows the story but other girls don't know. Sometimes it is hard; I can't share things. The whole life story, the marriage; I just don't like people to know about it. (First study participant)

I don't really talk with my friends in Ukraine. I chat with them online, but I do not talk with them a lot because the first question people ask you, "What do you there?" and I can't say what I do here. And I don't want to lie. Once, people asked me, "So what are you do there?" I said, "Hey, how is the weather in Ukraine?" (Nadia, 30)

As Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002) argued, the economic resources of the transmigrants, in addition to the limited mobility due to strict immigration laws, prevented them from engaging in frequent transnational activities. For example, when the participants without permanent residency permits obtained new student visas in the United States, they avoided leaving the country because they had to renew their visas in the U.S. embassies, which was risky, in their home countries. In addition, the majority of the study participants could not afford frequent visits to home. Therefore, communication on the Internet and/or phone, annual visits to their home countries, preferably during Christmas, and occasional care packages they sent to their families were the only forms

of transnational activities they performed. Some of the study participants' parents and/or visited them on tourist visas, yet, the regularity of these visits was not more than once in every 2-3 years, given the high cost of flight tickets—only Maryana, and H1-B work visa holder, could afford her mother's frequent visits.

Study participants explained that they did not remit money, at least on a regular basis, to their families at home, as their families were economically self-sufficient. Yet, some remitted pocket money to their siblings or savings to their parents occasionally:

My family doesn't need money at all. I send pocket money to my younger sisters. I would ask my younger sister, she is only 17, "So, what's going on?", "Oh, I want those boots, and mom says they are so expensive." So, I like to make her happy; I have this money, that I don't really need it so I send her money sometimes. (Nadia, Ukraine, 30)

I don't send them money. They don't really need it, but I know if I can send some money, they would keep it. (Olga, Ukraine, 25)

It is not like they don't need money, they would always be happy for some money. They are getting old; they turned to 50 last year and they both are still working. My dad has his own business and he works really hard and my mom works for the police in Russia. I mean they have money; they are fine. For now, I don't have to take care of them. At this point I can't send them money because for them \$100 or \$200 is nothing in Russia, for me here it is. (Sasha, Russian, 28)

As Sasha mentioned, the cost of living was very high in their countries of origin. For that reason, study participants remit consumption goods, which were more affordable in the United States or were scarce goods in their countries, to their family members as birthday or Christmas gifts via international mailing or friends who were visiting home. Their families, who were computer literate, could also order them goods that they found online:

I send clothes to my family, and I send candies that we don't have in Ukraine to my mother. For mom, I remember I was bringing a lot of candies. Everybody buys and sends clothes. It is cheaper here. Mom loves clothes, so I always buy her a lot of clothes. (Natalka, Ukrainian, 27)

I sent things two times by mail, other times I just sent with friends. I send cosmetics to my mom and sister. Just good cosmetics, because they are really into it. I sent clothes one time. I usually send them Starbucks coffee [laughing], because my mom is really into Starbucks. (Maryana, Ukrainian, 28)

Also, I always send them a gift package on New Year's. For example, last time I bought a music player for my dad's car because my dad bought a new car. For my siblings I bought dresses, watches, and my mom I bought her pajamas and a pair of sleepers because she was complaining that it was always cold. These are not things that they don't have. I just want to make something to make them feel better. I also sent a lot of toys and books to my nephew. He is going to study English and it is really hard to find good books in Ukraine. (Nadia, 30)

Normally I send small packages; like t-shirts for my brother, something nice, make-up and cream for my mom, and my dad asked for if I could get him a diving suit, so I sent that. It cost \$500 and he is very happy, so I try to send them gifts when I have money. (Sasha, Russian, 28)

I send vitamins, because my mom can't get any in Ukraine. You can't find it there. My mother found a site and sending me the links for the things she wants. I sent it by USPS. It is like \$20 a box or something. I recently sent a laptop. I paid \$800 and there it would be \$1500 at least. My mother found a dress for a wedding she was going so I sent that. (Larissa, Ukrainian, 25)

Participants also carried these goods when they were visiting home. Some were taking orders from their friends for the consumption goods that were cheaper in the United States:

I bring clothes because it is cheaper here. Everyone wants Abercrombie and those fancy brands because we don't have them in Czech Republic. Five people asked me to bring clothes so they sell it in Czech Republic. I tried once but it didn't work. I always bring clothes as gifts. (Adela, Czech, 27)

Not really. I sent couple of gifts. Since I go home every Christmas, I brought things with me rather than sending them. Make-up stuff for my mother, clothes for my brother; he likes Abercrombie a lot, or perfumes. (Julia, Czech, 26)

I brought a lot of gifts with me when I went for the New Year's. A big box filled with food because we don't have them at home. Peanut butter, candies, golden fish crackers; things like that. (Kristina, Ukrainian, 26)

Sending toys and books for their little nephews or nieces was also common among the study participants:

My niece and nephew, they were very little when I left, so I am trying to send them gifts; not very often though, because I have not been working and I am paying my tuition by myself, I cannot really send them too much but I am trying to be a good aunt, because they are expecting. That is not because they need it, but I know they are happy if I send them little presents once a year. (Lamara, Georgian, 29)

I also sent a lot of toys and in books to my nephew. He is going to study English and it is really hard to find good books Ukraine. (Nadia, 30)

As illustrated in these cases, remitting consumption goods—import goods that are expensive in their countries—with their families and even small gifts were an expression of their love for their families. When they visited home, study participants would bring groceries such as sausage, spices, and cheese back with them. Some mentioned that they did not bring much because these domestic goods were sold for cheaper in the United States. They also brought medication, such as antibiotics since the U.S. pharmacies required prescription for selling this type of medication, and ethnic home remedies. In addition, the majority of the study participants, like Dora, made use of cheaper services, such as hairdressers, dentist and/or doctor visits, during their visits home:

Everything was so expensive in Hungary. O.K. we had dollars, but wow, the prices were high. I bought some spices there and they were like \$25, which is really pricey. And the salaries were low. The only thing that was cheaper there, I went to the dentist, a dermatologist, got a facial. I did those things and it was fun and had good time with my mom. (Dora, 25)

Finally, I asked study participants if they followed national news, TV channels, or radios in order to understand their involvement in the political, social or cultural lives in their countries of origin. None reported that they actively did, but were rather informed about the daily and/or important events—the performance of their countries in the Olympics, beauty pageants, Eurovision song contest, the weather, elections, and so on—in their countries through the wall posts of Facebook friends and from their parents. Their passive involvement in the daily lives of their countries stemmed from the generally negative economic and political environment in their countries—which they ran away from and were highly critical of—and the availability of important events in their friends' lives (such as marriage, birth of a new child, and so on) and their countries through online social networking platforms. In addition, they did not have time from their work and studies for more intense kinds of daily incorporation.

In the following section, I will describe cultural and social incorporations of study immigrants in the United States.

7.4 Cultural and Social Incorporation

As demonstrated in section one, study participants spent their leisure time mostly with their fellow co-nationals. Common daily activities they engaged in were shopping, having lunch (when their workplaces were close) and dinners after work, and daily conversations over the phone, and through text messaging or instant messaging on the

Facebook. The leisure activities they engaged in together were taking weekend trips to surrounding big cities such as New York City, camping or holiday trips, or classes (such as belly dancing, cooking, exercise and so on), girls-night-outs, going to Spa salons, attending church services in religious days (except Ukrainians study participants were not generally religious), and going to ice-skating and movies. In their national and religious holidays—e.g., Independence Day, Easter, New Year’s Eve (in the Russian calendar) and so on—they gathered in one of their (usually married) friends’ house, cooked ethnic dishes and had long conversations at the dinner table. Being together in these days were particularly meaningful for the study participants as they were away from their families. They reported that they felt homesick most during their national religious holidays. In addition, they celebrated their birthdays and their married friends’ children’s birthday together in similar dining arrangements. Moreover, in American national holidays (Thanksgivings and Christmas), they had dinner gatherings with their fellow co-nationals and single participants attended to dinner invitations of their American employers, coworkers, or former/current host families

Participants who were married to immigrants or had American boyfriends (only Irenka) engaged in more ethnically diverse social activities and gatherings through their significant others. Alisa (Russian, 20), Dora (Hungarian, 25), and Katerina (Ukrainian, 25) were three study participants who were married to immigrants from Hispanic countries. They explained that Hispanic culture was very similar to their cultures, and for Dora, and Katerina, sharing similar demographics with their husband made their relationship very compatible due to mutual understanding:

I was actually surprised how close our cultures [were]. Because we are both from developing countries, and a lot of things about our lives are so similar. Like, having no water in countries. American people are like, “Oh my God, how can you live without water, how come you don’t have water?” We both know it happens there. They are very emotional, too, because they watch too many soap operas...Hispanic men usually open in expressing their feelings. They would say a lot of nice words, like “Oh my love, oh my life.” Russian or Ukrainian men wouldn’t be that open. They don’t say it when they don’t really mean that. (Katerina)

My host mom has a brother but also has two step-brothers and two step-sisters. They grew up together and they are very connected. I think I kind of wanted to a family like that. Then I met my husband. He had a very similar life to mine. His parents were divorced, and his mother [had] left the country and made him moved there and finish college there. They had a hard time not speaking English when they came here. I think that’s how we are bound together. We actually had this connection, what we both went through. We understand each other. So we are going to have our own family and have kids. (Dora)

My husband came here from Bolivia when he was in high school. His whole family is here. We use to get together in the weekends. He has four sisters and brothers, lots of nephews and nieces [laughing]. They have a really big family. They are really nice. They talk Spanish all the time so I started learning Spanish. All my Russian girlfriends have Hispanic boyfriends and husbands.

Do you know why?

I don't know. If somebody would tell me that I would have a Bolivian husband, I wouldn't ever believe it. My closest friend is married to a Bolivian guy and I met my husband through her. My friend recently got married to a Spanish guy from Peru. Another one is engaged to a guy from Argentina. I think it is culture; our cultures are very close. Spanish culture has the same values about family and friendship. Basically, Hispanic guys are really on their families. They treat the girlfriends very well. They can make money to bring home. Russian girls are usually stay at home, cook and laundry and everything, this is very close. Not like Americans here; they go to restaurants and pay fifty-fifty. I never pay. Whenever we go, for a vacation or something, I never pay. I cook and he likes to have nice dinners. I do the laundry I just take care of my husband. We also pick Hispanic

guys because Russian guys are spoiled. They are really spoiled. They want a lot of attention. Hispanic guys, you give them little attention and they would treat you like a lady. My boyfriend can do everything at home. He basically rebuilt the house. He can fix anything. Americans will go and pay somebody else to do it. Russians are very handy. My father is really handy. They listen more to their girls. Russian men fix things at home, but they mostly want girls to do it, but they bring money home, you don't have to work. If you get a boyfriend in Russia, you expect him to pay for everything. Even in first date, the guy will pay for everything. He pays for everything, for the apartment. He knows that I have to spend all my money for my studies.

The majority of the single study participants agreed with Alisa about the gender roles and the division of household labor they desired to have in their relationships with their future husbands. As mentioned earlier, single study participants complained about the difficulty of finding marriage eligible husbands in their home countries. Being at the higher threshold of marriage age, they were extremely concerned about staying unmarried if they returned home.

I asked them what qualities they were ideally looking for in their husbands. They described their ideal husbands by picking desirable qualities from American men and men of their ethnic groups. The common desirable qualities were protective, financially sufficient, handy men—like their fathers—who let their wives to take care of them, their children, and did not enter “their kitchen.” Conversely, they also desired their husbands to be more family-oriented and emotionally involved—what they refer as the qualities in American men. In contrast to American women, they were not desiring to be wives who worked full-time jobs, and thus, do not have time to take care of their husbands and families. As such, their ideals of motherhood and womanhood were a continuation of the dominant patriarchal gender roles, which had strengthened after the fall of communism, dominating the meaning of motherhood and wifehood in their cultures dominating:

I don't like the even relationship between men and women here because men should be the the head, the man of their family. Here, women are trying to be like men, trying to decide everything. I don't think that women should be worrying about those. For example, in my host family, my host dad is always cooking, my host mom never cooks. He cooks, he sets the table. It is not normal. I can't watch him cooking, I sometimes try to help him. Women should be the one who is cooking. (Yaryna, Ukrainian, 25)

It is kind of different from Ukraine, because we are not equal; we are still not equal. Here, Americans are trying to be equal, and at the same time, they are upset about that, that they are equal. From my opinion, they don't know what they want. Like, the family I work for now, they are equal, but sometimes, she is like, "I can't work anymore, I can't take care of kids anymore." You wanted to be equal, so be happy with that. But in Ukraine, the men are getting money and the women are taking care of the house, kids, and everything; maybe it is a good thing. Maybe it is better than working a lot. They take care of the kids, not their husbands here. (Kalyna, Ukrainian, 27)

Being a woman here is harder. Because Ukrainian women don't have to work full-time and drive. If they get pregnant, they get vacation for three years. Here women go back to work after they have the baby. I think it is hard. Also, women are more equal here, like men, so they have to work as equal as men. I think it is slightly harder here. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

As illustrated in these narratives, the study participants, based on their observations in the middle-class households, perceived American women as "insufficient mothers," because they hire child-caregivers rather than raising their children by themselves; as insufficient wives, because they were not devoted homemakers and expected men to partake in housework; and, as "insufficient women," because they dress casually and perform masculine roles—such as seeking full-time careers, managing family finances, and so on.

Some study participants, on the other hand, expressed that they wanted to be economically independent career women, yet still desired their husbands to have the masculine qualities aforementioned:

Someone I can trust, who can provide and protect. But I am not a type who just stays at home and does nothing and waiting for the things to come to me. I have to be productive and keep it going. I want the full package; attractive, you have to trust, believe in the person. Who would understand, listen. If the American can get it, I am fine. If Ukrainian can do anything fine, but if he is a loser, waiting for his parents to help him out, no. (Hanna, Ukrainian, 28)

You are more independent here in everything; in money, relationship... In Ukraine, women don't earn a lot of money so they depend on their husbands or boyfriend. Here you can manage it yourself. You can go to a store and buy the dress you like. In Ukraine, you have to save for it or you have to ask your boyfriend or husband, "Honey, can I get this dress?" Ukraine is a very conservative country. (Larissa, Ukrainian, 25)

There is much more male attention and less competition here just because the majority of the population here are men. At the same time, men are here got used to have very strong women. Because women in America make as just the same or even more money like men, they women are even getting offended when men are trying to open the door, I miss a little bit of being weak women who needs a little bit protection. I miss that. But I definitely choose being a woman in here than in Ukraine. I like the feeling that I am equal; I can do the things as I like, and I can do even better. (Yeva, Russian/Ukraine, 27)

All but three study participants who were married to American men held more optimistic views toward the gendered division of labor in the American culture. Yet, they valued protective and financially sufficient husbands alike. The first study participant who belonged to this group was Alena (Ukrainian, 22). Her first engagement with a White American man did not last long because he was a student without regular income and also he did not take care of her when she was sick. Her White American husband, on

the other hand, was the breadwinner of the family and proved his love to her by caring for her when she was sick. She explained that due to cultural differences, she initially had adaptation issues, which were not insurmountable:

How is it like to be married to an American?

It is different. It is really hard because there are a lot of things he doesn't understand. We have different backgrounds and it is really hard. I grew up in a farm and he grew up in a city. I had hard childhood because I was working all the time. He wants to hire somebody when something is broken in the house but Ukrainian men are very handy. He doesn't know basic stuff. For me, it was a shock because men are supposed to fix things. So there are lots of small things but we compromise each other.

What about housework?

I changed his attitude. He didn't like to cook; he likes to go out and drink. Now he cooks, he doesn't drink, and he cleans the house [laughing]. So yeah, Americans they don't cook at home. I can teach such things to him.

The marriage of the second participant—Liza (Ukrainian, 28)—who was married to a White American man, did not survive the personal incompatibilities, cultural differences, and more important, her husband's request to share the household expenses equally. Liza's perception of a "fifty-fifty" partnership in marriage, on the other hand, was different:

This family I work for now has kind of an ideal relationship I am looking for. They have two kids, and they still show love and care to each other. It is like a partnership: Fifty-fifty in emotions, and feelings. They put the kids to bed and they have dinner together and have a glass of wine and talk about things at the dinner table. It looks good, so perfect to me. This understanding, care, and love they have for each other. They are so great. Sometimes you feel tired and bored, but you know it is fifty-fifty...My father was a rough Russian man. He never told me that he loved me. After he died, I realized what [a] big mistake it was; not

expressing your feelings... My parents never told each other “I love you.” (Liza, Ukrainian, 28)

The final study participant who belonged to this group was Karina (Ukrainian, 29). She was working as an accountant in an American company, married to an African American working-class man, and they had one child. They shared childcare and also her mother-in-law was involved when the spouses needed a hand:

Now, I have a husband and I don't have to pay for everything [by myself]. I would never marry a Russian guy because he would make me cook and do the dishes. My husband cooks and sometimes does the dishes. He is very flexible with his work schedule. My mother-in-law is not far from us. We drop off our daughter in the mornings and my husband picks her up in the evenings. Russians don't share any responsibilities with their wives at home. They say, “You are a woman, you do this, that and that.” Here, they share responsibilities. That's what I like about here. Women are more independent. Women also have probably better chance to get to higher positions at work. They make money. They can go on vacations.

I heard that it was uncommon for Ukrainian women to marry an African American man.

The other au pairs said that? Nobody tells me anything. Maybe they are talking behind my back. I don't even see my husband as a Black person anymore.

In addition to interracial marriages, interreligious marriages and romantic relationships were common in the study group. While the geographical location of the study participants certainly created demographically diverse matches, the socioeconomic compatibility of the partners predominantly shaped the quality and the durability of their relationships. The Washington, D.C., Metropolitan area is populated by a racially,

ethnically, and religiously diverse foreign-born population²⁶. As a part of my participant observations, I accompanied Ukrainian study participants in their girls-night-outs. I was surprised how attractive the Ukrainian girls were for the international men; mostly transnational workers from Northern African and Middle Eastern countries. However, durability of these relationships depended on the compatibility of socioeconomic status between both parties. These middle- or upper-class, middle-aged men tended to be, and hid that, they were married and had their families back in their home countries. As such, the dating relationship with these highly charismatic men—as they were always dressed-up, knowing “how to treat a woman like a lady” and were financially sufficient—usually led to disappointment and drama in the study participants’ lives.

Romantic relationships with foreign-born men lasted longer and turned into marriages when the socioeconomic status of the partners was matched well. Indeed, the study participants that were married to foreign-born men met their husbands in online dating web sites. The social distance between different racial, ethnic and religious groups eroded gradually as the study participants valued other qualities of these men—being protective, financially-sufficient, family-oriented partners—over racial and religious compatibilities. Maryana (28) for example, was a moderately religious Ukrainian study participant, who had long avoided dating Muslim men due to her increased fear of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. She recently started dating a Northern African Muslim man, who was moderately religious. Witnessing the happy marriage relationship between

²⁶ The proportion of the population that is foreign born in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area by 2000 by race and ethnicity was distributed as: Asian: 75.9%, Black: 9.6%, Hispanic: 61.7%, Non-Hispanic White: 5.8%, and White: 9.3%

her close Ukrainian friend, Nataalka (27) and her Moroccan Muslim husband convinced her that “all Muslims were not the same.” Referring to Nataalka’s marriage, she explained that religious differences could not be a big problem as long as spouses respect each other’s beliefs, religious practices, teach their children about both religions, and let them choose which religion they want in the future. As illustrated in these examples, transnational migration enabled the study participants to redefine the desirable gender roles, and have more freedom over their marriage and dating relationships. In the following section, I will describe the economic incorporation of the study participants.

7.4 Economic Incorporation

Except for current H-1B visa holders and OPT interns, the rest of the study participants continued to work as babysitters either on a part-time or a full-time base, depending on their marital status and whether they had children. All childless study participants, except Alisa, were full-time students and were working as part-time babysitters. Two married study participants with children had more family expenses and were working as full-time accountants in American companies and were equally contributing to the family income with their husbands.

Working in live-out babysitting jobs was common among the study participants for several reasons: First, it pays well—typically \$10-15 per hour—and study participants did not pay taxes for their babysitting incomes. Second, it was a flexible form of employment in that the study participants could fit their work hours with their schedules as they liked. Third, they could easily get babysitting jobs by showing their au pairing experiences. Finally, in comparison to the au pair placement, they had least contact with their employers, and thus, more control over their labor.

For example, Alisa (Russian, 30) was working as a part-time babysitter for five different families –a total of 50 working hours a week–in order to pay for her tuition fees. In addition to the factors above, she explained that the freedom of picking the families she would like to work and leaving the ones she did not like also made live-out, informal babysitting a more preferable, yet “temporary” occupation which was not a “real job.” Furthermore, she could efficiently organize her childcare arrangement in a way that she would not get exhausted at the end of a long working day:

It is actually very different than being an au pair. I don't need to live with a family so it feels like a fine paying job. I go to their houses, I babysit and when I leave I don't have to worry about it. When you are an au pair, even when you are not working, you are constantly working because you are there. I really appreciate that they don't try to make me a part of their families. This freedom that when I am done; I go home, they are happy with my work, and I am happy with my work, and I forget about them...For me, we are not equals because babysitting is not a real job. For me, it is kind of a step back. But they take it differently. You have the freedom to leave them anytime if you don't like them. You can go to sittercity.com or care.com and find another family. If you are an au pair, you don't have that chance. In my situation, I can't work officially in a different job on a student visa. What else can you do other than babysitting? All you can do is work in a restaurant or babysit. Even the restaurants, even McDonalds, ask you for work permission or papers and pay you \$7 per hour. Babysitting is the only way for all of us who quit au pairing.

Don't you get tired when you work 50 hours and also attend your classes?

I need to take four classes, four times a week. When I do homework, I still have plenty time for a full-time job. I have kids of all different ages. I have a three-month-old baby, and a two-year-old, I have a five year-old, and an eleven-year-old. When I work with families with babies, I try to do it at nights because they put the baby into sleep and they want to go out on Fridays or Saturdays and I just go to their house and read a book. The baby does not interrupt you. The kids aged four or five are better. Most of the kids I have now are at before school age. In my afternoon job I work with an autistic boy who is thirteen. That's the only older kid

I work with. I am actually a driver for him. I am driving him to different places. I like two years old, when they get to know, they are the sweetest. Most of the families expect you to play with the kid and no TV. I actually read them a lot when they are playing. I take them to playdates or invite their friends and they can play and you can rest. Or you can take them to playground and they play on the ground by themselves.

Like Alisa explained, working for families who needed babysitters for their date-nights was a very desirable and common form of employment among the study participants. This form of employment was a good source for generating money when they had financially difficult times or savings. Other study participants, who were married and full-time students, were babysitting between 10-25 hours a week:

My husband has a good job and he pays for my school. If I can only help \$10 with the grocery, I feel good; it is more than nothing. I work fourteen hours a week for the families, and sometimes, they need me extra for their date-nights. Now, I get \$15 per hour and work less. (Dora, Hungarian, 25)

When I completed au pair program, I was like “I am done with babysitting; I want to do a real job!” Then, we got married and I applied for work authorization paper. So I didn’t really have a choice, I had to do babysitting. But I don’t want to have 2-3 kids, talking all the time. I mean, it is kind of limiting you and your thinking. (Katerina, Ukrainian, 25)

It is hard to pay the bills. My husband is very reliable but I still work as a nanny because I think every au pair can work as a nanny once they finish the program. This is the only thing we have experience in, as a reference. I work thirty hours a week for after school care. I go there to pick up the kids. They pay \$15 per hour. It is the same as [the] pair salary because you don’t pay for anything when you are an au pair. (Alena, Ukrainian, 22)

Once Katerina obtained her Green Card, she started to work as a full-time kindergarten teacher and continued to work as a date-night babysitter occasionally. After one year, she left her job because she was forced to work on tasks that were irrelevant to

her job title in addition to working extra, unpaid hours, even on the holidays. She explained that the owner of the private kindergarten was exploiting all teachers similarly, and nobody could stand the working conditions more than a couple of months. She decided that she wanted to study for a Masters' degree and babysit for several families to pay for her tuition fees.

The study participants usually found babysitting jobs in the online web sites specialized for childcare services as articulated by Alisa. Also, Alisa explained that her employers and the girls in her friends' group were referring occasional babysitting jobs to each other:

My employers give my phone numbers to other families and they call me too. I have three, four friends, we text each other when we have a job [offer] that we can't take, and ask each other who wants to take it. Like, "I have this offer but I can't take it can you take it? They pay that much and have that many kids." So we kind of have a network.

Although access to these jobs was eased through the availability of online employment web sites, networks with current employers and fellow co-nationals were important sources for having continuous employment.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed the formation of social networks and type of social networks transmigrant women participated in, in their lives, and how these networks shaped their cultural, social and economic incorporation into the host and host societies. As I proposed in Chapter 2, intersectional framework analysis of network formations at the local and international levels provided a comprehensive understanding of network formations within and across different ethnic groups. As addressed by Lan (2007:18),

transnational migration of Eastern and Central European women to the United States located them at more complex class hierarchies and class positioning due to national disparities, and also created new subject positions that allowed them to negotiate “multifaceted class identities across national borders and social settings.”

In the context of the United States, due to their immigration status and mode of entrance to the United States, namely, au pair program placement, they were positioned as class, domestic, gender and ethnic inferiors to White American women; and class, gender and ethnic inferiors to White Americans men. The study participants developed a sense of learned helplessness and limited self-efficacy through their daily interactions with these groups and American institutions, which manifested ethnic and gender discrimination. Additionally, unfamiliarity with laws, regulations and their rights as immigrants solidified these negative feelings, which consequently discouraged further networking with Americans. Similarly, they were perceived as migrants, class and gender inferiors to “other” co-national immigrants due to their immigration status and downward social mobility, which manifested occupational and class inequalities within the same ethnic groups. As a result, the study participants were discouraged from networking with other co-nationals. Yet, they were less dependent on migrant networks with their co-nationals upon arrival to the country, as they did not need supervision for accommodation and jobs.

However, the study participants perceived their occupational and immigration statuses as temporary mechanisms of their oppression, believing that in the long-term they would work in occupations that matched their human capital, and thus, their material conditions would improve. They also created new subject positions based on their

perceived higher sense of femininity, as potential mothers and wives, in response to gendered and ethnic stereotypes produced by White American women and men. Meanwhile, they sustained their social networks with their fellow co-nationals with whom they shared similar material conditions. These local networks were in the forms of both strong and weak ties, and their sustenance and strength were susceptible to personal incompatibilities, mobility and changes in lifestyles (such as marriage, bearing children, and work and school schedules). These ties also created solidarity networks within the transmigrant groups, and provided mutual social and emotional support, understanding and care among fellow co-nationals with similar material conditions and lifestyles. Yet, the dependency on these networks for generating economic capital was alleviated by the availability of online services, such as employment web sites.

At the transnational level, study participants' involvement in network formation and the dynamics of these networks were facilitated by online communication technologies. Transmigrant women maintained their strong ties to their family members, close relatives and friends through telecommunication systems—Skype and international phone calls. Virtual telecommunication systems alleviated transmigrants' loneliness and pain of separation from their strong ties by facilitating daily interconnectedness between them and their immediate circle of people. In addition to these communications, transnational practices consisted of remittances—in the form of presents, and scarce and import consumption goods that represented their expression of love and care for their immediate circle of people—and travel between home and host societies. However, their economic resources and work and/school schedules shaped the frequency of these transactions.

Formation and sustenance of transnational ties with their friends at home depended on several factors, such as compatibility of lifestyles, time differences, and social distance created by physical disconnectedness. In addition, because social status of transmigrants increased with their new consumption styles and life qualities, they were discouraged from continuing their previously strong and weak ties with their friends in response to the negative attitudes posed by these people. Furthermore, decreased social status in relation to occupational status of the transmigrants led to the same consequences. Transmigrant women negotiated these anxieties by forming weaker ties with their friends at home in the online social networking platforms, which enabled them to keep a more desirable—distant but weakly involved—forms of social connectedness with their formerly close friends and friends in general.

Transnational migration also led to anxieties within the study group in defining friendship. Friendship was conventionally defined by durability and physical closure of friends, in addition to mutual love, care, support and understanding. Legal barriers created by the U.S. immigration law challenged the long-term durability and physical closure of friendships formed in the United States. Yet, material conditions of transmigrant women created interdependency between fellow co-nationals. As a result, the meaning of friendship was defined in ambiguous terms due to challenges posed by transnational mobility.

Finally, for study participants, transnational migration was a vehicle for empowerment from oppressive gender relations governing marriage and family life.

Female marriage squeeze²⁷ and limited availability of marriage-eligible men in their home countries, and thus, the threat and fear of remaining single was overcome through seeking romantic partnerships with immigrant men in the United States. Indeed, the pressure to get married at a certain age and the high competition among women to find marriage partners created anxiety among the study participants, who were without permanent residency rights in their late 20s, to return home. In addition, study participants redefined the desirable qualities they looked for in a husband and gendered division of labor in the family. While the dominant patriarchal ideals of womanhood and wifehood had not dramatically changed, they redefined the ideal qualities they wanted to have in their husbands by combining the desirable masculine qualities in their ethnic men and in American men. As such, they aspired to have husbands who were as protective, handy and devoted to taking their financial responsibility as their ethnic men, yet also were financially reliable and sufficient, and family-oriented—more involved in child-raising and family life—like American men. As a result, they tended to form interracial and interreligious romantic relationships and marriages with immigrant men, and the durability of their relationships relied on the socioeconomic and cultural compatibility between both parties.

Their immigrant status, compatibility of their academic degrees earned at home in American educational institutions, their career goals, and cultural values largely shaped study participants' economic incorporation into the United States. If married and seeking

²⁷ An excess of eligible women is defined as a *female marriage squeeze*; an excess of eligible men is defined as a *male marriage squeeze*.

new degrees, study participants were holding part-time babysitting jobs while attending schools. They were financially dependent on their husbands; yet, this dependency was not problematic, given that men are expected to provide their wives economically in their cultures. Due to higher economic expenses in their families, married women with children were holding full-time jobs and were enabled to do so as their academic degrees were approved and they had work permits through Green Cards. On the other hand, single women's economic incorporation as full-time workers in compatible professions were blocked by their immigration status, as I also explained in more detail in the previous chapter. Yet, they made use of their childcare experience in au pair placement for holding babysitting jobs and could attend schools with the hope that in the long-term, they would acquire more desirable jobs that were more compatible with their human capital.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Overview of Findings

These findings have emerged from a three-year long feminist ethnographic research project on young Eastern and Central European women who migrated to the United States to work as au pairs in the Washington D.C., Metropolitan Area. These professional women were motivated primarily by cultural exchange opportunities in the United States when they decided to participate in the au pair programs. Although none of these women imagined that they would seek long-term settlement in the United States, only 10% returned their home abroad. In this dissertation, I examined the extent to which au pairs' transmigrant agencies and social networks helped build and maintain transnational mobility by employing intersectional and transnational feminist analyses of framework.

8.1.1 Contextualizing Au Pair Transmigrancy of Eastern and Central European Women

The entrance of Eastern and Central European young women into the au pair industry and unplanned long-term settlement patterns in the United States were not coincidences. These women were the first generation of post-communist transition in their countries, where economies were best characterized as being uncertain and insecure. Labor markets were dominated by corruption, gendered occupational segregation, glass-ceiling, gendered wage gap, and corruption; and the cost of living skyrocketed after the fall of the of communism. In addition, the reemergence of a patriarchal regime evicted

women from labor markets or placed them at lower levels in job hierarchies, and made them dependent on male breadwinner fathers or husbands. For these reason, au pair employment was perceived as the opportunity of a lifetime by goal-oriented transmigrant au pairs. These women hoped that improving their English competency would make them more competitive applicants at international companies, where wages and job security were relatively higher than public sector jobs in their home countries. Explorer-escapee settlers, on the other hand, were driven by the desire to explore the United States, and/or keep a distance from negative personal experiences at home. In the long-term, au pairs reassessed their initial settlement plans and extended their stays after completing the au pair programs. Maintaining transnational mobility became their means of empowerment in the face of oppressing economic, cultural, and social structures in their home countries.

However, the au pair placement in middle-class families situated these women within complex intersections of ethnicity, class, domesticity, gender and immigration status, and created asymmetrical power relations between the au pairs and their host families. In addition, due to national disparities and limitations imposed by au pair program regulations, au pairs became economic and legal dependents of their host families. Furthermore, working and living arrangements of au pair placements limited privacy and freedom of movement in their everyday lives. Contrary to their expectations, a majority of host families, whose social reproduction was often dependent upon au pairs' daily domestic responsibilities, treated their au pairs like maids, servants, or cheap labor. Resultantly, au pairs faced the trauma of downward social mobility and not being treated like a family member, physical and emotional exhaustions, loneliness, and isolation. Yet, they were not absolutely powerless or passive in these inferiority-superiority relationships.

As suggested by transnational feminists, marginalized au pairs did not internalize their repression and subordination. Instead, they used their resources to challenge the systematic relations of domination created by transnational division of reproductive labor and global economic inequalities, which had situated them in subservient positions. Thus, they developed several resistance strategies and coping methods.

First, they contacted au pair agencies. Unfortunately, these agencies were usually unhelpful, violated au pair regulations, and favored their host family clients in resolving conflict between au pairs and employers. Some au pairs, who had unbearable working and living conditions or who were sexually abused, simply exited au pair programs and relied on their social networks for temporary accommodations. Second, au pairs engaged in discursive strategies (retaining a strong sense of worth based on morality by devaluing the social and moral values of host parents regarding family life, life styles and parenting), attempts of immediate struggles (resisting to meet demands of their employers for extra additional service and keeping control over their labor), and passive resistance (drawing boundaries between their workplace and leisure time by leaving their workplaces after their shifts and not challenging their employers at the expense of realizing their goals for coming to the United States). Finally, social networks built with co-nationals, who shared the same social and material conditions of au pair placement, established solidarity networks and companionship among au pairs.

8.1.2 Women Transmigrant's Social Networks: Access to and Characteristics of Social Networks

The manner of entry into the United States and working and living arrangements of au pair placement primarily shaped the initial networking practices of transmigrant

women. These women entered the United States through au pair program participation. Unlike typical migrant workers, au pair transmigrants did not rely on migrant networks for accommodations and jobs prior to transnational migration. One downside of their lack of transnational networks was that au pairs were not informed about the working and living conditions of au pairs. Their ignorance led to disappointment once they were placed with host families.

Upon arrival in the country, au pair agencies channeled au pairs into ethnic networks with co-nationals. Age, nationality, language barriers, cultural expectations regarding friendship, geographical proximity, the size of migrant groups, and length of settlement in the United States each shaped the characteristics and durability of au pairs' social networks. The intersections of these factors created diverse patterns of network formations within and between ethnic groups. Au pairs were more likely to establish strong ties with their fellow co-ethnics of their own age group due to language barriers and cultural values governing the meanings of friendship. Czech, Polish and Hungarian au pairs formed more ethnically diverse, but relatively weaker, ties due to the more modest size of their ethnic migrant groups. On the other hand, Russian, Georgian and Ukrainian au pairs networked exclusively within their ethnic communities and formed larger networks.

Some au pairs' access to social networks was constrained by living and working arrangements in that au pairs who had unstructured work schedules lived in distant suburban areas and were not provided family cars for transportation, or had limited access to networks with fellow au pairs and co-nationals. The durability of these

networks was susceptible to distance created by relocation and changes in migrant statuses of au pairs.

In addition, because au pairs' friendships were primarily founded on their shared experiences of au pairing –not compatibility of personal tastes and traits–some of their strong ties with co-nationals were weakened or dissolved in the later stages of their settlement in the country, as disparities in these domains became more visible, and thus, less tolerable. Furthermore, changes in life styles (e.g., marriage, migrant status, and work or school schedules) led to similar outcomes in that study participants' former social ties got stronger or weaker based on their new shared experiences of being students, mothers, or workers.

Throughout their settlement in the country, transmigrant women developed a distinct networking behavior, *the discouraged networker phenomenon*, in networking with Americans and other co-nationals as a result of their lower class positioning in relation these groups' social locations. When au pairs arrived in the United States, they were interested in networking with Americans and co-nationals, because their primary motivation for au program participant was cultural exchange. As mentioned, complex intersections of domesticity, gender, class position and ethnicity, and immigration status situated au pairs as inferiors to Americans. They developed learned helplessness and limited self-efficacy as a result of discriminatory, ignorant, and exploitative practices of their host parents as well as au pair agencies. Their feelings of helplessness were reinforced through their encounters with institutional power figures, limited legal rights as immigrants, and unfamiliarity with the regulations in the United States. Finally, their daily involvement in their host employers' family lives and daily interactions with other

Americans led them ascertain negative perceptions of the American way of living, and the definition of friendship in their new country. As a result, au pairs were discouraged from networking with American nationals. A rare exception to this discouragement occurred when women had more positive relationship with Americans (e.g., having an American boyfriend or experiencing a family-like relationship with the host parents). In these instances, they developed less pessimistic attitudes towards incorporation into American culture and felt more confident about forming strong ties with Americans.

Transmigrant women were also discouraged from networking with co-nationals, in whose eyes they were ethnic, migrant, class, and/or gender inferiors. Their initial negative interactions with other co-nationals, whose immigrant status enabled them to secure higher social status and material conditions in the United States, was also an extension of class inequalities created by post-communist transition in their home countries. Social divisions between transmigrant women and co-nationals were a manifestation of high competition and vast discrepancies in purchasing power among social classes after the fall of communism. As such, the majority of the study participants were discouraged from networking with co-nationals in the United States.

Contrary to the view of some network scholars, ethnic social networks did not manifest negative social capital for transmigrant women. As discussed, transmigrant women's primary concern was to preserve their legal status in the country. Thus, U.S. immigration law blocked their upward mobility. They could not pursue occupations that matched their human capital because the visas—student visas and OPT permits—limited their freedom to do so. Due to the incompatibility of their academic degrees and highly selective eligibility criteria of H-1B work visas, they were blocked from obtaining work

visas after completing their OPT internships. Therefore, transmigrant women's upward mobility was not limited due to competition between co-nationals or social exclusion, as proposed by some network scholarship. Competition between fellow au pairs was trivial, and did not lead to negative consequences in their lives. If these women entered the country as undocumented immigrants or with tourist visas and become undocumented workers—as presented in the cases of post-communist domestic workers in Europe—then they would have to rely on their ethnic networks in seeking jobs and accommodations.

Their social networks with fellow co-nationals, on the other hand, provided instrumental information for developing settlement strategies, and facilitated emotional support and social solidarity among au pair transmigrants. These non-economic aspects of social networks were particularly powerful in encouraging transmigrant women to settle longer in the United States in times of adversity. In addition, transmigrant women who could improve their working conditions, such as those obtained H-1B visas, stood out as role models, and also provided information to their fellow co-ethnics about how to overcome the barriers to get work visas.

8.1.3 Transmigrant Women's Settlement Patterns, Strategies and Processes

I classified two types of transmigrant women: goal-oriented transmigrants—who had clearly set plans for short-term settlement and returning home; and explorer/escapee transmigrants—who had more flexible plans for settlement and returning home. This distinction was based on their initial settlement plans. However, these plans were redefined by the influence of social ties, an evaluation of pull factors in the United States and push factors in their home countries, and length of settlement in the country. Transmigrant women's agency in implementing longer settlement plans in the country,

on the other hand, was constrained by legal barriers created by the U.S. immigration laws.

As I demonstrated in the second half of this dissertation, settlement is a complex and dynamic process. Transmigrant women's short-term settlement plans did not easily transform into long-term settlement plans. In this regard, I classified three types of settlers based on their redefined settlement plans: persuaded settlers, unsure/hopeful settlers, and permanent settlers. The goal-oriented transmigrant women gradually set, through persuasion by their circle of people, new short-term goals to achieve in the United States (e.g., investing more in their human capital through obtaining degrees from American colleges and gaining work experiences).

More than half of the explorer/escapee transmigrant women, on the other hand, became, or were determined to become, permanent settlers in a shorter period of time. Their motivation for transnational migration was exploring new opportunities and escaping from their negative work and/or personal experiences at home. They also had weaker familial ties (due to dissolution of their families) in their home countries. Making fast or paper marriages was the most common strategy employed for acquiring permanent residency in this group. When they did not obtain paper marriages, they extended their stay by "buying time" through re-obtaining student visas. They hoped for better opportunities in the future, such as meeting their future husbands or finding American employers to sponsor them for work visas, in order to secure permanent residency.

Transmigrant women in both groups became unsure/hopeful settlers when they were discouraged from returning home due to frequent communication with their families and home visits. These experiences made them feel alienated from their culture and fostered a fear that, should they return to their home country, they would encounter a

decline in quality of life and purchasing power, employment scarcity, and scarcity of men eligible for marriage.

Women's agency in implementing their settlement goals was determined by the immigration law, financial resources, social networks, and marital status. None of the study participants were willing to settle longer in the country if they could not maintain their legal nonimmigrant status. Their concern stemmed from the difficulty inherent in returning or visiting the United States in the future should they leave while undocumented. This barrier was overcome permanently by transmigrant women who married American citizens or Green Card holders, and dealt with temporarily by those who obtained H-1B work visas.

Unsure/hopeful and persuaded settlers, on the other hand, were determined or convinced to extend their settlement as long as possible, due to difficulty of re-obtaining American visas, and high cost of travel expenses inherent in returning home. The ability of single women to maintain their legal status was constrained by their limited finances, incompatibility of educational systems between home countries and the United States, and U.S. immigration laws. As such, a majority of single study participants without work permits continued to make use of informal live-in childcare work arrangements in order to reduce accommodation expenses. These women extended their stays through student visas. Although legal and material dependency on American families and lack of privacy in live-in work arrangement were not desirable, these study participants believed that the longer they extended their stay, the more likely they would be able to find better opportunities in the future.

During the settlement process, a few explorer/escapee transmigrants returned

home, either due to their lack of social networks with older/former au pairs, lack of strong ties in the United States, and limited economic resources for preserving legal status. Also, the economic conditions of the sending countries created differences in the settlement plans, in that two transmigrants women returned to their families in Germany and the Czech Republic. These women believed that their opportunities for making a living were no worse there than in the United States. Ukrainian au pairs, on the other hand, reported that participation in the au pair program did not increase their employability at home because there had not been any drastic improvements in the economy of Ukraine. As such, one study participant reenrolled in the au pair program, in Europe, and sought to extend her stay in the country through marriage. Another study participant, who had stronger family ties and was relatively older, found a job compatible with her profession, however, she was dissatisfied with the long working hours and low wage.

8.1.4 Incorporation to Home and Host Societies

At the transnational level, transmigrant women formed strong networks with their family members. The recent online telecommunication systems unquestionably influenced the formation of these networks and the content of their interactions. Transmigrant women could have frequent communication with their family members, close relatives and a few friends through Skype and international phone calls. These communications alleviated transmigrant women's loneliness and the pain of separation from their strong ties, and also facilitated daily interconnectedness between them and their circle of friends back home.

Transmigrant women's ties with people other than their immediate circle of

friends and family, on the other hand, did not translate into strong social ties. The improvement of transmigrant women's social status –as a result of increases in their quality of life and purchasing power in an American context– created tension and social distance in their relationships with these people left at home. They negotiated this anxiety by maintaining their connections with these ties through online social network platforms, albeit in more distant and weakly involved forms. In addition, as they settled into living in the United States, physical disconnectedness and emerging discrepancies in the lifestyles of women and their friends left behind contributed to a transformation of previously strong ties into weak ties.

As presented, transnational activities of these women were limited to annual trips home and occasional remitting of goods to their families. This limited contact was a direct result of modest economic resources and visa constraints. These remittances consisted of presents and scarce and import consumption goods, and represented their expression of love and care for their strong ties in their home countries.

Women's social networks did not have a dramatic affect on their economic incorporation in the United States, as the main limitations were posed by their immigration status, compatibility of their academic degrees earned at home in American educational institutions, marital status, and career goals. Study participants without work permits or permanent residency rights were blocked from participating in the formal labor market. As such, they continued working in babysitting jobs, while studying in universities in order to secure long-term work permits. They found babysitting positions primarily through online employment websites, but also through co-nationals and employers. Women with H-1B work visas, however, were overworked and underpaid.

These unsure/ hopeful transmigrants were not determined to settle in the United States. As such, they did not challenge their exploitative employers. This reluctance was also enhanced by their inability to command the same financial rewards at home and the difficulty in finding sponsoring employers in the United States.

Married study participants with children worked full-time jobs that matched their career goals. Married women without children, on the other hand, were financially dependent on their husbands while attending universities. This dependence was rooted in the fact that their academic degrees at home did not grant them jobs in America. Therefore, they started over their higher education and postponed their full-time employment careers.

Single transmigrant women had limited access to formal employment and thus worked as live-in or live-out babysitters. Therefore, they had greater economic difficulties than married transmigrant women. Conversely, single transmigrants were constantly stressed with the concern of securing their legal status. At the end of the research, half of the transmigrant women who stayed in the United States remained unsure/hopeful settlers or persuaded settlers. These women believed that if they worked hard enough, they would have more access to full-time “real” jobs in the United States. If not, they would pack and leave when their legal nonimmigrant status terminated.

Transmigrants women’ sociocultural incorporation into American society, as presented, was limited. Although they had high expectations for assimilating into American cultural and social life prior to migration, the stigma of being “Eastern European” and “au pair” combined with decreased social and economic status, created social divisions between transmigrant women, Americans, and “other” co-nationals.

However, negative attitudes and perceptions of these groups did not lead them to internalize these identifications or incorporate more intensively into their home countries through transnational networks and practices. Rather, they resisted these negative identifications by blaming the economic inequalities in their home countries. They also disassociated themselves from other post-communist women, who took degrading jobs and underwent fake marriages for granting permanent residency. They viewed these as the “real cause” of the stigmatization of Eastern European women in the United States.

They also emphasized their moral values governing family life, friendship and life styles, which they believed many Americans lacked. Furthermore, they attached higher social worth to their feminine virtues, dressing up fashionably and looking glamorous. Interestingly, these sorts of values had also been the sources of gender oppression in their home countries. However, these women could reverse their oppression, which was created by their immigrant status and lack of economic resources, into empowerment through consumption of material goods in the United States. This reversal helped them develop higher self-worth and social status. As addressed by Mahler (1998:85), these resistance strategies show that transmigrant women from post-communist countries could “thwart the forces of assimilation and build ethnic identities that were problematic if not possible to sustain within one nation-state and challenge the power of states to control their movements and interests.”

Social exclusion led transmigrant women into establishing closer relationships with fellow co-nationals, and into forming interracial and interreligious marriages with foreign-born men. However, as presented, sustainability of their friendships was contingent upon changes in their lifestyles and migrant status. While married women

established stronger ties with co-nationals who had similar life styles, single transmigrant women's friendships tended to be founded on an interdependency relationship rooted in companionship and social support. Conventionally, friendships are based on durability, mutual love, understanding and support. In the cases of au pairs, insecurities about legal status in the United States combined with the unpredictability of the length of their relationships, led to uncertainty regarding the meanings of friendship. Additionally, their former best friends, with whom they shared conventional qualities of friendships prior to migration, were not accessible due to time differences and discrepancies of daily routines of family and/or work responsibilities. In many cases, their friendships had dissolved as their lives changed after migration.

Despite social, cultural and economic barriers to incorporation into American society, transmigrant women were determined to maintain transnational mobility. Therefore, they belonged, simultaneously, to both their host and home countries. They identified their ethnic, gender, and cultural identities in relation to their home countries, but were reluctant to return home due to economic instability and insecurity, marital woes, and lack of personal privacy. They defined their social class in relation to consumption habits and lifestyles they could establish in the United States. However, they devalued cultural and social components of American culture. Their desire was to maintain double affiliation in their home countries and the United States. Thus, they ideally wanted to secure permanent residency rights in the United States, so that they could make use of employment and marriage opportunities in the country. At the same time, they identified their home countries, where they had their "real" families and friends, as their "home" where they would return sometimes in the future. In addition, they negotiated gendered

expectations regarding marriage and division of household labor by marrying and dating immigrant men. These men showed masculine characteristics typical among ethnic men, but were more involved in family life and childrearing, as is typical in American culture. Social distance between their co-ethnic men and American men was alleviated through online dating, as one-third of study participants' husbands were Americans or co-ethnic immigrants. Finally, some study participants managed to transform their relationships with parents, which had formerly been governed by authoritarianism, into relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

In conclusion, although most of the challenges that au pairs faced were a result of entering the United States through au pair programs, both returnees and settlers in the United States believed that their transmigration experience made them more mature and independent. They also believed that the au pair experience widened their horizons and improved their life chances.

8.2 Theoretical Contributions and Implications of the Study

Findings from this dissertation provided a theoretical contribution to existing scholarship on social networks and transnationalism in several ways. This contribution was made possible through integrating intersectionality and transnational feminist framework of analyses in order to better explain, theoretically, the diversity and complexity of women's experiences of transmigration. In addition, uncovering transmigration experiences of an under-researched group, namely, transmigration au pairs who do not fit to general profile of transmigrants (i.e. working-class transmigration workers such as domestic workers or transmigration professionals such as H-1B workers) provided insights about how occupational status of transmigrants is a decisive determinant of their

incorporation and settlement experiences in the host countries.

Intersectional analysis of social network formation, roles of these networks, and dynamics of these networks over time provided that transmigrant women's access to social networks and extent of these networks were determined by interplay of social locations and structural conditions. Au pairs were motivated to immerse in American cultural and social life as cultural exchange students. However, they experienced downward mobility due to the stigma of being au pairs from post-Communist countries. Socioeconomic status of these young professional women also was relatively lower than that of other co-nationals as their immigrant statuses prevented them from holding employment compatible with their human capital. As a result, unlike proposed by social capital theory, these women did not actively seek to network in their communities and with Americans for their economic and social advancement in the host society. This finding implies that migrants' networking behavior is highly influenced by their new class positioning, particularly in respect to their occupational status, in the host countries.

In addition, this research highlighted the importance of non-economic aspects of social networks during settlement and incorporation processes of transmigrant women. As proposed by network theory, transmigrants women' social networks constituted a form of social capital, however, they did not provide the means for upward mobility or translate into financial capital. These limitations stemmed from structural barriers, such as incompatibility of educational systems in America and the host countries and strict immigration law restraining employment options for migrants holding student or OPT visas. Non-economic aspects of social networks, on the other hand, composed of provision of social solidarity and emotional support among fellow co-national and were

critically influential in shaping incorporation and settlement patterns of transmigrant women.

Finally, this study showed that contemporary transmigrants' dependency on social networks for improving their material conditions was alleviated by the increased availability of information on the Internet. Rather than relying on other co-nationals for finding employment, for example, transmigrant women used services of online employment web sites. Unquestionably, the high educational capital of these young, professional women enabled them to benefit from such technologies.

By analyzing the extent of women's agency in building and maintaining transnational mobilities from transnational feminist framework of analysis, I showed that women's agency could be constrained by their social and material conditions and immigration law of the host society. However, these women resisted these challenges and exercised their agency by developing strategies and taking support from their social ties in order to cope with experiences of oppression and exploitation in their everyday lives. Rather than internalizing their powerlessness and subservient positions in the host society, they perceived these positions as a temporary manifestation of their lack of material resources and legal barriers created by immigration policy.

While intersectional framework analysis enabled me to show the multidimensionality of women's experiences of transmigrancy level analysis, by using feminist ethnography I also showed that settlement in home countries is a multifaceted and dynamic process that involves persistent anxieties and challenges and is influenced by third parties such as family members, employers, and significant others. Based on the initial settlement plans, I suggested a classification of transmigrants as goal-oriented

transmigrants and explorer/escapee transmigrants. Both type of transmigrants had short-term settlement plans in the United States. However, this classification showed that, when women's transnational migration stemmed from their desire to explore new opportunities and/or escape from individual and structural constraints at home, they could then be more likely to seek long-term settlement plans in the host societies if more desirable opportunities were presented. On the other hand, when women were motivated to realize short-term personal goals through transnational migration, they were more likely to reassess their settlement plans at a slower pace, and engage in short-term, rather than long-term, settlement in the host society. In addition, length of stay in the host country, formation of new strong ties in the host country, sustenance of their strong ties in the home countries, and economic conditions of domestic economies were critical determinants of their settlement decisions.

8.3 Emerging Questions for Further Research

This study contributed to the literature on au pair employment by exploring au pairing experiences of an unstudied population in the United States. Indeed, it stands as the first comprehensive study of au pair programs in the United States and experiences of au pairs as transmigrants. However, this research had two limitations. First, employment of snowball sampling led to a disproportionate number of participants from post-communist countries. Therefore, some findings may not generalize to au pairs from less representative ethnic groups, such as Georgians, Hungarians, and Polish au pairs. In addition, since the primary purpose of this study was to explore au pair transmigrants' experiences, au pair agencies and host families were not recruited to participate in this research. Future research on au pair programs should also involve the opinions of these

groups in order to better understand their experiences with au pairs.

For further studies, I suggest that recruitment of au pairs from Western European and other countries could provide a comparative understanding on how ethnic and racial backgrounds of au pairs determine their transmigrancy experiences in the United States. In addition, I observed that Facebook was an important social platform for the study participants where they shared their everyday experiences, feelings and opinions publicly, and networked locally and transnationally. Therefore, I suggest that content analysis of transmigrants' Facebook posts could be influential in exploring transnational identities of transmigrants, their everyday experiences and transnational social ties in online social networking platforms.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Page 1 of 2
Date _____

Initials _____

Project Title	<i>“Functions of Transnational Networks on Everyday Experiences of Immigrant Paid Domestic Helpers”</i>
Why is this research being done?	<i>This is a research project being conducted Nihal Çelik at the Department of Sociology at University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a paid domestic helper emigrated from a post-socialist country. The purpose of this research project is to understand influences of transnational networks on everyday and migration experiences of women of post-socialist countries employed in paid domestic jobs abroad.</i>
What will I be asked to do?	<p><i>The procedures involve participating in an interview that will last between two to three hours. Questions will be asked about your everyday and migration experiences. The interview will be held in a convenient location of your choosing. There are not any right or wrong answers. It will be like an informal conversation.</i></p> <p><i>If you are willing, we may ask you to follow you around in one of your day-offs to see how you spend your free times outside of your workplace.</i></p>
What about confidentiality?	<p><i>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, we will give you a “code name” immediately after the interview and all information files will be linked to that code name. Information will be kept in locked file cabinets and in password-protected computer files. In some instances we will change key identifying information (such as your job) to help further blur your identity. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I do not agree to be audio-taped during my participation</i></p>

	<p><i>in this study.</i></p> <p><i>The observation is completely optional.</i></p> <p>_____ <i>If I am selected then I agree to be observed.</i></p> <p>_____ <i>I prefer not to be observed.</i></p>
What are the risks of this research?	<i>There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.</i>
What are the benefits of this research?	<i>This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about migration experiences of immigrant domestic workers.</i>
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	<i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i>
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <p><i>you are at least 18 years of age,;</i></p> <p><i>the research has been explained to you;</i></p> <p><i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i></p> <p><i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></p>
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT
	DATE

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Demographic Information

1. Can you tell me about yourself? How old are you? What's the latest academic degree you earned? How would you identify your social class status?
2. Can you tell me about your family? Do you have any siblings? What are their educational degrees? What do they do now? How about your parents? What are their educational backgrounds? What do they do now?
3. Can you tell me about your living arrangement before moving to the United States?
4. What was your occupation when you decided to become an au pair? If you were working, can describe your workplace and job experiences at home?

II. Motivations to Become an Au Pair and Initial Settlement Plans in the U.S.A.

- 1) How did you decide to become an au pair? What was your motivation?
- 2) How did you get information about au pair programs in the United States? Did you know any au pairs in the United States? If yes, who were they? Did they give you information about living and working arrangements of au pairs?
- 3) What did you know about working and living conditions of au pairs in the United States?
- 4) How did you arrange your travel and work here?
- 5) Did you have any family members, relatives, or friends in the United States prior to in the United States when you decide to participate into the au pair program?
- 6) If yes, have they been effective in your decision to get a job here? If yes, how?
- 7) How did you feel about becoming an au pair in the United States?
- 8) What was your initial settlement plan?

III. Au Pair Placement Experiences

- 1) Can you tell me about how was your first day here? How did you feel when you arrived and met your host family?
- 2) How is your work schedule like? What are your responsibilities?
- 3) How is your relationship with your current employers? How do you feel about working for and living with them?
- 4) How do you spend your free time from work?
- 5) Have you ever contacted your au pair agency? Can you explain me your experience with your agency during your au pair placement?

IV. Transnational Ties, Activities and Practices

1) Are you a member of or participate to any clubs/organizations here? If yes, can you tell me about what kind of activities do they organize, and how are you involved in these activities? What's the meaning of participating to these activities for you?

2) Can you tell me about your communication with people back at home? Whom do you communicate with? How do you communicate with them? How frequently are you in touch with them? How do you feel about your communication with these people?

3) Do you send/receive anything from people you know in your country? If yes, what are they? How frequently?

4) Do you follow up with what's happening in your country? If yes, how often? Are you involved in any activities, organizations, or clubs at home while you are here?

5) How often do you visit home? Can you tell me about what's your typical visit experience is like? How do you feel when visit home? Whom do you see?

6) Has anyone from your home country visited you here? How often you have visitors from your home country?

V. Incorporation into the United States

1) Can you tell me about your friends here? Who are they? How did you get to know them?

2) How often do you see and/or talk to your friends? How close are you with them? What do you do when you get together?

3) Besides friends, are there any other people you can count as a part of your daily life here? Can you tell me about them and your relationship with them?

4) Do you have any American friends? Can you tell me about your relationship with Americans?

5) Do you know anyone from your home country here? Can you tell me about your relationship with them?

6) How do you feel about living in the United States? What do you like and not like about American lifestyle and culture?

7) How is it like to be a/an Eastern/Central European woman here? How do other people treat you when you tell them where you are from? What do you think about their perception of you?

8) Looking back to your ideas and feeling of this country before you moved, and your first day in here, can you tell me how you feel about living here now?

9) Have you ever had an unpleasant situation here? If yes, can you explain what happened? How did you feel about it?

10) Have you ever felt stressed or depressed here? If yes, can please explain what happened? How did you overcome it?

VI. Future Plans

1) Have you accomplished your goals here? Why and why not? Do you have any new goals?

2) Where do you want to see yourself in five years from today?

3) Do you see yourself returning home, staying here, or going anywhere else in close future? Why?

4) Is there anything I haven't asked about your experiences of being an au pair and living in the United States that you want to add?

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