

THOUGH SHE BE BUT LITTLE:
THE SOLO FEMALE TRAVELER AS AN AGENT OF GLOBAL CHANGE

by

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the safety, perceptions, and potential of solo female travel. The two main goals of the project are to highlight the solo female traveler by challenging negative global discourses of gender dynamics surrounding travel, while simultaneously establishing the solo female traveler as an agent for combating negative perceptions about the countries that she may visit. I define the “Solo Female Traveler” as anyone identifying as female who chooses to travel for any amount of time by herself. Historical gender norms have created a system where femininity is often associated with staying at home with your family while masculinity is about striking out on one's own and finding adventure. In another vein, fears about females traveling alone, while sometimes based on fact and reality, are more often based on preconceived notions of certain countries and cultures that are informed by negative global stereotypes and discourses. This project attempts to demonstrate the above points by putting forth two research questions. First, what are the real threats to solo female travelers, and what threats are wrongly perceived? And second, how can the experiences of solo female travelers challenge perceptions of women’s ability to travel alone and transform negative global discourses about safety in different countries? Using four methods (statistical analysis, online ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation), my research yielded three overarching themes: Safety of the solo female traveler, Challenging Stereotypes, and Cosmopolitanism. The perception of the risk that solo female travelers face, part of which

marks entire countries as unsafe, is not equitable to the actual risk that women face while traveling alone. If one attempts to measure the level of safety for a destination it should be done on a localized level. Solo female travelers do have the ability to challenge gender-based and country-based stereotypes by sharing their stories through word of mouth or social media. By participating in the act of traveling alone and coming back with stories to tell, women can learn and spread newfound ideas, as well as give back to their global community. Through this project I came to the conclusion that solo female travel is something that can be done safely, should be encouraged, and has the potential to evoke global change.

I. INTRODUCTION

My entire life I have been drawn to the idea of travel. From the time I was little, looking at the map next to my grandmother's bed and listening to my uncle tell stories about his trips, I knew I wanted travel to be a major part of my life. As I got older, I realized that not only traveling, but traveling alone was important to me. This would give me a chance to really engage with the places I visit and give me the confidence to know I can handle myself in complex situations. However, when I started actually talking to my family and friends about taking these trips, I was faced with their strong fears and reservations. These negative opinions about me traveling by myself didn't seem to be geared towards me directly, though. Instead they seemed to be more based on negative perceptions about the places I wanted to visit; perceptions that, with a little bit of research, often proved false.

It is an unfortunate fact that women everywhere do face an increased amount of challenges and risks when they choose to travel by themselves. With that being said, it is not just these risks that prevent them from seeking out that experience. Many women who would like to travel alone are deterred by societal and familial pressures which, in addition to relying on historical gender dynamics, project perceived risks on to certain countries based upon negative and, at times, falsified information. In reality, solo female travelers have a wide range of experiences when they travel, many of which are mostly positive. Furthermore, many of the countries that are typically dubbed too dangerous, poor, or crime ridden are actually dynamic and unique societies that, most of the time, have perfectly safe areas within their borders. Perpetuating these negative discourses of

place can be detrimental to our global society, as they breed concepts of “otherness” and damage ideals of global citizenship.

To address these issues, I ask the following questions: what are the real threats to solo female travelers, and what threats are wrongly perceived? And furthermore, how can the experiences of solo female travelers challenge perceptions of women’s ability to travel alone and transform negative global discourses about safety in different countries? In order to answer these questions I analyzed statistical data relevant to assessing the actual risk for women traveling alone; observed the online solo female travel community through the medium of Instagram; conducted interviews of women who had traveled by themselves; and personally took a trip to Merida, Mexico on my own in the spring of 2022. Data and information collected using these methods was analyzed using a variety of coding techniques through which I was able to draw conclusions about solo female travel. My conclusions serve to challenge false perceptions of women’s ability to travel alone, as well as reveal truths about the countries they travel in. The ultimate message of this thesis is that solo female travel is something that can be done safely, should be encouraged, and has the potential to evoke global change.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To commence our discussion of the solo female traveler, I will draw from and draw attention to three key concepts: feminist analysis of travel and mobility, the solo female traveler, and global citizenship. Our analytical feminist lens will be mostly in the form of feminist historical geography, which will enable us to talk not only of gender dynamics inherent in travel and the tourism industry, but also about how a feminist perspective can be useful as we strive to understand negative discourses of place and geographies of difference. We will then discuss the concept of global citizenship and how global citizenship education has previously been attempted with the hopes of achieving a new way of thinking about the world. I will also give context for who the solo female traveler is, and ultimately offer solo female travel as a potential avenue for accomplishing this project's goals.

To provide a clearer idea of what the solo female traveler (SFT) is, I offer the following definition. An SFT is anyone identifying as female who chooses to travel for any amount of time by herself. This definition includes women who choose to join in on guided tours and trips that have been created specifically for women groups, as the act of leaving home was still done by the traveler alone. This would also include any woman that met fellow travelers on her trips and decided to travel with them for any amount of time, as she still retains all her personal agency to depart the group and begin to travel alone again.

Feminist Analysis of Travel and Mobility

Over the past few decades, feminist literature has begun to proliferate, however there is still some work to be done in many subdisciplines to firmly establish this

perspective in the academic milieu. One such discipline wherein the feminist perspective has become increasingly more utilized is that of historical geography. While twenty years ago the existence of geographers dubbing themselves both feminist and historical was only just emerging, the subdiscipline has seen a definite new prevalence of feminist approaches thanks to the work of female geographers such as Mona Domosh and Karin Morin (McDonagh, 2018, p.1564).

According to Domosh, feminist historical geography is qualitative work that is ethnographic in nature (Domosh, 2003, p. 262). She advocates for the historical approach to geography, as well as the feminist one, because “as the field is presently constituted, several significant areas of feminist geography make little analytical use of the past or a ‘developing’ present” (Domosh, 2003, p. 260). She uses the example of research into “geographies of women’s fear,” which looks at some of the contemporary challenges women face in domestic city landscapes but gives little attention to the historic variables that create such barriers to women’s safety (Domosh, 2003, p. 260). A further discussion of the geography of women’s fear will be included later, however the point Domosh brings to the table here is that current issues within feminist geography are based upon factors that have long since been perpetuated. Morin asserts that histories are always “presentist,” as their purpose in narrating the past is to develop some sort of understanding about the present (Morin, 1999, p. 313). Using this sentiment, we will analyze how gender dynamics that have been inherent in the travel sphere are still affecting our female travelers today. It is with these ideas in mind, that we choose to use a historical perspective of feminist geography for our study of the travel industry and the various dynamics solo female travelers are faced with.

Feminist historical geographer Briony McDonagh defines the discipline as “scholarship which asks geographical questions of historical material *and* is informed by feminist theories, approaches, and methodologies” (McDonagh, 2018, p. 1564). She also confirms Domosh and Morin’s earlier conclusions about the lack of historical accountability in the construction of gendered dynamics in time and place (McDonagh, 2018, p. 1567). She argues for a furtherance of the discipline regarding intersectionality, asserting that it can make great strides in bringing to the forefront of conversation the histories of non-elite, previously racially or sexually marginalized groups of women (McDonagh, 2018, p. 1571).

The connection between our subject, the solo female traveler, and a feministic approach may seem obvious, but there is more to its value than the simple discussion of gender relations. In feminist historical geography, an emphasis is placed on geographies of difference based on categories such as race and ethnicity, in addition to gender (Domosh, 2003, p. 259). As McDonagh encourages, we may don the hat of a feminist historical geographer to simultaneously examine how gender dynamics are inscribed and reinforced in societal structures and begin an investigation of global discourses that impact perceptions of travel destinations that are more influenced by racial biases than informed conclusion. With this potential for intersectionality, feminist historical geography can be about accounting for gender dynamics and gender influenced forces throughout history, while simultaneously giving due respect to the racial and socio-cultural factors that have also been at work.

For an example of what this would look like and how historical accountability can be useful to us as modern feminist geographer regarding for intersectionality,

we can relate a few of McDonagh's conclusions to Morin's study of British women travel narrative in the nineteenth century American West. McDonagh claims that there are certain emancipatory possibilities in reading and telling "small stories," such as examining oral histories and private writing to make active narrative subjects out of previously little known or forgotten individuals (McDonagh, 2018, p. 1569). This is exactly what Morin does in her examination of the narratives written by British female travelers who, through their explorations and documentation of the American West in the nineteenth century, captured unique windows of Native American life. Morin cites how these travel narratives both perpetuated discourses and stereotypes about Native Americans, and in some ways serve to contradict them (Morin, 1998, p. 316-325). Of course, the limitation here, as Morin attests to, is the lack of agency Native Americans had in shaping these conversations and whether even the respectful female travelers had the right to tell the stories of a culture that was not theirs (Morin, 1998, p. 327-328). There is something to be said for the fact that these travel narratives offer evidence of how Native Americans were treated and how they established themselves in their space as it was being encroached on by white settlers, however retrieving these insights would require a critical reading of the narratives.

A closer examination of gender dynamics in the world of travel and tourism that can be observed by taking a historical feminist approach can be done by addressing the work of Cynthia Enloe. While she doesn't claim to be a specifically historical feminist geographer, she does tackle in depth the topic of historically shaped gender dynamics within travel in her book *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*. In the chapter entitled "Lady Travellers, Beauty Queens, and Chambermaids," she paints an extremely vivid

image of the various aspects of the travel and tourism industry that have been historically gendered and how these historical constructs have perpetuated into the modern day. According to Enloe, while women have always been encouraged, or in most cases forced, to protect their virtue and femininity by remaining close to home and never venturing away from the family, the idea of masculinity has long been associated with adventure and striking out on one's own (Enloe, 2014, p. 40). This foundational concept is the basis for much of the current state of women's relationship to travel and has informed how women have always carried themselves within the industry. It is these historical concepts of femininity and travel that I personally aim to combat with my research.

Global Citizenship and Avenues of TLT

Professors from Manchester Metropolitan University Karen Pashby and Marta de Costa define the transformative global citizen as “reflexive in understanding themselves as intricately connected to people and issues across different scalar boundaries” (2021, p. 382). Global citizenship education aims to promote this idea within the United States and other country's education systems and encourages more attention being given to holistic global dynamics. Thinking of oneself as a global citizen goes against contemporary education practices that rely on westernized, Anglocentric concepts that do nothing but polarize our global society.

Such concepts are captured and perpetuated by the negative discourses of place to which I have previously referred to. According to Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-British sociologist and cultural theorist, a discourse is generally defined as “a coherent or rational body of speech or writing” (1992, p. 201). Hall's, and this paper's, use of the term more

accurately refers to the particular way a place, country, or region is represented (Hall, 1992, p. 201) Here, discourses influence the concepts with which general society views the world around them. Such concepts well known by at least the general American public include the idea of the “First World” vs the “Third World.” This economically based labeling asserts a hierarchy amongst the various countries of the world. Columbian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar describes how the rapid globalization of US domination began the “war on poverty” (1994, p. 21). This effectively led to the wealthy “first world” countries viewing the “third world” countries as inferior and separate. This ideology then influenced the creation of concepts such as the “West” vs the “Rest,” as Hall discusses in his essay, “The West and The Rest: Discourse And Power.” Disguised as geographical concepts, these constructs of modern discourses are actually based off historical development and variables (Hall, 1992, p. 186). The perpetuation of concepts such as these has led many people living in the “West” to see themselves, and the conditions of their countries, as entirely superior to the rest of the world, bifurcating society into the “West and the Rest.” Countries outside of the conceptualized “western world” are labeled as “poor”, “underdeveloped,” or even “Third World.”

The problem with these ways of thinking and the effect they have on those who subscribe to them is that they lead to generalized opinions about cultures and places that do not properly address unique factors and historical nuances of the individual countries. From here you get ideologies that affect the way people view certain countries, and thus may affect how they view their safety level. Somehow “wealthy nation” gets made synonymous to “safe nation.”

Our definition of global citizenship education is any educational program or societal initiative that encourages one to think of themselves as one small part of an incredibly connected global network. Our goal here is to expand our global sense of place and in turn adapt societal discourses about smaller localities to be less overwhelming dismissive and antipathetic.

One approach to challenging negative discourses of place by promoting and adapting concepts of global citizenship is the means of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). TLT is “the process of reframing discriminative, untenable worldviews with a more inclusive, permeable, rational, and reflective epistemology (Gambrell, n.d., p. 99). The point of this concept is that an approach to travel that involves open-mindedness and willingness to truly learn and absorb another culture, is vital for both the traveler, and the place they visit. One such example of the application of TLT in contemporary education is that of study abroad programs. James Arthur Gambrell, a professor of multilingual/multicultural education at Kennesaw State University, conducted a social experiment in which he created and implemented a study abroad program for the purposes of testing TLT’s value and effectiveness. He played the role of a quiet observer while accompanying eight students from rural Midwestern University on their study abroad program in Spain. His goal was to answer the question about if traveling to “other” places and experiencing “otherness” has a significance effect on transformative learning (Gambrell, n.d., p. 99). Unfortunately, his findings were that the students failed to achieve a significant degree of transformation in the development of their socio-cultural awareness and thus the study did not yield the results he had intended.

In going along with the assertion of feminist historical geographers such as Morin, Domosh, and McDonagh, we want to ensure that as we are encouraging the proliferation and normalization of solo female travel, but that we are also making sure to address geographies of difference based on factors such as race and ethnicity, in addition to gender. In counteracting negative discourses of place and certain cultures, we may emphasize the importance of a greater focus in our society and academia on constructing global citizenship as a method of creating more culturally sensitive travelers, as well as a more globally informed public. This project suggests that the promotion of solo female travel, and a subsequent increase in the number of women choosing to travel alone and tell their stories, could have a bigger impact on the way many members of our global society view the world. The goals of my research are to assess the validity of this hypothesis through multiple means, one of which is an analysis of the online solo female travel community as it exists on Instagram, a platform through which people from all over the globe can be reached.

I do not believe that encouraging the act of women traveling alone will in and of itself be sufficient to combat ingrained societal beliefs and structures that have developed from long standing historical forces. With that being said, the point of this research is to offer an avenue of promoting global citizenship that could simply be a helpful piece of the puzzle. According to Gambrell, “transformation commences with cognitive dissonance, when a person is confronted with an idea or experience that contradicts a prior underlying assumption of a personal belief system” (Gambrell, n.d., p.99). The act of a woman traveling by herself not only challenges underlying assumptions about gender dynamics that have been intrinsic in many societies throughout history, it can also

challenge personal beliefs that many hold about the countries these women travel to. As an agent of global change, the solo female traveler will seek to encourage the cognitive dissonance that may lead to a transformation of common negative and false perceptions in global society.

The Solo Female Traveler: Motivations, Issues, Concerns

The idea of solo female travel is not a novel one. Women have long since been pushing the boundaries of gender dynamics to obtain the adventures and experiences that their male counterparts have always been encouraged to pursue. So, what is it about traveling, and traveling alone for that matter, that intrigues some women so much that they are willing to take on the apparent risks? I think it is important to know why women want to travel alone in order for us to grasp 1) the value of the act and 2) the potential for solo female travel being used as a mechanism of global citizenship promotion. In the 2018 study “Women Solo Travellers: Motivations and Experiences” conducted by Andreia Pereira and Carla Silva, the authors cite eight different motivations associated with women deciding to travel on their own. These include challenge and overcoming; self-recognition; contact with other travelers; new life perspectives; escape routine; learning, new experiences, autonomy, and adventure and leisure (Pereira & Silva, 2018, p. 102). Researchers from the Department of Tourism at National Dong-Hwa University, Chiu-Ping Su and Tsung-Chiung Wu, put it well in their article “Solo female travellers’ memorable experiences: positive encounters with male strangers,” when they said that “confronting the stereotypes, solo females take challenges and gain autonomy and empowerment, through which they express independence, and confirm their identity and self-esteem” (Su & Wu, 2021, p. 41).

With the multitude of motivations and reasoning behind traveling alone, why do so many women choose not to? And why is it considered taboo in many cultures and settings? In the article, “The Solo Female Travel Experience: Exploring the Geography of Women’s Fear,” Erica Wilson and Donna Little discuss the impetuses in society that lead to women having fears and paranoias about traveling alone. It asserts that the causes of these fears are less about research and first-hand experience and more a result of societal stigmas and pressures (Little & Wilson, 2008, 167-186). These stigmas emerge in the form of overarching global discourses and in engrained gender dynamics.

In their study about the constraints that inhibit female travelers from setting out alone, Rongcan Yang and Vincent Wing Sun Tung of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at Hong Kong Polytechnic University conclude that one of the greatest inhibitors is family (2018). They found that when families of female travelers did not want their loved one to travel by herself, they would do things such as providing financial incentives to them or finding them travel partners (Yang & Sun Tung, 2018, 514). This is consistent with my own solo travel experience, as when I have wanted to travel alone, I have been bribed to go to places that my family considers safer. While this did not normally change my mind about going on my trip alone, my family did have a major influence over my travel decisions and my mindset when going on the trip.

Catering to the question about what the real risk to SFTs are, I turn back to Su and Wu, and their earlier study in which they dove into the negative experiences that these travelers faced. In this article, “The Dark Side of Solo Female Travel: Negative Encounters with Male Strangers,” Su and Wu discuss some of the real threats women may face when travelling alone, such as sexual harassment and

assault, and the ways they respond to this. In their study, many Taiwanese women said that they refrained from travelling to India alone due to the severe gender inequality and the frequency of sexual assault cases to women (Su & Wu, 2020, p. 389). This study obviously reveals some harsh realities about what women may face when they set out to travel by themselves. With that being said, placing this article side by side with the study about positive experiences of solo female travelers that Su and Wu conduct the following year, a more holistic image is developed. In this article they discuss four divisions of positive encounters experienced by Taiwanese solo travelers: tidbits of travel, acts of kindness, company and friendship, and affective relationships (Su & Wu, 2021, 44). The results of their research indicate that solo female travelers can greatly benefit from interacting with others that they meet on their travels. This comparison highlights the idea that, although there is no denying that women may encounter danger whilst traveling solo, different women have different experiences.

It is unfortunate that women must refrain from gaining such valuable experience due to safety factors that they cannot control. Governments of popular travel destinations- and our own government for that matter, as these safety concerns are not exclusive to foreign countries -should be doing more to mediate these problems. Outside of the simple fact that women are being attacked and need help, many tourist destinations also have financial incentive to fix these issues. From the economic perspective, many countries rely on income from tourism to support their local governments and economies (Enloe, 2014, p.38). By not doing more to address the inherent risks solo female travelers face, they are completely losing out on a demographic that could bring in more money for them through the tourism sector.

Another question we may ask ourselves is how the solo female traveler, or the act of a woman traveling by herself, has manifested and adapted throughout history? To see an example of a woman who, by challenging stereotypes of her race and gender, was able to benefit herself and society through gaining new perspectives by traveling, we can turn to the Begam of Bhopal in the early twentieth century. Nawab Sultan Jahan, who ruled over the Indian state of Bhopal was described in an article written by S.L. Hurley as a “keen traveler” (1998). This was, of course, not typical of Muslim rulers at the time, let alone Muslim women. Through her travels to conduct foreign affairs, the Begam of Bhopal was exposed to other cultures, politics, and life perspectives (Hurley, 1998). She decided to use these new ideas and implement them in the way she ran her country. This is an example of how promotion of global citizenship and intercultural exchange can benefit individual countries and global society. The fact that this was accomplished by a powerful female traveler, and not to mention a head of state, can be used to inspire future solo female travelers to achieve the same.

As I mentioned earlier, the concept of women traveling, alone or otherwise, is not a new and novel idea. With that said, examples of historical female travel are largely variable in form. Let us look back upon the nineteenth century British women travelers that Morin analyzed. Although they may have provided a realm for intersectional study of cultural identity and space, they did so inadvertently and most of the time with less than favorable intentions. By encouraging solo female travel in the modern day, and thus the portrayal and recording of trips that these modern women will take, we will also encourage the development of these realms for intersectional investigation with intentional, respectful, and culturally sensitive motives.

The above bodies of literature are useful for orienting oneself into the context of this project in order to achieve the project's goals. In the following paper, I will investigate the feasibility of my hopes for the solo female traveler. The paper will use content analysis of the online travel community as it exists on Instagram to assess whether or not solo female travel is, or can be, an effective means of promoting global citizenship. It will also explore solo female travel experience through personal interviews of women within the travel industry. Complimented by statistical analysis and observation from my own experience traveling alone to Merida, Mexico, I hope that the research will provide new and valuable insights about the solo female travel community. In the end, I hope that my research will contribute to the literature on solo female travel, feminist historical geography, global discourses and ways to challenge them, as well as overarching travel and tourism studies.

III. METHODS

Four methods were chosen for this project: Statistical Analysis, Semi-Structured Interviews, Online Ethnography, and Participant Observation. These four methods were chosen because they could yield an overall view of the topic of solo female travel and the dynamics surrounding it. The goal was to draw conclusions for the two stated research questions of this project: 1) What are the real threats to solo female travelers, and what threats are wrongly perceived? and 2) How can the experiences of solo female travelers challenge perceptions of women's ability to travel alone and transform negative global discourses about safety in different countries? The statistical analysis mainly informed the first research question, as well as the first-hand accounts from SFTs in the semi-structured interviews. The second question also drew a lot from the interviews, and to a certain extent from the online ethnography. My participant observation served to highlight and confirm conclusions from the other forms of analysis.

1. Data Collection

1.A Statistical Analysis

Finding data that could be specifically linked to the risk involved for women traveling alone proved more difficult than anticipated. This reveals a severe lack in available statistics related to crime in tourism. To mediate this obstacle, I had to rely on inferences from more overarching statistics. One source that was utilized was data UNODC, a database of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. These sources provided country specific rates and counts of a variety of crimes. I chose to look at five data sets that provide statistics on crimes that could be encountered by foreign visitors to a country. These data sets included "Intentional Homicide by sex and citizenship,"

“Theft,” “Sexual Violence,” “Detected Victims of Trafficking,” and “Serious Assault.” I used the data from 2016 as that was the year which had the most recent, consistent data provided. Besides “International Homicide by sex and citizenship,” all of the data is generalized across gender and nationality, relying on the reported cases of each crime by the country specified. None of these data sets provided information for every country, and some did not include the United States, however they yielded enough information about crime across the world to prove relevant.

Next, I analyzed the Global Peace Index Report from the Institute for Economics and Peace which provided data on the level of stability and peacefulness in certain countries. After taking a look at these broad global trends, I focused my attention on the specific chosen case study of Mexico as this is where I chose to travel by myself as part of the participant observation, which I will expand on later. The purpose of observing more specific data on Mexico, rather than solely relying on country-based data is to highlight and encourage the idea of not developing sweeping beliefs about a country’s safety level, when most countries have ranging levels of safety in different areas and cities. My sources of Mexico specific statistics were the UNODC data and the Mexico Peace Index Report of 2021, also created by the Institute for Economics and Peace.

1.B Online Ethnography

My second method for achieving my research goals was an online ethnography of the solo female travel community as it exists on Instagram. I chose to look back at the past 100 post on Instagram with the hashtag “#solofemaletravel.” Within these posts, I used qualitative coding analysis to identify themes in the online community. The codes were detected from the verbiage used in post captions or the pictures the Instagram users

chose to attach to the post. The data was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet for easy observation and comparison. When a theme emerged, I created a column to track the occurrences of the qualitative codes that informed it.

1.C Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to get first-hand accounts of women who have traveled alone, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I chose to conduct the interviews in a semi-structured format in order to ensure that the research questions were being answered while allowing for the discussion to flow and expand naturally. I used Instagram to recruit women who have participated in the act of traveling alone as females. I asked them about their experiences while traveling alone, the comfort levels they had on their trips, the reactions they received when telling people about their travel plans, etc. I wanted to see how the patterns of experience revealed by the women's interviews reflected or clashed with the ideas put forth by the other methods. Seventeen interviews were conducted using a set of seventeen questions. The meetings were over Zoom and lasted anywhere from 25 minute to over an hour, depending on how in depth the interviewees went with their answers.

1.D Participant Observation

Finally, there was my participant observation which I conducted by going on a solo trip to Merida, Mexico on my own. By doing this I was able to observe my own experience and comfort level. My intention was to interview women also travelling alone in Merida in person, but this opportunity did not present itself. My personal observations were recorded in the form of daily field notes on my personal computer. These notes were

uploaded to the Texas State Canvas site for this project and then deleted from my computer.

2. Data Analysis

2.A Statistical Analysis

To analyze the information available in the dataUNODC database, I developed a set of questions meant to reveal global trends, and then compared those trends to the United States and Mexico. For the data on “Sexual Violence,” “Theft,” “Detected Victims of Trafficking,” and “Serious Assault,” I used three questions: 1) What is the highest count per region (continent)? 2) What are the top 3 countries, and what are the bottom 3 countries? 3) Where do the US and Mexico fall in these rankings? Since, “Intentional Homicide by sex and citizenship” was the only data set that could be linked specifically to the female traveler, and it only had data for 31 countries, I approached it with different questions. These questions were: 1) What is the percentage of victims that are foreign and female in each country? 2) Which countries have the highest percentage of foreign female victims? 3) What are the averages for each region (continent). There was not data provided for this crime in the US, however Mexico was included.

I then shifted my attention to the Global Peace Index Report of 2021 and the Mexico Peace Index Report. These reports measured the Global Peace Index scores (GPI) of different geographical areas in the world, which they determined using three domains that the institute has chosen as indicative of peacefulness: Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict, Societal Safety and Security, and Militarization (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2021). They use these domains and a variety of indicators within each of them to judge the absence of violence or the fear of violence. They then

calculate two sub-components, internal peace and external peace, based on the indicators from each domain. The overall score is assigned after a weighted formulation of 60% internal peace and 40% external peace (IEP, 2021). The smaller the score, the more peaceful the area, according to the GPI. After ranking each region, as labeled in the report, I identified which country within the region had the highest score. I then compared this data to the specific information provided for the highest scoring Mexican states and the lowest scoring, to see how they fell into the global rankings.

2.B Online Ethnography

The online ethnography revealed five themes: *Safety*, *Perceptions*, *Challenging Stereotypes*, *Cosmopolitanism*, and *Personal Enrichment*. Each theme was cultivated through the prevalence of related qualitative codes. *Safety* was demonstrated as a theme through the occurrences of the codes “Nerves,” “Fear,” “Violence/Assault,” “Threat,” and “Comfort Level While Traveling Alone” within the research data; *Perceptions* by “Perceptions of Solo Female Travel,” “Fears of the Family,” and “Fears of Society;” *Challenging Stereotypes* by “Personal Perception Changes,” “Inciting Change,” and “Challenging Stereotypes;” *Cosmopolitanism* by “Cultural/Destination Information,” “Exposure to New Ideas,” “Interaction with Locals,” “Cultural Engagement,” and “Authenticity;” and finally, *Personal Enrichment* by “Personal Development,” “Seeking Happiness/Enlightenment,” “Female/Personal Empowerment,” “Pushing Out of Your Comfort Zone,” “Inspiring Others to Travel,” “Making Connections,” and “Personal Agency/Independence.” The degree to which each theme and its respective codes were represented in the data informed the priorities and trends of the online solo female travel community.

2.C Semi-Structured Interviews

To analyze the interviews, I used the same categories of codes and themes that were developed through the Online Ethnography. This proved a useful tool for organizing the discussions and patterns that came up in the interviews, yet in this case the ideas overlapped often. When the responses of the interviewees were catalogued and added to the collected data, I was able to link specific questions asked in the interviews to one or more of the five main themes. This allowed me to see how important the ideas mentioned above were to the interviewees while they were traveling solo. The women were given pseudonyms in order to prevent breaches of confidentiality.

2.D Participant Observation

This part of my research involved addressing my personal experience while traveling alone as a female. After returning from my trip, I reflected upon my personal notes and observations. I looked to see how, if at all, my experience was in line with the conclusions and ideas I had discovered at that point in my research. This method obviously relied on my personal perspective and thus unavoidably holds a level of bias. In the end, the results of this method of analysis mainly served to support the rest of my research.

These four methods yielded three overarching themes: Safety of the Solo Female Traveler, Challenging Stereotypes, and Cosmopolitanism. Each of these themes are demonstrated using three main arguments that provide various ideas about solo female travel. These themes and arguments do overlap in a variety of ways, demonstrating the idea that solo female travel is a dynamic concept that does have a large amount of potential and should be endorsed.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Safety of the Solo Female Traveler

4.1.A Where is the Danger?

The main idea that came out of the analysis pertaining to a woman’s actual level of safety was that no one region is inherently more dangerous than another for women to travel to by themselves. Determining safety on a regional level based on averages from full countries or continents is insufficient in developing a clear picture of how safe a certain region is. It is more valuable to look at data on a localized level.

Figures 1.A-1.C capture the data analyze from dataUNODC. Rates for Sexual Violence and Theft were given per 100,000 population (Figure 1.A). Out of the five regions that had data provided for Sexual Violence, Europe had the highest rate at 209.3, with the Americas following shortly behind at 207.7. The three countries with the highest rates were the UK, Grenada, and New Zealand, while the lowest rates were held by Senegal, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan. For theft, highest rated region for this crime was Europe at 3,948.47, followed by the Americas at 3358.07. The three highest rated countries are Denmark, Sweden, and Uruguay, while the lowest rated were Kenya, Nepal,

	Sexual Violence	Theft
Highest Regional Rate	Europe (209.3)	Europe (3,948.47)
Top 3 Countries	UK, Grenada, New Zealand	Denmark, Sweden, Uruguay
Bottom 3 Countries	Senegal, Pakistan, Azerbaijan	Kenya, Nepal, Myanmar

Figure 1.A Sexual Violence and Theft cases in rates per 100,000 population

and Myanmar. The next crime was Detected Victims of Trafficking, but the data provided was in the form of counts instead of rates (Figure 1.B). The highest country count was held by the U.S. at

5,582, followed by France at 1,516, and Nigeria at 1,017. The lowest country counts were in Georgia, Brunei Darussalam, and Swaziland, all of whom only has one case.

Detected Victims of Trafficking	
Highest Country Counts	Lowest Country Counts
U.S. (5,582)	Georgia (1)
France (1,516)	Brunei Darussalam (1)
Nigeria (1,017)	Swaziland (1)

Figure 1.B Detected Victims of Trafficking in Counts by Country

Intentional Homicide of Foreign Females	
Top Five Countries	Bottom Five Countries
Switzerland	Honduras
Spain	Mexico
Germany	Guatemala
Slovenia	Ecuador
Grenada	Serbia

Figure 1.C Top/Bottom Five Countries ranked by reported cases of Intentional Homicide

detected. Lastly, I analyzed the

data on Intentional Homicide by sex and citizenship

provided by dataUNODC, measured in the percentage Foreign Females murdered in the country (Figure 1.C). The five countries with highest percentages were Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Slovenia, and Grenada. The lowest percentages were held by Honduras, Mexico, and Guatemala, Ecuador, and Serbia. There are evident problems with this data.

To begin, not every country was represented with every data set, which makes comparative analysis difficult. Also, a lot of the data relies on the assumption that each country has reported the correct numbers for each of these crimes to the United Nations.

Both of these facts yield to the idea that the data is not entirely reliable, however it is the data available, and if more reliable data is not made easily accessible to the public, then it will remain difficult for the common researcher to make inferences from these statistics.

In line with this reasoning, this paper does not take the data at face value and instead draws the general conclusion that these crimes, which may be faced by travelers in

foreign countries, are not exclusive to any one region. With that being said, European countries and countries in the Americas do hold the highest rates/counts in each crime according to these statistics.

In lieu of definitive statistical data with which to make firm conclusion, I turned to the first-hand accounts of the solo female travelers that I interviewed. These interviews were more reliable for determining the level of safety women face when traveling alone, as the women shared their real personal experiences. 9 out of 17 women interviewed put forth the sentiment that they did not feel any more at risk traveling alone as they do when alone in their own hometowns. Cairo expressed that “as women, you know we’re unsafe in many contexts, you know it could literally be me walking down my neighborhood street.” Another woman who grew up in the United States said that she actually felt less safe here than in certain other countries. 7 women total explicitly cited being catcalled, what seems to be the most common form of harassment that women face. 3 women recalled stories of physical assault in the form of groping and, in one case, theft. It is important to note that these cases were experienced by women on isolated occasions within long histories of solo travel.

7 women recalled feeling nervous in the beginning of their travels and having to overcome a certain level of fear, however all of these women claimed to have had happy and enriching experiences that made them glad they pushed pass their initial nerves. A few of the women did have tips for safety tips that they would urge others to follow. For most of the women, being safe simply meant being aware of your surroundings, and the idea came up in two interviews that this was actually easier to do while alone. Multiple women discussed being more open and aware of their surroundings while traveling alone,

but Sarajevo and Lisbon explicitly linked this to the ability to constantly assess your safety and level of comfort. These ideas of overcoming nerves, following general safety tips, and being aware of your surroundings reveal that safety is something that is on these women's minds when they travel alone. No woman made the claim that there isn't inherent risk involved when you decided to travel by yourself, however none of them felt as if the danger was great enough to not engage in solo travel. The women instead link the danger that is involved to larger societal issues that women have to face in their day to day lives, regardless of if they are traveling or not.

In my participant observation, I shared similar feelings about my safety as the women I interviewed. The first evening I was there, before I had a chance to look around, I was fairly nervous which led me to not sleep well. However, as soon as I woke up and got a feel for Mérida, I felt better. I did not feel more nervous or uncomfortable than I have in other solo situations at home, and in fact I found an immense amount of friendliness in the town. With that being said, I did find myself more hyperaware of my surroundings which allowed me to be judging my level of safety constantly, and I feel like I really benefitted from this.

From the above evidence I reached the conclusion that the level of danger that a woman may face when traveling alone is not explicitly linked to one country or region. There is an inherent amount of risk that women deal with in their day to day life that does not stop when they decide to travel, but the evidence does not suggest that the decision to travel increases this risk. Moving forward, I will discuss the large gap between the real level risk that women face and the perceived danger that many people believe exists for women in these contexts.

4.1.B Danger Levels Within Countries

I would like to reiterate that the main argument on this paper is not that there is zero risk to women who choose to travel alone. I also would cede that there are places in

the world that women would encounter an increased amount of danger. My argument is

<u>Region</u>	<u>GPI</u>
Europe	1.607
North America	1.834
Asia-Pacific	1.887
Central America and the Caribbean	2.142
South America	2.18
Russia & Eurasia	2.213
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.263
South Asia	2.392
Middle East & North Africa	2.459

Figure 2 GPI Scores by region ranked from lowest to highest

<u>Region</u>	<u>GPI</u>
Yucatán, Mx	1.318
Tlaxcala, Mx	1.587
Europe	1.607
Chiapas, Mx	1.613
Campeche, Mx	1.691
North America	1.834
Asia-Pacific	1.887
Central America and the Caribbean	2.142
South America	2.18
Russia & Eurasia	2.213
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.263
United States	2.337
South Asia	2.392
Middle East & North Africa	2.459
Mexico	2.62
Colima, Mx	4.203
Baja California, Mx	4.411

Figure 2.B GPI Scores by region ranked from lowest to highest with Mexican states, Mexico, and the U.S.

that these places are not overarching countries or regions, but instead should be identified on the localized level. As previously mentioned, an analysis of the Global Peace Index Report of 2021 and the Mexico Peace Index Report of 2021, both created by the Institute for Economics and Peace, yielded support to

the argument of localized identification of safety. In Figure 2.A you can see the GPI's for

each region of the world, as identified and measured by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP, 2021). Europe has the lowest score, indicating they are the most peaceful by the standards of the GPI. Following Europe is North America, which for the purposes of this data includes the United States and Canada. The region with the highest score is the Middle East & Africa. However, it is important to understand that these numbers are not equitable or indicative of specific country scores within the regions. For example, while North America has a score of 1.834, this is a median between Canada's score of 1.33 and the United States' score of 2.337 (IEP, 2021). This reveals that the U.S. scores worse than 7 out of 9 regions of the world. Another example is the country of Qatar, classified as part of the Middle East, which has a score of 1.605 (IEP, 2021). This score reveals that Qatar actually has a higher level of peaceful than Europe, even though the Middle East region as whole ranks as the most violent. The overall point here is that the individual countries are not always as dangerous as the region to which they are placed in. In addition, I would go a step further to say that even country-based scores are not indicative of the amount of danger you would face when traveling to more specific places within the country. Mexico is the perfect example with which to illustrate this point. While the overall country GPI score is 2.62, the scores of individual Mexican states, received from the Mexico Peace Index Report of 2021, range from 1.318-4.11 (IEP, 2021). The state of Yucatán, where I went for my participant observation, has a score of 1.318 (IEP, 2021). This score is well lower than all regional scores, including Europe and North America. In fact, two Mexican states (Yucatan and Tlaxcala) are ranked as more peaceful than Europe, while four (Yucatan, Tlaxcala, Chiapas, and Campeche) are ranked more peaceful than North America. The higher overall score of Mexico is influenced by

the scores of states such as Baja California, which scores 4.411, and Colima, which scores 4.203 (IEP, 2021). This data can be found in Figure 2.B, which allows for the comparison between these Mexican states, regional scores, and the country scores of Mexico and the U.S. This table highlight the idea that when you looked at levels of danger and peace on a more localized levels, you get a more dynamic picture of the degree of safety that one may encounter when traveling in specific places around the world.

The idea that use should may more attention to localized conditions was put best by Copenhagen who said she “visited countries where there are bits of that country you don't go to, there's bits that are in a current conflict, in a war... but you can still be in the same country and not go to the conflict zone and there's a lot else happening, you know countries are big places.” From this line of reasoning, we can conclude that the best way to find out what parts of the world would be safe to travel to alone is by looking into current events and where the situations we would like to avoid are actually happening.

4.1.C Disjuncture Between Real and Perceived Risk

In the interviews, the women spoke about the reactions they received when telling their families and friends about their solo travel plans. These accounts proved similar to those that I faced when I told people I was going to Merida. All of the women discussed encountering some degree of concern and/or judgement when people found out they would be traveling alone. The online ethnography did not contribute much to the development of this argument, as only one post of the hundred analyzed referenced perceptions of safety. In ta post about Egypt, the user said she had kept rescheduling her trip because “may people influenced (her) that Egypt would be unsafe to travel to alone.”

This reflects that there is a negative perspective towards Egypt in the society that this woman is surrounded by. However, the user's post was about how amazing her trip was and that she felt safe there, implying that the perspective was false.

The majority of the concern that these women encountered was from friends and family that were simply concerned about the well-being of their loved one. I asked each of these women where they thought the root of the concerns were, and the theme arose that these concerns were informed by stigmas surrounding women being alone and certain countries that have a negative reputation on the global scene. Here I specifically choose the word stigma, instead of prejudice, though the latter is not entirely inaccurate, because none of the women seemed to think that these gendered or geographically based stereotypes were observed out of intentional malice from their families or friends. Instead, these stigmas were the result of long-standing ideas about womanhood and general perceptions of countries based on global discourse and media.

The discussions that arose in the interviews pertaining to gender-based stigmas were consistent with the ideas revealed from the literature review, especially Cynthia Enloe's idea about the traditional ways in which men and women have been encouraged to participate in the act of travel. In society, it is often believed that women must have some sort of male partner or escort in order to ensure her safety and virtue. To hear Budapest say it, "there's kind of a societal standard that women should depend on men... there's an undercurrent of that here and there, like it's not expected for women to travel by themselves." Some of the women were married, and a couple discussed the fact that they receive judgement or shock when people learn that they sometimes chose to leave their partner to travel solo. This yielded to the idea that many believe when women do

choose to travel alone, it is only because they don't have another option. Berlin recalled that many people thought it sad and lonely traveling by herself. She was happy and confident about her travel choices, and other began to project their concerns and opinions on to her. These stigmas that women are dependent upon men for protection and are always lonely and sad when by themselves perpetuate sentiments that solo travel is unsafe for women.

In addition to these gender-based stigmas, the discussions in the interviews supported the conclusion that perceived risk of solo travel is reinforced by negative societal stigmas against certain countries. You will recall that Qatar was a Middle Eastern country that actually ranked really well on the Global Peace Index. Due to its positioning in a region that has been a hotbed of conflict in recent history, people assume that it must be just as unstable and dangerous as some of its neighbors. Oslo, who spent time study abroad in Qatar while in college, knows differently. Since many of her family and friends didn't know where Qatar was, she said they were initially excited for her. Yet, as soon as she told them where it was located in the world, they were instantly terrified. She says, "it was just like pure prejudice and like blanket statement... I had already gone, and I found it to be incredibly nice and hospitable... and all these people that didn't even know what Qatar was were telling me like it's a terrible idea."

A lot of this stigma seems to arise from what Athens would call the "fear of the unknown." Madrid discussed the fact that citizens of every country seem to think that their country is the safe place, while foreign countries are inherently more dangerous. Familiarity is apparently exclusively linked with safety. Furthermore, it does not help a person's perception of a country when the only they hear about it negative media or

global discourse. Copenhagen put forth the idea that various countries have something attached to their name that leads people to make instant judgements about them. This stereotype-based association came up in a multiple interview; examples include Mexico & drug cartels and Thailand & sex slavery. Almost everyone that I told about my travel plans were instantly concerned about me going to Mexico by myself. The fact that I was going to specifically Mérida, a statistically safe place, did not seem to ease anyone's nerves on the matter. I received comments related to the cartel, sex slavery, and other dangerous situations that some believe I was almost certainly going to fall into.

The perpetuation of these gender-based stigmas and stereotypes of countries through media such as news and/or television continuously supports, and the amount of perceived risk people assign to solo travel. However, as seen from the statistical analysis and other points of discussion within the semi-structured interviews, the level to which this risk is perceived is not equitable to the amount of risk actually involved in the act of women traveling alone. The large disparity between real and perceived risk is evident in this research.

4.2 Agents of Change: Challenging Stereotypes

The previous section of discussion was meant to answer the first research question of this project pertaining to real and perceived risks involved with solo female travel. In the next two sections, I work towards answering the second research question: How can the experiences of solo female travelers challenge perceptions of women's ability to travel alone and transform negative global discourses about safety in different countries? This question is meant to inform the potential that solo female travelers have to act as agents of change. The first way in which solo female travelers can contribute to global

change is by challenging stereotypes, both gender-based and those based on countries or regions.

4.1.A Challenging Gender Based Stigmas

Solo female travelers can help to challenge stereotypes against women traveling alone by doing just that; traveling solo and coming back and sharing their stories. When a woman goes a trip on her own and comes back safe, well, and possibly even better than before, it shows the people around her that solo travel is a possibility for women. The act of traveling solo is in and of itself an active challenge to gender-based stigmas within the realm of travel and mobility. Another interviewee, Cairo, believes that it is “so important to break those narratives because we [women] can exist in any form that we want to.” Her point was that a woman should be able to seek out the personal enrichment that can come from solo travel no matter what her status is (single, married, divorced, etc.).

Challenging these stigmas can lead to inspiring other women to travel. 15 out of 17 interviews mentioned either being inspired by other women they saw traveling solo or inspiring others to do what they do. By sharing their stories, in direct conversation or through social media, female travelers can show people what their experiences are like. In the online ethnography of the solo female travel community on Instagram, Challenging Stereotypes was not a prominent theme. No posts directly talked about challenging stereotypes and only one seemed directly meant to inspire solo female travelers. However, even though the posts didn’t explicitly put forth ideas of challenging stigmas, their existence speaks for itself. Women can see posts that are simply about another

woman's positive travel experience in Colombia, and that indicates to them that having such an experience is within their reach.

In another part of her interview, Cairo say that "this will help a lot of females to realize that there are pockets of other females, that they can be inspired by, they can meet up with, they can learn from." This point reinforces the inspiration aspect of challenging these gendered stigmas, and references another: that women can learn and teach others how to decrease any risk that may exist. As mentioned before, a few of the women told me some of the safety tips they tend to follow when they travel alone. One that was less obvious but definitely helpful was from Athens, who said that if she ever does find herself lost, she doesn't wait around for someone to ask her if she is okay. Instead, she is proactive and about finding someone to help because it means she gets to choose who she is interacting with. This is an insightful piece of advice that will influence my future actions when traveling and is a prime example of how solo female travelers can share their knowledge with one another. This exchanging of knowledge, telling of stories, and general promotion of the positivity that traveling alone can create for women, will do a lot to challenge negative perspectives of women's ability to travel alone.

4.1.B Challenging Country Based Stigmas

In a similar way to fighting gender-based stereotypes, the best way for solo female travelers to challenge stereotypes that countries are too dangerous, is to travel to those countries and share their stories, revealing that the countries they went to are safer than many believe. The interviews were, again, the most useful analysis method in yielding this conclusion. Multiple women had specific examples of times they attempted to or succeeded in changing someone's perspective about a certain country. This did not

happen in all cases, for a lot of concerns and reactions that women received when telling people of their plans to travel to certain countries did not automatically change. Many talked about how their parents were concerned towards the beginning of their travels, but some parents got more comfortable with the idea of their daughter traveling to certain places by herself the she went on trips and came back safely. Seoul, whose parents were scared of her solo traveling, although never stopped her, said ““But now that they see she went to Mexico she went to Chile, she went to Columbia everything went fine, so they trust me now.”

Copenhagen recounted a story of when her group of friends wanted to meet somewhere in the world, and she suggested Kenya, having been in Africa for a long time and found Kenya to be a great destination. Her friends were hesitant at first, not believing Kenya to be anything more than deserts and maybe safari. However, they went on the trip and had a great time, and their perceptions of the country really changed. Though not everyone has the capability to plan trips for all their friends to go various locations around the world, this kind of perceptions challenging can, as with the gender-based perceptions, be done by simply telling stories or by a solo female traveler sharing her experiences on Instagram. In the online ethnography, 60% of the posts provided some sort of information about a culture or destination that the user was traveling in. The more people are shown that particular destinations are more than the headlines and general stereotypes, the more their minds can be opened and global discourses about certain countries can be changed.

4.1.C Changing Personal Perceptions and Biases

Another important thing to note is that, in addition to giving women the ability to convince others that the stereotypes they subscribe to are false, the act of traveling gives the women themselves the opportunity to challenge any internal prejudices and biases they may have had. As previously mentioned, a lot of the women claimed to have been nervous in the beginning of their solo travels. These nerves were most likely fueled by their lack of experience at that point, and the exposure to negative ideas and perceptions informed by societal stigma. What helped these women overcome their fear was pushing through it, and they went on to have incredible experiences.

Interviewee Oslo noticed an interesting thing happen into her perspective after visiting Jordan. Where thinking about Jordan before, she tended to think about it as indistinguishable from the rest of Middle East, as many in American society do, and equate it with conflict, war, and terrorism. After going to Jordan, she now has a different image of it in her head. She recalls the experience like this, “you know that's just what colors our view of the Middle East, but the second that you meet a friend from Jordan... you like erase terrorism from that little speck that's Jordan and... when I hear about Jordan I don't have this like blanket like ‘oh they're just like scary over there’... no that's my friend Natalie and her family.” She now associates Jordan with that positive experience and, by doing that, she has cut through the fog of conflict and exposed some humanity; humanity which exists all over the world.

I did experience a version of this within my participant observation. Growing up in Texas, one is often taught to think of Mexico as poor, crime-ridden, and dangerous. If I am being honest with myself, a year ago I probably wouldn't have believed that there were places within Mexico that I could travel to outside of tourist resorts. Then I listened

to podcasts and saw social media posts about women traveling alone in Mexico, and I started doing research that showed that Mérida was a very safe destination. Even then, I was nervous in the beginning and concerned that the stigmas I had been exposed to my whole life were right. Now, my image of Mexico is the friends I made and the beautiful Nayah cenote that I was able to visit. I am glad that I was able to challenge my personal perceptions and I hope that this project can encourage others to do the same.

4.3 Agents of Change: Cosmopolitanism

4.3.A Exposure to New Ideas

The theme of Cosmopolitanism creates ideas about the act of women traveling solo can inform a more global oriented mindset and develop global citizens. One prominent way form of this is the increased exposure to new ideas that one receives with traveling, and even more so traveling alone. Traveling by yourself gives you increased amounts of opportunity to make connections with people, both locals and other travelers. A noticeable theme in the interviews were that women, even while solo traveling, were very rarely by themselves, and that it was actually much easier to meet people when they didn't have a travel partner. Oslo said that there is an evident difference between the amount of people who started conversations her when she was traveling alone and the amount of times it happens when she is with her husband.

These interactions are valuable because they allow the women to expand their minds and develop a greater understanding about the world, as well as see ways in which their own local society could be improved. Kabul put it as, "it's hard to be closed minded when you've done traveling," and she later added "you know you're put in unfamiliar situations and there's a lot of challenges to your worldview and trying not to take your

perception of the world and overlay it into your experience.” A few women found themselves to be generally more empathetic people after having these experiences. This understanding and empathetic sentiments can serve to develop global citizens that want to work towards achieving more global harmony. Furthermore, once one is exposed to these new ideas and ways of perceiving the world, they can come back and share these newfound perspectives. This can create a cosmopolitanism global environment where it is encouraged to learn from one another instead of separating ourselves through perpetuating false perceptions and stereotypes.

4.3.B Giving Back

Another cosmopolitan ideal that can be realized through solo female travel is giving back to global community. While traveling alone, women could participate in volunteer work or local initiative in the places that they travel to. This activity is not obviously not exclusive to solo travel or females in general but being alone does gives you more power to choose what you are doing. This means you can choose to use your time to volunteer if that’s what you want, and you can also choose where you want to spend your money, such as locally run businesses or programs that contribute to local initiatives. One interviewee has a particularly interesting way of giving back to the communities she travels in. She actually goes to tourism department websites or contacts them to directly to ask them if they have recommendations for helping support the local community. This is an incredible example of being a respectful and considerate tourist. All travelers should look into how they can embody this kind of sentiment and traveling alone opens up your flexibility in order to act upon it while on a trip.

4.3.C Social Media’s Role

As has been alluded to in this project, social media is a very valuable platform through which we can spread information and newfound perspectives on a higher scale. Additionally, social media can provide the infrastructure through which large communities can be made and band together to make global change. In the online ethnography, 66% of posts fell within the theme of Cosmopolitanism, by far the most prominent theme to come out of that mode of analysis. The majority was simply cultural/destination information, but there were also multiple posts that expressed the users positive experiences in engaging with new people and cultures. These posts about interacting with locals and learning new things, are a way to demonstrate what is really out there in the world when you push passed false perception.

Through interviewing women from the solo female travel community, I learned more about the community in general. One of the things I found were the various online communities that cater to solo female travels, as well as travelers in general. The communities are organized to various degree. Host a Sister is a Facebook group and an example of an online community in which women who love travel can interact with one another. In this group, women can post where they are traveling to and find other women in the group that willing to let them stay with them for free. Women can also find travel partners, people to meet up with when they are in new cities and share their experiences. When the current Ukrainian crisis started in Eastern Europe, this group mobilized in a beautiful. It started when a couple women posted offers to any Ukrainian refugees who needed a place to stay. Then the offers started to increase to the point where the moderators decided to make a spreadsheet to organize everyone asking for and accepting the help. This was entirely grassroots, humanity driven example of making a global

difference. It is beautiful to think that a Facebook group could have such a big impact, and it reveals the power that social media can have.

V. CONCLUSION

This project aimed to draw attention to the solo female traveler as an agent with the ability to challenge historical gender dynamics surrounding travel as well as combat negative perceptions about the countries that she may visit. To achieve this goal, I asked two research questions: 1) What are the real threats to solo female travelers, and what threats are wrongly perceived? and 2) How can the experiences of solo female travelers challenge perceptions of women's ability to travel alone and transform negative global discourses about safety in different countries? In an effort to answer these questions I employed four main methods that would yield a wide view of the act of solo female travel.

My statistical analysis proved useful in providing a quantitative look at the level of danger that solo female travelers could potentially face. My semi-structured interviews supplied the greatest amount of valuable and supportive research, as the women were able to give accounts of solo female travel that both revealed prominent patterns and opened my eyes to a wide range of ideas about the world and the act of traveling solo. The online ethnography did not produce as much helpful data as was hoped. If I was to revise my implementation of this research method, I would analyze a greater amount of posts with the hashtag “#solofemaletravel” over a longer amount of time - such as 200 posts on four separate days spread out over several weeks. Finally, while my participant observation did not provide an immense amount of physical data or information that wasn't gained from one or more of the other research methods, I believe that it gave me the necessary perspective and credibility to complete this project.

In my research, three themes emerged which highlighted the safety of solo female travelers, the potential they have to challenge both gender-based and country-based stereotypes, and their capability to promote cosmopolitan ideals. From the various arguments that arose from these themes, I would put forth two key takeaways. First, that there is no one region of the world, such as Latin America or the Middle East, that is inherently more dangerous than another on a national or supranational scale. Levels of safety should be measured by localities ranging from neighborhoods to cities at the most. Using any larger scales runs the risk of developing false perceptions and negative stereotypes of locations and cultures that are incredibly diverse and dynamic. Second, solo female travel is something that can be done safely and successfully, and simply by doing it and sharing their stories, solo female travelers can incite global change. Using social media, women can reach wide audiences and show them the experiences they have had as solo travelers in various countries. If this message is put forth consistently, then the narratives of both women's abilities to travel alone and the level of safety in the countries they travel to can begin to shift in overarching global discourse.

In addition to a revised version of the online ethnography, I would also, in future research, look more into the negative societal perceptions that this project aimed to combat. A survey meant to reveal the general population's specific views on women traveling alone, as well as safety in certain regions such as Latin America, would prove useful. Lastly, I would seek out more examples like *Host a Sister*, in which social media was used on a larger scale to make a global difference, to further support the idea that social media is a valuable medium for inciting change.

This project should be used as a jumping off point for more discussion on how we can make a world where solo female travel is not perceived as dangerous or undoable. In the area of feminist analysis of travel mobility, this research may serve as a new chapter in the development of women's relationship to travel. A new dynamic in which women are encouraged to travel alone and feel empowered by the action is a large yet necessary departure from historical perspectives on the matter. The potential of the solo female traveler to incite global change through the act of traveling and sharing her stories informs both the general literature on the solo female traveler herself, as well as global citizenship. For the latter, solo female travel creates a valuable medium through which we can endorse cosmopolitan ideas. This research serves to not only highlight solo female travel within academic study, but also provide foundational support to a community that can have a positive impact on global society. This paper encourages women who are not yet sure about taking solo journeys to seek out the enrichment and empowerment inherent in solo travel and provides them with a means through which they can be agents of global change.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Do you identify as female?

To what extent have you traveled by yourself?

Do you enjoy traveling by yourself?

For you, what is the difference between traveling by yourself as opposed to having a travel partner or traveling with a group?

Can you tell me about positive experiences you have had while traveling alone?

What do you think the benefit of traveling alone is in general, as well as for females specifically?

Have you ever received any backlash, judgement, or disapproval from friends, family, or anyone that you have discussed solo travel plans with?

If so, why do you think they were concerned about your travel plans?

Have you ever felt unsafe while traveling alone? If so, could you tell me about that experience?

Have you ever been a victim of violence or harassment while traveling alone?

If so, did that incident change your view on solo female travel at all?

Do you have plans to travel by yourself again?

How has your perception of the world changed since you started traveling alone?

Have perspectives of the people around you changed at all since you started traveling alone and sharing your stories?

As someone who is active in the solo female travel community, do you think that the community has the potential to produce and affect social or global change?

Do you believe solo female travel is something that should be endorsed and encouraged?

Why do you travel as a solo female?

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