

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF SPACE AND PLACE-  
MAKING ON UMBC'S CAMPUS  
LANDSCAPE

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In this dissertation, I used a mixed method approach to explore university students' perspectives regarding their spatial awareness as it relates to their culture and identity. The campus of University of Maryland, Baltimore County served as a test case for both a pilot study and a main study during the 2018 spring and fall semesters, respectively. After securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I asked the student-participants to engage in a project in which they used Photovoice, and these students completed a survey about their experiences and perspectives regarding the topic of how their academic, social, and cultural identities shape the meaning of space and place on campus. I then asked these very same students who participated to take photographs regarding six prompts to represent the spaces on a spectrum such as "exclusionary to inclusionary," "proud to embarrassed," and "taking away from to beneficial" (in terms of their academic success). In this study, I aimed to demonstrate how the participants learn to behave, as well as how they contest and/or negotiate their identities in academic spaces.

A large body of evidence has shown that empowerment education such as photovoice can play an important role in students' inquiries about their natural surroundings and can improve their critical sociocultural awareness (Goodman et al, 2018; Gutierrez & Wolff, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). This awareness is better known as *Spatiality*. Through the analysis of students' spatial awareness in their photographs, I argue that photovoice is a student-centered approach to learning by which students can identify problems in their communities, as well as represent and enhance those communities through specific empowerment techniques. I applied the theoretical framework of spatiality, in which people's spatial awareness is defined as a coded expression in the environment in which they conquered spaces and created meaning from places; this framework explains the sociocultural, environmental, and ecological forces that impact people's lives and communities (Massey, 1994 & 1998). I used this framework to critically explore Paulo Freire's application of problem-solving strategies in educational spaces described in *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, as well as Doreen Massey's *For Space* starting with the central idea that people see and examine common issues to create meaningful experiences and dialogue. Future research could also consist of even giving an opportunity for graduate and undergraduate students to work on a research project and presentation coming out of this dissertation.