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In an effort to better understand the intersection between space, place, and sexual identity mapping over time, this study utilized qualitative interview data to identify how the concepts of space and place that are present within our culture helped young women develop their sexual identities. This study focused specifically on the homosocial educational space of an all-women's college. This study consisted of a sample size of sixteen young women, each of them at a different stage in their college careers. This study measured which factors played a part in each young woman's decision to attend an all-women's college, how new friendships were formed, how their decision to attend this college affected their familial relationships, and what their college experiences were like.

ARE WE THERE YET? THE MAPPING
OF SEXUAL IDENTITY
OVER TIME

by

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To my children, Joshua Thomas Doyle and Jacob Aaron Doyle, it has been a long hard road, but I have made it. I just want you both to know that you can realize your dreams, no matter how old you are. To my wife, Lucy Crawford Dunn, I could not have completed this part of my education without your unfailing support and love. To my parents, Tony and Charlene Dancy, whose words of encouragement and tenacity will always ring in my ears; I am forever in your debt.

APPROVAL PAGE

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PREFACE

Being There: A Prelude

Clifford Geertz (1988) argues that one way of assuring our audience views our fieldwork critically is not merely our retelling of the stories we have heard, but also our potential to write about our experiences of having "been there" (p. 16). My experiences as a student, an alumna, and adjunct instructor at Salem College have allowed me to see what these young women see, hear what they hear, and feel what they feel. The following narrative is one way of navigating this conceptualization of homosocial relational place and echoes my own stories of both the college at which I studied and where I returned as an instructor.

With the glow of the morning sun lighting the way, I walk across cobblestoned sidewalks and stop to listen to the tolling of the bells from Home Moravian Church, announcing the hour. A soft breeze stirs leaves of ivy climbing up aged red brick walls. Looking up, majestic white columns rise from the brick staircase leading into Main Hall. The main entrance into Salem College looks even more imposing close up. Doors, heavy with layers of white paint, swing slowly open and once inside, the palpable stillness envelopes me like a cocoon. There is a faint musty smell, reminiscent of old lace stored in trunks in an attic, with just a hint of the modern smell of cleaning supplies. Finely splintered sunlight streams in through stained-glass windows, softly illuminating the pale

green walls, adorned with portraits of benefactors long since passed and wooden floors, which are worn to a soft patina from hundreds of years of use. Soon this area will be bustling with activity, but for now, the only sound is the ticking of the ancient grandfather clock, slowly counting down the minutes until the bells toll for morning classes to begin.

The smell of boxwoods intermingles with the loamy scent of freshly turned earth. Looking out over the back porch of Main hall, a small courtyard surrounded by massive old oak trees provides a playground for numerous grey squirrels and a sitting area for the students. This juxtaposition of modernity and timelessness creates the backdrop against which the sounds of students' voices echo through the courtyard. Two students walk by me, lost in their own thoughts, until one yells "I love you" and the other one replies "I like you a lot" to which the other one responds, "UGH!" and finally the student whispers "I love you too, Katlyn".

I continue walking towards the library. The smells of old books and fresh coffee greet me as I enter Gramley library's lobby. The walls of the lobby are adorned with students' artwork and a few stand-alone pieces grace the floor, lending an aura of sophistication to this space. I go through a glass door, which separates the lobby from the actual library. The smell of coffee is stronger now. There are three students sitting on rust colored couches around a fireplace, all with laptops and earphones. All I can hear are the key strokes as they type furiously away, I wonder if one of them is Emily. As I approach the young women, a redheaded young woman is approaching me from the stacks, "Excuse me, are you Ms. Doyle?" she asks almost shyly. "Why yes and you must

be Emily” I reply. Emily nods her head in agreement while walking towards one of the yellow chairs that flank the couches, coming to rest hesitantly on one of the arms. I immediately try to put Emily at ease by introducing myself as an alumna of Salem. This seems to do the trick and Emily settles down into the chair crossing her legs underneath her. After a few minutes of commiserating about shared professors and experiences, I ask Emily to talk to me about her high school experiences. Her story begins.

Emily

I was the senior class president at an all-girl’s high school. I consider myself social; I rather went with the flow. Over the summer of my junior year, I started losing weight and people really starting to notice me. I played softball all four years and because I participated in a sport, I had many friends and felt included and on the same page as everyone else, however, this was not always the case. When I started high school, I had my first “real” boyfriend and I rather neglected my friends to hang out with him all the time. I dated him through my sophomore year and we broke up over the summer, which I was somewhat glad we did. I had started to notice my friends were not talking to me as much and that really bothered me. You see, my friends were more like my family. I mean I had a somewhat ok family life, but I had started shutting out my family when my baby sister was born. This created a very uneasy relationship with them.

In Emily’s own words, she describes the feelings that she felt towards her family during this time.

Before the end of middle school I was really close to them, and because I had those problems with friends and the social, the social scene, like as far as being

accepted, I was picked on a lot so like my family was like my best friends. So, once I started getting that social feeling and atmosphere of being involved and being like popular, or whatever, being around my friends, like I just kinda shut them out. But once I got to the point where I realized your family's there for you all the time, where your friends may not be, then you know, and I needed their help, so I asked them for it and they gave it to me. We became a lot closer. Plus I'm older so I think like it was like, I shut my mom out until I got to college. I didn't really want to tell them anything about me, like, I just kinda wanted to be left alone and a part of that was that my sister was born when I was thirteen and I felt like I was just didn't have the attention that I wanted or that I used to have, so a lot of that I think was like not like I was just kind of bitch about it. Like I didn't like the fact that I wasn't getting the attention I wanted, but at the same time I got away with a lot more because of that.

Emily talks into existence a few of the central themes I will explore in this thesis.

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CHAPTER I

A THESIS STATEMENT

A homosocial space is a space where people of the same sex develop friendships that may or may not be sexual in nature. This study explores the impact of homosocial educational spaces and places in the work young women do to map their sexual identities. In most discussions surrounding sexual identity, one controversial issue that continues to confound researchers has been the nature versus nurture debate. On the one hand, essentialists argue that sexual orientation is biologically determined (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Savin-Williams R. C., "--And then I became gay: Young men's stories, 1998; Troiden, 1988). On the other hand, social constructionists contend there are more than just essential biological characteristics in determining sexual orientation (Cass, 1984a; D'Emilio, 1983; 1992; Kitzinger, 1987; Valentine, 1993b). Still others maintain that arguing for only an essentialist or social constructionist view of sexual identity formation is naïve (DeCecco & Shively, 1984; Jenkins, 2010; Milton & MacDonald, 1984). By focusing on the nature versus nurture debate, researchers are overlooking the effect of space and place on young women's sexual identity mapping.

Via the concepts of space and place, I would like to introduce the notion that there is an additional pathway to understanding how young women map their nascent sexual identities, which the dichotomy of the nature versus nurture debate overlooks. By introducing space and place theories alongside identity theories, this study examines how

space and the idea of place become a part of and affect young women's experimentation with their sexual identities. According to Kimmel (2000), the junction of essentialism, social constructionist and space/place theories can be briefly summarized as: our biological differences provide the necessary raw materials from which we begin to create our identities within our culture. In many women's colleges, this space provides a necessary place for young women to explore and map their sexual identities (Hammers, 2009).

This study is set in a small women's college in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In this setting, I interviewed students to understand how their emerging and evolving sexual identities were affected by the relationship between patches of geography and place within a cultural context, focusing particularly on the connection between sexual identity and place. I also explore the way place becomes a normative part of the relationships between the students and the set of expectations that come with it. This relational place allows the students to answer the how, who, and when they are going to be. It is within this relational place that the external influences of the educational space become internalized over time and social identities emerge in the interaction between space and place. A woman's social identity is a constant negotiation between spaces, within which one is constantly moving through, navigating, and mapping as they go, and places, which are significant because the people that interact there create maps of significance for themselves. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine in a specific geographic, social setting how this negotiation between space and place shapes sexual identity.

My goal in this thesis is to understand how young women navigate homosocial spaces in the course of forming and shaping their sexual identities. In the midst of mapping their sexual identities, they transform these homosocial spaces into homosocial relational places. While several researchers have acknowledged the way in which men construct and justify homosocial spaces (Bird, 1996; Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Sedgwick, 1985), less has been written about female homosocial spaces. Kimmel (2006) states throughout history homosocial spaces among men were established via fraternities and other male dominated arenas, like the military.¹ I would argue that the concept of homosocial space is a bit of a misnomer for homosocial relational place. A more refined idea is to make a distinction between homosocial spaces and homosocial places.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter two, I provide a synthesis of the literatures surrounding identity theories, sexual identity development, and space and place theories. Chapter three details the methodology I used to carry out my research as well as my positionality in the study. In chapter four, I introduce you to my participants during their high school years. This chapter also addresses how the young women began their journeys to Salem. In chapter five, the young women have made their decisions and talk to me about why they finally decided on Salem. Chapter six finds the young women finally on Salem's campus and discusses how the young women navigated through this space to create places of meaning as well as cultivate new friendships. In chapter seven, the young women have been on

¹ The gendered way in which homosocial spaces are used tends to place men in the context of military conflict and military life. See additional discussions surrounding this topic in Kaplan (2005) and Sinclair (2009).

campus for a while now. In this chapter, the young women are beginning to fashion their own places within this geographic space of Salem College. Chapter eight deals with the disconnect several of the young women felt towards the iconic “Susie Salem” and how the administration seemed to promote this ideal type and how alienating “she” really is to most of them. The final chapter concludes with me explaining how, through my research, several of the universal assumptions surrounding identity work have been challenged. I also discuss several questions that remain to be answered regarding space/place theories and identity work among young women.

CHAPTER II

A CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

Most people use the words place and space interchangeably. According to Gieryn (2000) however, it is worth drawing a distinction between these two words. This thesis will follow Gieryn in defining place as a patch of geography filled with people, emotions, practices, and objects. Space is that patch of geography that we move through as we travel from place to place in our lives (Rosing, 2003). When we are not able to name a space then it is not a place. Places are constructed through individual relationships, practices, physical objects, streets, and monuments. We make places as we connect emotionally with others and the physical boundaries within which those connections occur.

To assist me in this project I draw on two literatures to set the context for an exploration of sexual identity mapping in a homosocial educational space. One literature is conceptual; the second is empirical. The empirical literature is composed of research that explores how individuals develop and map their sexual identities over time, as well, as how space and place are ways in which individuals are invited to experience and explore their sexuality. In the beginning, I found the task of defining and building a conceptual framework itself being more descriptive than analytical. Therefore, in trying to make it more analytical, I chose the approach of trying to fashion a more theoretical notion of homosocial space and identity mapping. The idea of homosocial place as I use

it here is relational and that is one key to building a more robust take on this concept. It is not the physical but the relational that defines this place and allows for the development of different perceptions for each individual.

I have arranged my review of the literature into three sections. The first section concerns identity theory. The second section relates to sexual orientation and sexual identity. The third section is about space/place theories. The connection between these three frameworks is centered on identity, sexual orientation, and geography.

Identity Theory

Personal identity is explored as a way to highlight the importance of individual cognitive development, which may bring understanding to the social choices an individual makes. Stets and Burke (2000) would seem to acknowledge the significance of the personal and the social when they write, "...we see substantial similarities and overlap between social identity theory and identity theory...this overlap ultimately will cause these theories to be linked in fundamental ways..." (p. 224). The essence of Stets and Burke's argument is that even in spite of how the two theories originated, both theories have several things in common, and that both "being" and "doing" are central parts to personal identity (p. 234).

One of the most significant aspects of being an individual is our ability to be reflexive, to be self-aware. In his theory of identity development, Erikson (1968) argues that during adolescence the developmental task that involves figuring out who I am as a person and what I want in life occurs. According to Erikson, this developmental task occurs in a series of phases. Passing through each phase is achieved by a resolution of a

particular problem the individual faces. One of the problems occurs at the end of adolescence when the individual must choose an identity. Erikson states that this progression is a normal part of human development.

Drawing on Erikson's work, Arnett (2000), states the period between the ages of 18 to 25 should be labeled emerging adulthood. This signifies an intense period of identity development and exploration where ideas regarding love, work, and worldviews takes place. This identity development includes both social identities as well as self-identities. It is about us as well as others. Chris Barker (2008), argues, "Identity is best understood not as a fixed entity, but as an emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change" (p. 216). In other words, identity is not static but is a more fluid process of how we become. It is subject to change according to time, place, and discursive practice.

Identity theory explains how social behavior is codified by the interaction between self and society. Hogg, Terry and White (1995) state, "...identity theory postulates that self reflects the wider social structure in so far as self is a collection of identities derived from the role positions occupied by the person" (p. 258). The category membership that a person feels they belong to, for example, nationality, sexuality, student/teacher, and in which they fall, provides a definition to the person as to who they are in relation to the group (p. 259). Jay Lemke (2008) agrees that we internalize the ways in which we live. According to Lemke, our identities are a composite of all the roles and identities that we perform and we sometimes use complex ways of describing the categories in which we perform them.

While the concept of identity theory helps us understand how an individual develops her notion of identity, this notion is more than two-dimensional. Most individuals follow multiple pathways for development (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000). Savin-Williams (2001) and Diamond (2000b) proposed models with multiple trajectories for development that take into account the diversity of young women's identities and their integration (Winter, 2004). Sexual orientation and sexual identity are two, some might say essential, paths that individuals must travel. Like James' (2012) "forced option" (p. 37), we cannot avoid them. It is not just the how and when, but also the where we become. I have introduced the concept of identity as a way of describing the journeys these young women are on to map their sexual identities over time.

Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity

Sexual orientation is usually recognized as an essential, early-developing, stable proclivity towards sexual attractions for persons of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes in an individual (Bell, Weinberg, Hammersmith, & Alfred C Kinsey Institute for Sex Research, 1981). Sexual identity, in contrast, refers to the self-image an individual establishes around this predisposition (Cass, 1990). Individuals may label themselves "heterosexual," "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," or "transgendered." However, sexual identity and orientation do not always correspond with each other.

Most of the research conducted on sexual orientation has stressed the importance of developmental causes, both biological and psychosocial, (Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Bell, et al., 1981; Savin-Williams R. C., 1998) through which "false" orientations can be distinguished from "true" orientations (Diamond L. M., 2003). According to

Burch (1993), true same-sex orientations are comprised of persons that have experienced the onset of their orientations at a very early age, independent of external influences, and have more exclusive same-sex attractions and behavior. False same-sex orientations are comprised of persons that did not experience their same-sex orientations at a very early age, and who experience both same-sex and opposite-sex attractions equally. Sexual orientation is defined as “an ever-present, invariant biological or psychological truth,” as opposed to sexual identity, which is “a historically and culturally located social construction” (Savin-Williams R. C., 2001, p. 14). “Sexual orientation is generally understood as an essential, early-developing, stable predisposition to experience sexual attractions for persons of the same sex, the other sex, or both sexes” (Diamond L. M., 2003, p. 352). Jenkins (2010) discusses the naivety of trying to argue for only an essentialist or social constructionist view of sexual identity formation.

Both sexual orientation and sexual identity are so imbedded in culture, that culture does not just give meaning to them but helps in the creation of sexuality and sexual orientation (Ford & Norris, 1993; Gagnon, 1990; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Giles, 2006). According to McElwain, Grimes, and McVicker (2009), society has developed a way to talk about sexual identity and sexual expression from a cultural aspect. These social processes do not act as constraints but actually produce sexualities through discourse – desire, religion, gender, and so on (Blackwood, 2000). By making sexuality a social product, certain fluidity exists which allows sexuality the opportunity to change with locations and cultures (Baumrind, 1995; Blackwood, 2000). This fluidity is also

connected to a certain erotic plasticity (Baumeister & Stillman, 2006), and how cultural, situational, and social agents shape our sex drive.

We tend to think of ourselves as falling within certain sexual categories. These categories invariably make us subjects to them. While trying to couch sexual categories within a scientific realm, Davidson (1992) argued that if we used anatomy to describe a person's sexual identity then it would be based solely upon the physical presence of either male or female genitalia; however, since we are sentient beings, there is no longer a link between the sex organs and a person's sexuality, rather sexuality is based on a person's attitudes, preferences, and tastes. This sexual fluidity has been the focus of several studies (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond L. M., 2003; 2008; McDowell, 1999). According to Kauth (2006), sexual orientation is not specifically essential or socially constructed, it is both. This research highlights the non-linear process of identity formation. According to Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, and Levy-Warren (2009), this notion of sexual fluidity could be attributed to how individuals choose to “come-out” as lesbian.

Baumeister (2000) identifies several important factors in predicting female sexual fluidity. Some are personal changes for example marriages, adopting new activities in adulthood, and changes in sexual preference. Others include sociocultural factors such as religion, education, political affiliation, and peer influence. According to Baumeister, while changes to sexual identity over time are possible, very little research has been done to support this (2000). However, Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, and Braun (2006), found that young women, who identified as lesbians in the beginning, were more consistent in identifying themselves as lesbians. Additionally, Rosario et al. (2006), found in young

women that identified as bisexual there was more fluctuation in their identities over time. Rosario et al. (2006), purports to dispel the current belief that there are two types of lesbians-- *primary* lesbians—early developing and exclusive, and *elective* lesbians—subject to external influences and less stable. According to Diamond (1998), multiple models are necessary to describe the development of sexual orientation among women.

Peplau and Huppert (2008) argue that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to understanding the formation of sexual identity in young women is not a valid approach. They argue for a paradigm shift, one that recognizes the diverse ways in which young women map their sexual identities. Garnets and Peplau (2000) argue how the neat categories society uses to categorize women’s sexuality do not encompass the full range of women’s desires within same-sex and/or opposite-sex relationships. Griffin (2000) claims that in western societies, close personal relationships between women are not encouraged. She attributes this to the eroticized view that is bestowed on most female-to-female relationships. According to Griffin, it is during adolescence that identity formation is solidified and one’s sexuality will be determined. Laws and Schwartz (1977) purport that the female experience is a central tenet to female sexuality. According to Laws and Schwartz, personal contacts and experiences can lead women to participate in sexual relationships they would never have anticipated participating in.

According to Meier, Hull, and Ortyl, (2009) the intersectionality between gender and sexuality significantly influence relationship views and longevity of these same relationships. Friendship scripts were the most widely used in developing lesbian relationships (Rose & Zand, 2002). According to this research, several women

developed friendships with other women prior to coming out as lesbian, and women already self-identified as lesbian preferred the friendship script to dating around. Certain social conditions must be present for women to forego heterosexual relationships and form lesbian relationships (Peplau, Spaulding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1999). In addition to these social conditions, the existence of female homosocial spaces is an important area to consider when discussing sexual orientation in women.

Peplau et al., (1999) also discuss the implications of reading women's sexual identity formation through the lens of research that is focused solely on men. The focus should not be on sex acts when discussing relationships that women form with other women, but rather should focus on the emotional aspects of the bond. If the term "lesbian," defined as women loving other women in romantic relationships, is applied to all the close relationships that women form with other women, then we have limited our ability to understand why women form these relationships. By problematizing the word "lesbian," Bennett (2000), illuminates the fluidity of the term. She creates another term "lesbian-like" to denote *practices* rather than *persons*, for women who engage in some lesbian-like behaviors; for example, living in single-sex dorms or communities, but not others such as having sexual contact with other women. Diamond (2000a) focuses on these close personal friendships between young adult women. She found that these passionate friendships were not prime indicators of young women eventually identifying as lesbian or bisexual. However, Diamond does argue that quite possibly the young women will more quickly become aware of same-sex attractions and be more comfortable with this identity.

Diamond (2003) highlights the fluidity and plasticity in women's attractions and behaviors. Diamond's (2008) research into the sexual fluidity of young women persuasively argues that for some women, sexual identity and orientation are not rigid, but rather fluid and dependent upon her life circumstances, membership in social groups, the places where they live, and her relationships between both men and women. While this might normally be considered more of an anthropological/geographical viewpoint the concept of how place is solidified within culture, just how this solidification affects young women's experimentation with her sexual identities and the space where this occurs is important. A young woman's sexual identity as lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual is often seen as an essential component of her sexual orientation. However, neither sexual orientation nor sexual identity is fixed or universal; both can change over time and place. We cannot separate sex from geography.

Space and Place

A young woman connects with a particular space she inhabits and transforms this patch of geography into a place through an intuitive cognizance wherein she is able to identify, access, and utilize the emotions and objects from these spaces (Camiz, 1996). This relational place within a space is created through practices and interactions between individuals and it is these interactions that provide relational place its intransience. It is in relational place where body, mind, and emotions come together in the making of identity. Psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove (1996) described this concept of relational place as that patch of geography where we consolidate our sense of who we are as particular kinds of individuals.

According to Fullilove (1996), this perception of relational place is a part of each individual's sense of identity and is an essential building block of a person's primary personal identity development. She goes on to define place as a center or location of specific events, which can be construed as a patch of geography where personal relationships occur. Additionally, she discusses the meanings of place and how every individual defines these relational places. She also distinguishes the way in which every place possesses unique meanings for each individual. In essence, one's sense of place is shaped by her past, together with her behaviors, emotions, and actions. Therefore, when we combine the above-mentioned elements, place "...can be understood as the sum of resources and human relationships in a given location" (Fullilove, 1996, p. 1518).

For Stedman (2002), place is a center of meaning, based on human interaction, emotions, and thoughts. Sense of place is a collection of symbolic meanings and attachments that settings provide for individuals and groups. Additionally, individuals and groups create bonds with places, which in turn aids in creating and defining their personal identities (Finkelstein, 1999; Hayden, 2000). The how, who, and when we are going to be, along with our ideas, lived experiences, and expectations manifest themselves during social interaction. Through the construction of place, ways of being are produced, fashioned, and reinforced (Forest, 1995). According to Valentine (1996), the characteristics and identity of a particular place are interconnected with the identities of the individuals present within a particular space.

By constructing a relational place through language and movement (Vianello, 1996), and by controlling her movement within this relational place (Umiker-Sebeok,

1996), a young woman can maneuver herself into different positions within a particular space (Goffman, 1959). By utilizing Goffman's language about the theater, Valentine (1993a) argues that women engage in different presentations of self in different spaces. Valentine (1996) contends the sexual identities of individuals can produce the identity of the place they are occupying. The gaze of the audience present rather than the performers is, in effect, producing this identity. This reifies the concept of fluidity in female sexuality.

Anbjørg Ohnstad (2009) stresses the importance of how movement between different places can contribute to the creation of a specific sexual identity and help young women interpret their gender and sexuality. At the intersection of place and sexual identity is the center of how young women map their sexual identities over time and through relational places. According to Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), this intersectionality is applied in various ways in which multiple dimensions of a person's identity can be used to construct her social world.

Towards a Working Synthesis

I carved out this section to bring together and examine the intersections of identity and space/place theories. According to Kimmel (2000), the junction of identity, space and place can be briefly summarized as: our biological differences provide the necessary raw materials from which we begin to create our identities within a specific space and in turn find our sense of place.

The homosocial space in women's colleges provides a necessary area for young women to explore and map their sexual identities (Hammers, 2009), carving this space

into relational places filled with emotions, attachments, people, objects, and practices. Within this comfortable homosocial space, young women may explore several sexual identities (Bennett, 2000; Blackwood, 2000). Every facet of their personality and interactions within these relational places is affected by their sexuality. In turn, the spaces they inhabit affect their sexuality. By identifying the complexity of the intersections of space, place, and identity, place becomes not just a fixed point on a map, but rather, it is the social practices that intersect with space and the relationships inherent in each place. This in turn defines who belongs to a certain place and how they experience it.

Our identities are closely related to the geographies we inhabit. This relationship between geographic space and place is positioned at the center of our awareness of selfhood and belonging. It is impossible for us to imagine or even conceive of relational places without also taking into consideration the practices, emotions, and attachments inherent within those spaces. As we move through these relational places, our personal and sexual identities are mapped around and through interactions with others. In other words, our identities are not static; they are ongoing productions. Sexual identities are continuously mapped via the ways in which these young women refashion these spaces into relational places where they can consolidate their sexual identities, and are as myriad as the young women I interviewed.

A young woman's sexual identity as lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual is frequently viewed as an important element of her sexual orientation. However, neither sexual orientation nor sexual identity is static; both can shift with time and place.

Through a careful reading of space, place, and identity, theories I intend to illuminate how the immediate, tangible lived experience of sexual beings, ideas of self, spaces, and places animate the quotidian world.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

For my research, I utilized a qualitative study approach using semi-structured interviews from my participants. Qualitative research, roughly defined, means, “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Strauss and Corbin (1990) also state that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is known. I also chose to use an interpretive approach for the data analysis. My analysis is based on the intersection of the essentialist/social-constructionist arguments concerning sexual identities, and how space and place add additional facets to the research. By utilizing qualitative data, subjective experience, a small number of respondents, and detailed examinations of the text from the interviews, I have examined how each young woman's view of themselves is dependent on the many subjective experiences of their place within this homosocial educational space and how those experiences encourage these young women to map their sexual identities over time.

Data Collection

The setting for this study was a small, private women’s liberal arts college in the southeast. The participants of this study were traditional aged students that were currently residing on campus, traditional aged students that were currently living off campus, and traditional aged alumnae. I found my participants using the snowball

method of sampling by asking for recommendations from the faculty. One of the benefits in utilizing this type of sampling method is it allowed me to access my personal network of friends to ask for recommendations (Browne, 2005). In addition to the ease of access, according to Noy (2008), snowball sampling is one of the most “widely employed methods of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines...” (pg.330). Furthermore, several researchers have utilized snowball sampling to access populations that might prove difficult to contact due to the sensitive nature of their particular studies (Valentine, 1993a; Valentine, 1993b; Diamond L. M., 1998; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

I provided each faculty member with an abstract of my study and several of them sent me names of students who they thought might be interested. I also met with the Dean of Students and was given permission to address student clubs on campus to recruit students that might be interested in participating in my study. Several students responded to the initial request by giving the faculty their permission to be contacted via email. I then contacted the students via email, providing them with the same abstract. To those who exhibited interest, I emailed more information before meeting with them. My only requirement was the students read and sign an informed consent form prior to their participation. The form explained, in detail, what my project entailed. I then contacted the individual students via email with a request to send me their hours of availability.

Once a student responded, we set a day and time for the interview. All of the students were asked to choose where they wanted to conduct their individual interviews. I felt that by giving each student the opportunity to choose where their interview took

place they would be comfortable and this in turn would make them feel more at ease and open with me. Three of the interviews were conducted at the local public library, one in the library on campus, eight in the chapel on campus, one in a professor's office, and two in a residence hall lounge. Each student was given a consent form to read and sign. A copy is included in Appendix A.

With the student's consent, I turned on a digital audio recorder and began the interview.² The interviews were semi-structured in nature. I had an outline of topics, questions, and prompts to be covered during the interview. I used these as a general guide, while allowing for flexibility in response to the answers. All of the questions were open-ended, and participants were encouraged to discuss everything that came to their minds when answering. A copy of the outline may be found in Appendix B.

Additionally, with the exploratory nature of this study, I asked follow-up questions to explore any tangents that arose during the interview. Furthermore, I made side notes during the interviews, concentrating on each respondent's body language, tone of voice, as well as anything else, which was said that triggered my curiosity during the course of taping each interview. While fifteen individuals might appear to be a small number of participants, it is not unusual for qualitative researchers to accumulate transcriptions totaling many hundreds of pages for just a few individuals. I used my personal laptop to transcribe each of the interviews.

² A decision was made in the beginning to keep the interview text in the vernacular of the students. I did not edit the interviews for grammar or syntax.

Emergent Themes

There are invariably areas in which individuals merge in their views, ideologies, as well as experiences. Even though my participants differed according to race, class, and sexual orientation, I focused on the areas in their stories that coincided in an attempt to recognize their commonalities. Once I did this, several themes emerged from their stories, such as sisterhood, family histories, and high school experiences. However, there were variations and I incorporated those themes, such as sexual orientation, class, and participation in extracurricular activities on campus, into my analysis as well.

Positionality

An issue that I also had to deal with was my place among the young women I interviewed. For all of the young women, I was not only the engaged listener, but outside of this research, I was an alumna, tutor, as well as “sister.” As part of my role as a tutor in the Writing Center as well as a tutor in the Sociology department at this college, I had reviewed a few of these young women’s research papers or had tutored them in some of their classes. As an alumna, I had also had a number of the same professors as they had. At the beginning of several of the interviews, I noticed some of the young women were very nervous. However, once they realized that I was interested in what they had to say their faces lit up and they became decidedly more animated and loquacious. It was at that point their stories started materializing and my positionality towards them became an active and attentive listener.

For this research project, using a semi-structured interviewing technique was somewhat risky for a couple of different reasons. As I mentioned earlier my positionality

with the young women ranged from being their tutor to being an alumna and "sister." As a result, establishing credibility and sincerity were crucial to enable the young women to feel comfortable enough with me to share their experiences. Many of these young women had never participated in a research interview and most did not know what to expect. Moreover, I did not know which themes would develop as the young women told me their stories or even if any of their experiences would genuinely connect with each other. Additionally, a few of the young women, who really wanted to help out, became stressed when I actually turned on the recorder. For example, Anna repeatedly twirled her hair and kept asking me if she was answering correctly. Emma kept apologizing for not being very interesting and Carli began by her narrative very slowly, it seemed like she was disconnected from the experiences she was talking to me about. So, I just reiterated that all I really wanted was to learn about their life experiences and reassured them the information that I gleaned from our interview sessions would only be used for this research project and none of their names, or other identifying information would be used in the finished project.

Another reason using this type of research was risky was simply I became fatigued. Even though I only listened to and transcribed fifteen interviews, I really did not have any idea of how these interviews would affect me both emotionally and mentally. While listening to several of the young women speak about their middle and high school years, I could not help but think back to my own experiences and several of their emotions I found myself also claiming as my own. Although I did expect to experience some emotional stress (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991), I truly was not prepared to

feel somewhat out of place at my alma mater. In addition, as the researcher I knew that I needed to be supportive yet cordial, interested, courteous, understanding and sympathetic, yet I found this to be considerably more difficult to put into practice than I had thought. Despite these emotional hardships, the voices of these young women never wavered, and their stories related their experiences of how place, space, and identity played a part in their journeys.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THE WOMEN SAY: A PLACE TO BEGIN

I asked the young women to begin their stories with their high school experiences; however, several of them began with late middle school experiences. I decided not to question the reasons they started their stories where they chose, nevertheless, I listened to how they began their stories as well as where they took me from that point in time. The majority of the stories were shared in chronological order; however, there were instances when the young women found it necessary to “backtrack” to ensure I grasped minor situations that contributed to major ones. For many of the young women I interviewed, it appeared that their middle school years were laden with thoughts of the persons they were becoming.

While I framed my first question around their high school experiences, for a few of the participants, middle school was fraught with questions about whom they really were and their place within middle school culture. For example, Anna described it in this way:

I had been picked on like basically from elementary school to like seventh grade and I didn't want to bring attention to myself because then somebody might pick on me. Like I said, in eighth grade I started caring more about what I looked like than school, and I seriously, like, throughout middle school I was scared of people, I was scared of being picked on, I tried to stay invisible, I guess you could say. Eighth grade I opened up a little bit more, because I was losing weight and I felt more

confident in myself because I was not socially, like unaccepted or whatever.

As Anna was talking, I noticed that she kept twirling her long hair around her fingers and seemed to be very agitated. When I interviewed Anna, she had just graduated the spring before from college. However, the feelings she had from middle school apparently were still with her. Another student, Bella, who presented herself as a very energetic and bright young woman, conversely described her middle school years:

I had a small group of friends of maybe six, seven people that I knew since I was maybe third grade elementary school, I knew them since then and we've stayed really, really close throughout our middle school and our high school years. It was mixture of guys and girls.

Bella was very sure of herself during the entire interview. This was her first year in college, yet she had an aura of one much older than her nineteen years. While Bella's forthrightness was illuminating, so was the reticence of Evie, another first year student, who described her transition from middle school to high school in this manner:

Coming out of eighth grade was a very difficult year, so for me when I entered high school, I really felt that you know, fresh slate, new sort of starting point, kinda flip the page in a book like starting a new chapter.

While a few of the students did begin in middle school, the greater portion interviewed began with their move to high school. Erikson (1968) suggests that it is in adolescence that a person struggles with figuring out who she is in this world, who they will be, how they will be, and with whom they will be. Erikson identifies

this development as a “natural” and important part of human development. Interestingly, however, Erikson does not consider the ways in which space, place, and culture also contribute to the development of personal identities. I will use the idea of identity in a descriptive manner to signal the ways in which these young women consolidate their sense of who they are as sentient beings. In the process, I am considering how space, place, and culture are related to their identity work.

Several of the young women I interviewed talked about how stressful high school was and how hard it was for them to figure out where they belonged. Beth discussed how the transition to high school was fraught with internal questions about who she really was and where she fit in this new space:

High school was very stressful for me. Um, it was a big transition going from middle school to high school. Um, you know and I didn't really have a place, I wasn't on any of the sports teams, I wasn't involved with any of the big cliques, you know I really wasn't into that. Um, so I remember my ninth grade year was very difficult trying to find myself, trying to figure out where I fit in this new school, 'cause I went to a fairly large school for this area, you know like we had 1,500 hundred students, about 400 in my graduating class, so it was a lot of people. So, um as I went through, but senior year I think I finally figured out who I was and what I wanted to do with my life, um, but getting there was very difficult.

Beth's use of the word 'place' echoes Gieryn's (2000) definition of place. She was not able to find a home. Her account lights up the connection between place and identity as she experienced it in high school. Another young woman, Patty, a third year, spoke about how difficult it was for her to "fit in" with the other girls at her high school. While Patty does not explicitly say that she could not find a place, she alludes to this idea of not

having a place where she felt like she fit in. Patty had attended a state sponsored school for performing arts, where she was going to pursue a career in ballet:

I guess I've always been more of an introverted individual, so I've never been one to group with um girls who were always talking about other people or drama, I couldn't like all of that. I guess I sort of floated in and out with people while I was there.

Joyce, a first year, put into words her feelings about her transition when she moved from a public to private high school.

My high school experience was kind of interesting. I went to a K-12 school, but I entered in ninth grade, so that was already a kind of difficult transition, besides the fact that I entered into a private school and I had gone to public school my whole life. So, for the first two years I kinda was just getting my footing, trying to figure out what I was doing, and what I liked. Didn't have a ton of friends the first few years because I didn't play sports, my school is a very sports school, and I was new and everyone else already knew each other. I was really quiet. So that was pretty much my first two years was just sort of hiding and trying to figure things out.

Joyce also suggests that during her high school years she did not really have a place where she felt comfortable. However, Joyce chose to regulate her movement within this new place, and by doing so, Joyce was constructing a place for herself in this new space. (Vianello, 1996)

Several of the young women spoke about feelings of anonymity, others of anathema, while others spoke of the wonderful friendships they had formed and all the activities they had been active in. For instance, Carli spoke about her high school beginnings in a sort of disconnected manner that was almost taciturn. The entire time she

was talking, her arms were crossed over her chest almost as if she were trying to hold in the volatile emotions that were threatening to spill over. Carli speaks into existence the problems some adolescents encounter when they are bereft of place:

Well in high school, I was kind of like a loner I only hung out with the art kids, so I was literally in the art room every day. So I didn't really interact with anyone else except the same five people every day. and I really hated high school. I was really glad to be out and I was looking forward to the day I was graduating so I would never have to step foot near that place again.

Portia was very animated when she was talking about participating in sports, yet she became quieter when she started talking about the relationships she had with other students:

In high school, um I was probably, to be me it was complicated, I think especially in high school everyone's trying to figure out who they are and how they belong in the environment that they are in. Um, however, when I was in high school I was, I played three sports, so I was identified as a jock, um and then I was also very smart, so I had really good grades so I was also on the scale of um being smart and athletic. But um, I think it's, it's all a process. Um, I think in high school um I had um I always say that I have a lot of acquaintances, but I have few friends.

Others, like Emma, were more reticent in their responses, almost to the point of being apologetic for not being very interesting. According to Emma:

I was really shy, I was really quiet. I did orchestra and that's where most of friends came from. I was very involved in high school I did about five different orchestras, two community, one on Saturday. I played on the academic team and for the most part I hung out with the same group of people over and over again.

Emma also spoke about how she was treated by some of her classmates and how she tended to use silliness to refute them as well as how her friends would speak up for her.

I was bullied a little bit in high school, a lot more in middle school, but a little bit in high school, I was quiet, I was fairly likeable as a person, I was short and sometimes when I did speak up I would say some silly things, I was a bit of a goof ball but um I got through high school. I had a lot of really close friends who took care of me, who would you know stand up for me, um and just had a lot of really close friends who were there for me.

Identity development includes both social identities as well as self-identities. It is about us as well as others. We create identities from connecting with other individuals, yet we also make decisions about how we respond to other individuals, our environments (space), our place within a specific space, and our own selves. Our identities are our own unique creations; furthermore, they continue to be malleable, changing as our places change. Abby talks into existence how our identities are fluid and how difficult it was for her to come to terms with her sexual identity:

High school was interesting for me because my sophomore year I actually, my mother actually moved, so I moved in with my sister so that I could stay at my high school. So that was a weird time, 'cause you are a sophomore in high school so that's just weird in general you know, you're not quite old enough to hang out with the older people, 'cause you're like at that weird stage when you're like just turning sixteen, like you can just drive, you're like growing into your body. But uh, so I guess my sophomore year was the fir..., well my junior year was the first time I ever had a girlfriend, which was really stressful. Um, as someone growing up in Georgia, I'm originally from Georgia, so it's the south, very, very Southern Baptist type area, um and I was, did a lot of things on campus, I was a prominent leader on campus, so I thought crap I can't be gay and do these things, how's that going to happen, that's not going to work. Um, and then my senior year I uh became senior class president, head of, president of like five other clubs on campus. Um I did a lot my senior

year and I found this girl that I was ready to date and we both came out together and that was interesting, well at school at least, socially at least. Um, which was fun, it was a good experience, it was a freeing experience.

In the high school years peer groups and relationships emerge as some of the most pivotal, simply because teenagers develop closer connections with other teens. Amy's response delineates how the internalization of cultural expectations affected her dating life and how she felt conflicted and confused when her identity did not match what was expected of her.

I was involved in a lot of things, did music programs, my senior year I was drum major, that's about it. Um, when I first, well when I went into high school, I was in a relationship with a young man, I had been with him for two years, never kissed or anything, he never understood why, I understood why (laughing). Um, when I started to have relationships with women, because I had grown up in a really Christian background, it was hard, 'cause like while it felt like natural to me at the same time I had all these voices in the back of my head, like you're going to hell, and all this stuff I had heard while sitting in the pews on Sunday.

Young adults struggle to understand who they are and where they fit it, while starting to form their own identity in relation to others, which is a critical component of healthy social development. Lemke (2008) posits that our identities are comprised of all the roles that we perform on a daily basis and how the internalization of these roles helps one to map their identities. Jennifer epitomizes this concept of social development as she describes her senior year of high school:

Well when I was in high school, the relationship with my parents was great until um probably my senior year. I was an athlete, I did four sports a year, I was an honor roll student, I was known in my community. I

mean high school was great. I had some great friendships. I mean everything was good the first three years um and then senior year everything kinda went downhill for me. Um, I lost pretty much all of my contacts, all of my friends; um I am a bully victim. I was bullied very harshly my senior year. My parents wouldn't listen and they didn't understand what I was going through I ended up leaving the high school I was at and moving back home to my hometown with like three months left in my senior year, it was a great, a great move. I had a very close group of friends, of girlfriends they, there were five of us, we were all cheerleaders, three of us ran track together, um, yeah, I mean, it was, it was good. I had one best friend Laura, she and I are, she and I were very close, we're not close anymore she's kinda gone off the deep end in her own little world of immaturity. Um and I grew up really fast, I never really had a childhood, I didn't ever, I didn't really know how to hang out with friends.

Identity development is a natural element of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and there seems to be significant overlap with the social responsibilities of adolescence that Erikson describes. During this time of emergence, most adolescents describe their friendships in terms of the emotional connections they have as well as the common beliefs they share with other young adults. Several of the young women I interviewed were very involved in social activities during their high school years. Sally describes her high school experience as full of activities yet she felt she was closer to the young men that she was to the young women:

I was involved in a lot of different activities, um Honor Club, sports and that kind of thing so my relationship did grow with my parents as I um ventured through high school. Um, I had a lot of relationships with women as in just friends aspect. I had a lot of girlfriends but I had way more guy friends than I did girls; I just found girls to be uh malicious and conniving and that kind of thing and I guess that happens in high school anyways. But the other friends were just um people that you kinda hung out with if you had a party, or you were playing cards or something one night. And in high school, these two friends, I mean I still talk to them

almost daily, today, so it's been almost three years since I've been out of college and we're still super close friends yep.

Additionally, adolescence is a time when friendship groups emerge. These friendship groups are generally based on common beliefs and behaviors as well as interests. It is these friendships that can turn space into place (Stedman, 2002). Cathy spoke about the friendships she made during her high school years and how they supported her through a very traumatic personal experience:

Um, my experience in high school is pretty easily divided into; I went to a small private school in North Carolina. I loved it; I had been there since I was three. Um, and in high school, it was really small and my first two years I pretty much enjoyed it a lot and I didn't stop enjoying it junior and senior year but I, my like life experience shifted dramatically because at the end of sophomore year, um I began to be anorexic and that just totally shifted my worldview. I made some really good friends. In particular I had really close friends with um like between four and five girls and they were just like really awesome.

However, Jeanette described her friendships with other students with an almost *laissez-faire* attitude:

Um, I was, I've always kind of had a wandering personality anyway, so I didn't realize it at the time but I wasn't, like yeah I had like friends and I was doing the whole high school thing, trying to fit in, conformity like high school very much is, but um I always kind of had a wandering spirit in that I didn't really want to make connections with a lot of the students and the people that were permanently going to be there, I tend to have like five or six really close friends compared to like twenty semi acquaintances that you hang out in large groups with.

During adolescence, friendships sometimes undergo changes in both intensity and duration. It is often during late adolescence that an important transition occurs from high school to college. This transition frequently results in both the loss of old high school friendships and the addition of new college friendships, which often force an individual to not only work harder at maintaining their old friendships but also to dedicating more time and energy to building new ones. This ability to form friendships is a very important part of maturing. While the young women I interviewed were acutely aware that going away to college would change some of their friendships, they were also excited at the prospect of making new friends. It is also during this short time between high school and college that these young women have the opportunity to contemplate whom they are and who they wish to become.

The minute we gain sentience and we can begin to think reflexively, we are thinking about who we are, how we are, and what we are. Identity then, is not a given, a once and for all process, but it is gained through an evolution of maturing. Erikson introduced the idea of identity as a never-ending process, a quandary if you will, for a person. We come to a fork in the road, one way leads us to our future, and the other takes us back towards our past. The young women I interviewed were in the process of navigating their way down these two roads, continuously mapping their identities through time, via their places in their worlds.

CHAPTER V

A DECISION IS MADE

Typically, the time surrounding applying for college, eventually choosing a college, as well as preparing for the actual move necessitates an awareness of strategies in which an individual may begin to map their identity. There are always places where people come together in their thoughts, ideologies, and experiences. These young women found themselves connecting with a particular place at a time in their lives when identity formations are vital. As these young women recounted their stories, I began to notice several of the stories surrounded the relationships with their families, friendships they had in high school, their reasons for choosing an all-women's college, and the sisterhood among the students on campus. Even though each young woman eventually made the decision to attend Salem College, the rationales behind their decisions were varied.

According to Stedman (2002), the ways in which individuals bond with their environment allows a place to develop into a "center of meaning" (p. 562) for them. Three of the young women I interviewed said they chose Salem because of the close proximity to their homes as well as having visited the campus during their elementary and middle school years. Carli discussed the attachment that she had formed to Old Salem was her main deciding factor in choosing Salem:

Well, ok, ever since I was little for some reason I've had an attachment to this place 'cause you know, in elementary school you always go here and everything, and the campus is so beautiful and I always kinda wanted to go here...

When Sally started thinking about college, she chose to visit Salem College first and immediately "fell in love" with the campus. She also wanted to stay close to home, which was a factor in where she chose to go:

I knew college was something that I would enjoy but we came to Salem College (chuckling), first, like when I was thinking about colleges and I fell in love with it right away, just because of the atmosphere of the college, I love the history, um I do like small classroom size. um I did want to stay close to home, because it does cut down on cost to not have to you know board, so I do like commute back and forth every day.

Jeanette echoes some of the same feelings of nostalgia that Carli spoke about regarding the beauty of the campus. According to Jeanette, for as long as she could remember she had wanted to attend Salem:

Salem was my first choice overall, like I got accepted to two other colleges that I had applied to, and um but as soon as I got that acceptance letter from Salem, which did come first, I didn't even care about the other acceptance letters. It was like in the back of my mind as soon as Salem came I knew that's where I wanted to go and I think I decided to go there because it is so small it kind of implied that there would be more of a personal connection Salem's campus is gorgeous, it's breathtaking, and that's immediately what got me I actually liked the fact that it was a women's college 'cause at the time I had a very different idea of success than I do now after being there. I very much had a different idea about success back then which didn't include boys as a distraction, which I can get distracted by guys. I think it was always in the back of my mind for several years that I kind of wanted to go to Salem.

Another young woman, Anna, had attended Salem Academy and her mother and grandmother were both graduates of the Academy and College. Anna also talked about her relationships with her boyfriend as well as her family as being very important to her decision making process:

Well, I don't think my reasoning for going to Salem is like everybody else's because I was thinking more about being at home, being near my you know I was used to being at home, my grandparents are here, you know, It was good to be around my family I was like comfortable with myself, my main deciding factor is that I wanted to stay at home with my family, and my dog, and my boyfriend, I was used to that setting of being all women. It was nice just knowing, having that comfort zone of just being around, in an all-girls school it didn't bother me and it just kinda made things a little easier 'cause that was one less thing that I didn't have to worry about.

Prior to attending Salem, a few of the young women had toured or attended other colleges, but failed to find a place that felt comfortable to them. Beth had originally planned to attend an in-state public university where her father had attended. However, during her junior year of high school she applied for a scholarship to Salem College and actually won. This still did not dissuade her from touring other in-state universities as she recalls. Beth also mentioned a health related reason for finally deciding to attend Salem College over the larger in-state universities:

Well I found out about Salem and applied um by chance. Um, I had a counselor in high school who found out about a scholarship for juniors, it was the Salem Book award, I believe. I ended up winning up, so I was like ok, I already have a scholarship to this college in my junior year. Senior year I toured a lot of different colleges. And um when I was in high school I was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, it was middle school or high school, so I've always been very nervous in crowds um I

don't like being around a lot of people, so whenever I got out there and started walking those campuses (laughing) I realized this probably wasn't for me. Um, came to Salem and they were just very welcoming, I loved the campus, I really like the idea of having a small classroom and having professors that knew my name. Um, what really sold me on Salem was the privacy and the small size I just feel like it's kind of inclusive compared to most colleges. I just feel very safe here. We're just a small campus.

Melissa vocalized her feelings of regret and her misgivings about the decision to attend a large in-state public university:

I didn't go to Salem first. I went to a different school before I came to Salem as a transfer, well I went to NC State, um I had also been accepted to Salem as well but I chose to go to NC State, um it was not a good environment, I wasn't happy, I didn't you know, I didn't like, I wasn't, the girl I had been I wasn't feeling good about myself, I you know, there was, nothing was going right and so I was like you know what my grades are suffering, I'm quitting, I'm here to be in school.

Conversely, Sally did not get into the university she had wanted to attend and ended up attending a local community college for a semester. However, due to her mother's influence she decided to tour Salem and ended up transferring to Salem during her first year.

I had went to Rockingham Community College for one semester because I didn't get in to NC State, which is where I wanted to go. My mom was going to Salem so she was very adamant about Salem, Salem, Salem. And I had heard it so much, it just made me want to throw up, I did not want to go there, didn't want to have anything to do with it you know, it was not for me. I thought you know, the women thing I don't want it, it's going to be petty, you know catty little people, I don't want to do it. I still to this day can't really pinpoint what it is that in the initial stages 'cause I can tell you what it is afterwards after you get in there, but it's before is almost just something you know like it's just a cool place to be you know, it's

very serene and it made you kinda peaceful but it was relaxing you almost feel, felt liberated to be on the campus, I know that it sounds crazy but that's kinda the way it was.

While each of the young women above traveled a different road to Salem, each one of them eventually found their place at Salem. According to Fullilove (1996) , being able to find one's place is crucial in developing not only personal identity but a feeling of safety as well.

Jennifer attended another in state private school prior to attending Salem. Even though Salem was one of her choices, she knew at the time she did not have the grades to get in to Salem. Therefore, she decided to apply to a school that was still close enough for her to come home if she had to. While Jennifer really liked the social atmosphere at this college, her grades were taking a back seat to her social life. After two years, she decided to apply to Salem again and this time was accepted. What follows is her account of how all of this transpired.

I didn't have the grades to get into Salem; Um, so there were a lot of different factors, but Salem was one of my options but I knew I couldn't get in based on my grades in high school. So I was like you know what that's ok, let's go venture out, get out from home, I need to spread my own wings, I need to get away anyways. So I went to LR in Hickory, still could get home easily if I needed to. Well at LR I wasn't receiving the best educational experience I could've been, socially it was great. Um, but my social life was overcoming my academics, which I felt like was wrong. So I moved home, applied to Salem, did my tour, got accepted. So when I came here um and when I made this choice I just felt like this is where I will be pushed, this is where I will be tested, this is where I'm actually going to learn something. I'll be close to my family, I can live at home, it's going to save me and my family money. So it's a very comfortable atmosphere for me, which I think helps, um and being a women's college and not having very many men on campus it helps me

focus more in class because I don't really care about drama or anything else, that's just not my personality.

Cathy applied to Salem quite by accident at a college fair her high school was hosting. The only prerequisite for her was that the college had to be located somewhere warm, so she applied to Salem and was accepted, but ended up having to take a year off for medical reasons.

Um, I first went to the college meeting with Livni, she came to my school and my college teacher, the guidance person at the Friends School was like no one had signed up to go so she like cornered me and another girl and was like come on you can do it, and since I didn't really want to go to class, so I did and I met with Livni. And then I forgot about it until Livni called me and was like are you coming to visit, when are you coming? So I came and visited and it was really pretty, um and I liked it. I applied to 6 schools and they were all chosen pretty randomly and my only requirement was that it had to be somewhere warm because I don't like being cold and once here I liked it, so I applied and got in. Um, but I ended up not being able to go away to college; I had to take a year off to do treatment. Um, and during that year off the only, I didn't apply to any other schools, and I emailed Salem in like March, and I was like oh, I was like what do I have to do to reapply? And they were like oh just tell us what you did for this year. And I enjoyed Salem when I visited, so I came when I was a senior it was, I really liked the feeling on campus and especially the relationship that I had with my hostess and then on my year off, I think I ended up coming here because it was convenient.

According to Stedman's (2002) concept of place attachment³, individuals develop a bond with a particular patch of geography via emotional attachments and turn this patch of geography into place. According to Stedman, identity is a very important part of place. Two of the young women, Bella and Evie had never heard of Salem College

³ For additional discussions of place attachment, see (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992).

before attending the college fairs their high schools offered. However, once they learned about Salem, they both decided to participate in a visitation weekend that Salem offers several times a year. After Bella's visit, she was not exactly enamored with the idea of an all-women's college, yet in the end, Bella chose to attend.

I had never heard of Salem College until the um one of the um admissions counselors at our college fair, I had never thought about coming into, coming to a women's college until they talked to me about and they got me interested so I came and visited and it was really, it was a um a really neat experience seeing all the women and everything and uh when I applied I, I wasn't entirely sure I wanted to come here for sure but I wasn't entirely sure of the um going to a women's college because I'm not, I well, in high school I got along well with girls but I wasn't entirely um, I wasn't the great, I wasn't the best around them, I was very awkward I was used to more guy stuff so I wasn't really comfortable around girls so it was a whole new experience coming to a school that was only girls.

Evie, on the other hand, thoroughly enjoyed her visit and afterward decided that Salem College was the perfect fit for her. In her own words, she tells how instead of her choosing Salem, Salem chose her:

I was actually a sophomore in high school and I had started attending various college fairs and umm, just kind of getting my feet wet and what I wanted to do and things like that my senior year and really discovered that I wanted to do business or law. So when I discovered that, then I started opening my mind to OK, maybe the college will pick me. And a year ago, I would definitely say that Salem chose me, Salem found me. And I still partly believe that, I umm, but Salem found me at a college fair, uh in Athens GA and I even came to Salem my, I think my first part or second, I don't know, sometime in my junior year. It was my first college visit and I fell in love with it and I wasn't able to give any other school a fair chance and I knew that from the beginning. Um, I think it was the community of Salem you know they say pictures are worth a thousand words, and the pictures and just coming here and seeing what it had to offer was just, it kinda spoke to me that you know, this is where I belong, this is, it just felt

right and it was Salem had set the bar so high and I did come back to Salem for two more tours, umm and my family was pretty much, my parents were sold on Salem, we all pretty much mutually decided that Salem was the place for me. And to me it was kinda like here I am and um it just kind of caught my attention and from there it just kept pulling me. I instantly fell in love with Salem. I was so sold on Salem; this is where I wanted to be.

Two young women did not even have Salem on their short list of colleges to attend. One student, Amy, had a friend who attended Salem and encouraged her to apply, even though she really wanted to attend an in-state university so she could study flute. However, after applying to Salem and receiving her acceptance letter, Amy scheduled an audition for the orchestra and met with several professors. After this meeting and touring the campus, she made the decision to attend Salem.

Well originally Salem hadn't been on the list at all. Um, I was planning wholeheartedly to go to UNC-G, I got accepted there, and my friend Karen, who also goes here, was like you need to apply to Salem, so I was just like fine. And so I came here to do my musical audition first and I met Lister-Sink, and I met Ms. Pivetta, and I met Donna Rothrock and they were all so nice and sweet and it was just like a laid-back environment. And so then, I mean the campus is beautiful too which was another thing that caught my eye and then me and mom walked around here and we were talking and she said that she would feel safer with me being here, she said it's a small campus, it's beautiful, like you know it's a good community and I was like yeah like I think so too like I could see me being happy here and here I am.

The other student, Emma, after learning that Salem was an all-women's school, gave a resounding NO to Salem. She really wanted to go out of state to college, but the stigma of being gay, which sometimes surrounds single sex environments, was still more than

she wanted to deal with. Nevertheless, she scheduled a weekend visit and fell in love with the area surrounding Salem College. Here is her story:

When I started deciding to look at colleges, I was a junior in high school. I really wanted to go out of state, I had always seen all the college movies growing up or something where the student would you know hop on a bus or train or something and take off to somewhere new and I kind of really wanted that. So, um, distance was an important factor, um I also knew I wanted to go to a small school, I have a lot of offers from places in New York but I leaned more towards North Carolina because it was smaller and more rural area and I had grown up in a really suburban area so it was different and I thought it would be a challenge. But Salem actually got a big NO tag from me when I found out it was an all- girl's school. That was definitely not something I was looking into, Um, and especially there's that whole tag associated with it that whole oh a female college you're either feminist or you're gay (laughing). When I came here, my first time staying here, I was just kind of overwhelmed by the historic district and how beautiful that seemed that we were attending something so old that was set in such a beautiful historic district. And my mom really liked it as a fit as well and of course, if she's paying the bill then of course she gets a little bit of the say in where you go. Um, but there was something really welcoming and something really great about the fact that not only was I going to go that far away from home but that they were kind of going to be there enough to take care of me or at least that's what my parents got out of it, they had made it seem like a really welcoming homey environment.

I also included themes in which only a few of the participants related to such as sexual orientation and sexual identity. Personal and sexual identities are often explored during the college years. Independence from friends and family members oftentimes permits more possibilities for young women to figure out who they really are. Three of the young women I interviewed identified as lesbians, however, only two of them actually talked about their sexual orientations as the reasons why they chose Salem. One

young woman talked about having same-sex feelings but not really feeling comfortable with actually identifying as lesbian.

Abby felt the need for safety. Being from the Deep South, she had grown accustomed to having to hide her identity around people she was not familiar with. During this part of the interview, Abby kept looking at the floor, almost as if she was embarrassed:

Um, I looked at a lot of different institutions, large and small, this was actually one of the two, three, one of the three all-women's institutions I actually considered. Um, at the end of the day I knew that I was looking for three things. I was looking for safety, I was looking for rigorous academics, and I was looking for a place that I felt comfortable. I was looking for, whether it was a big school or a small school, at the end of the day I wanted to be on campus and feel like I was welcome on campus being who ever I happened to be that day.

Joyce began by relating her desire to attend a college in California to be near her mother's family and she only applied to Salem because it was free to apply and she liked the admissions counselor she met at her high school college fair. She was accepted to Salem and was offered a scholarship to attend so she came to campus for scholarship weekend, which was her first campus visit to Salem, and realized that there were other people like her on campus. That is when she first really thought about attending Salem.

Uh, ok so coming to Salem was funny. I toured twenty-one schools, Salem was my 21st school that I toured and I wanted to go, I knew I wanted to go to a small school, um I really was looking to go in the Northeast or in in California, because my mom's whole family lives in California. And I applied to Salem kind of for fun because it was free, the application, and the woman, who I met at a college fair, seemed really nice. I applied to almost all private schools, I applied to one, no two

public schools in Florida I really almost didn't even come to scholarship weekend here, the only reason I really came is because they offered to fly me up because I was a full tuition candidate. The girl I stayed with really interesting and really kind of like me, vegetarian, really interesting, really smart, interested in like a lot of the same things I was, very politically active, very involved, things like that. And I was like oh there are people like me here, because I was very worried about this kind of pearl girl reputation that Salem has, the Suzie Salem, because that's not me at all. I just really felt so comfortable and at home here, which was something that I haven't felt at very many of the other schools. Um, (pauses) this sounds really bad, but the people. Like that's such a silly reason to pick where you are going to go to school but, well here's the funny thing. So I met all these people that I loved and they were great and I met all these professors that I loved.

Portia began by addressing how insecure she was in herself. She had been struggling for some time about her identity. Coming to Salem provided her the impetus to change.

I was very insecure about myself um and it was only until Salem did I understand, did I have to delve into myself and figure out who I was. So when I was um ultimately choosing the places that I chose I thought of all the places that you would need to fly in order to get home. I guess I still struggled with my own identity. Um, because I was told what I was and I didn't believe it. I was told oh you're really, you're really beautiful, you're really nice, you're really kind, you're, you know and I didn't, I hadn't believed it yet, it was only until I came to Salem did I actually find out who I really was and believe who I was. As far as Salem directly, Salem I feel ultimately has helped because it provided a chance to start over. There wasn't that past history that I had in high school, where everyone understood me as this particular thing and, and now I am changing it, or you are not going to make me feel like I have to change it. I have the opportunity, um, to become what I want to become and let that be ok, without as much judgment. Um, an example, I really embraced that possibility of change when I came to Salem, and not necessarily with my sexual identity, that, that was just sort of an after effect. I was like there's something about this place that I like.

The connection between place and identity would suggest that identity work is dependent upon the patches of geography we inhabit and occurs when we interact with our environment either consciously or unconsciously. By acknowledging this relationship, the connection between place and identity can be illuminated as more than just a specific patch of geography in which one might find themselves. Our identities are directly linked to the patches of geography we live in. This connection between geographic space and place is the core of our understanding of selfhood as well as belonging. It is difficult for us as individuals to envision or even comprehend relational places without also considering habits, feelings, and attachments we form within those places. As we move through these types of relational places, our personal and sexual identities are mapped around and via the relationships we develop with others.

CHAPTER VI

RELATIONSHIPS EMERGE

Our lives are always shaped in part by whom we happen to meet, where we meet them, and what kinds of experiences we have with them. It is between late adolescence and emerging adulthood when young women start developing close, intimate relationships with others. In many cases, young women will cultivate very close friendships with other young women prior to recognizing same-sex feelings within themselves. Conversely, not all close friendships are indicative of young women eventually identifying as lesbian or bisexual. These emotionally close friendships most often occur when young women have substantially more opportunities for interactions with female peers. For many young women the school environment is one of the most influential. Most of the young women I interviewed had never lived in a single-sex environment.

While living in a single-sex community is not always a precursor to a young woman eventually identifying as lesbian or bisexual, the existence of this important homosocial space is critical when thinking about sexual orientation development in young women. If a young woman already has identified as lesbian or bisexual this homosocial space enables them to further explore their sexual orientation. Even if a young woman has never questioned her sexual orientation, this homosocial space provides a safe place for questioning to occur.

Take Emily, for example, who by her own admission had a serious relationship with a young man, yet found herself questioning her sexuality when she meets an 'out' lesbian student on campus.

I don't know if I should admit this or not, but there was this one girl that was clearly a lesbian but she looked like, more like a guy than she did a girl, and I almost like was kind of attracted to her for a little while. So, I kinda had that, not really an attraction, but like, it was like wow you know, I don't know. Well, I wasn't like, I wasn't like, oh my god they're so hot I want to be with them or anything. It was more like it was strange for me I was like oh my god. I just had this, it crossed my mind a couple of times, I was like, wow she's kinda cute, she looks like someone I used to date, but it wasn't like I wanted to be with her or even go near, like flirting or anything like that, because I had a boyfriend and I didn't really, I didn't want to do anything like that, but, I don't know. I mean, I wasn't like attracted but it just crossed my mind and I was like that's kinda of strange, like it just kind of shocked me a little bit, you know. I mean it really wasn't I want to get with her...or even go beyond just having a conversation in class kind of thing, it just, I don't know, it just crossed my mind a coupla times, I was like wow, And it just was like, I just was kind of was in awe, I guess.

When Emily started talking about these same-sex feelings, she became very reticent and withdrawn. While same-sex attraction may evolve slowly over time for some young women, for others it may just suddenly appear without any early indication (Diamond L. M., 1998). As we create (our)selves by participating in social communities, we also make decisions about how we respond to others and the geographic spaces we inhabit. While Emily was quite astonished regarding her reaction to having same-sex feelings, Joyce was more relaxed and open about how she came to realize that she was definitely interested in dating women. According to Joyce, she had noticed same-sex

feelings during high school but she pushed those down. It was not until she arrived on Salem's campus that she felt more comfortable acting on those feelings. She states:

I've been pretty much dating E this whole year. I knew I was attracted to women, I wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue that and how much. But I've known since my sophomore year in high school, then I kind of like pushed that away again and then I got here and uh, started having more encounters with women and was like oh ok, no I'm definitely, definitely interested in women. And boys would try to talk with me and I was just so bored with it and I was like oh, I think I just going to kind of steer clear of them for a while. Um, so that's kind of how I knew, it was like an evolutionary process. And then E's my first girlfriend. She's my first serious like really relationship actually. It helped because I felt very comfortable coming out and dating her and I wasn't scared or, but I'm so naïve like, we're an interracial lesbian couple. We all live in this tiny, tiny space and it's very easy for your relationship to move very quickly. Because what happens is, like the same thing happened with me and E, so we you know sleep in the same bed and like oh I'm going to sleep in your bed tonight ok no I'm going to go back to my bed, and then we're like well then why would we ever sleep apart?

Amy, on the other hand, was very nonchalant when she mentioned she had a girlfriend. To her it was more important for me to know that she felt safe to be who she was rather than whom she was in a relationship with.

Um, I definitely can tell though that since I've been here I've become more of my own person and not like following exactly what they say, because I have become more I guess empowered as a woman. And I mean it's not because the gay thing, like I just I don't know, I guess I feel safer, not saying all men attack people but I do feel safer because I feel like if a women tried to jump out and attack me I would have a better chance. Um, it's it seems to be generally more like I said accepting and loving environment and also too I don't feel like, I don't feel pressure like even though I'm not trying to attract men. I can do my own thing; I can be my own person. Well, right now, I am in a relationship with a girl and she is very sweet, and I like her a lot. Here no one really, no one really reacts to it. I feel very comfortable here, especially, it really helps too being around

my friends, like if it were just me and I didn't talk to anyone, didn't have relationships with anyone yeah it would be hard to be completely myself.

According to Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2010), young women start developing close, intimate relationships during emerging adulthood. However, if they attend college they are able to delay this development, while at the same time, they also have the freedom to explore alternate routes without penalties. While Joyce decided to wait and act on her same-sex feelings until her first year of college, Abby came out during high school to her friends and some of her family, yet it was not until her first year in college that she felt comfortable coming out to her mother and immediate family. Abby relates her experiences:

I actually didn't tell my family that I was gay until um Christmas Break, of my first year at college, which was this last Christmas. So this year I just, I told my mom, my brother, and my sister and um I told my cousin when I was in high school, but I finally just told my mom, my brother, and my sister uh over Christmas. I was like what I want for Christmas is for you to be ok with me liking women the way that I'm supposed to like men is the text message they got (laughing). Because it's really difficult um 'specially in the African-American community being gay and being a woman because the assumption is that you just haven't found the right man, um not that you're not looking for men. I can honestly say that coming to Salem from where, the point I was when I came here to the point I am now is completely different. It's not so much that I have to shy away from the person that I am or hide behind what I think my family wants me to do or wants me to be.

The relationship between emerging adults and their parents is also a predictor of how smoothly young adults can perform identity work. If the relationship is an affirmative one, young adults are more likely to feel safe to explore their sexual

identities. The better the parental support, the more apt young women will be to explore multiple identities (Hall & Brassard, 2008).

Five of the young women either were in relationships with young men or had just recently broken up with them. Patty reports that she had started dating a young man from her church and bemoans the fact that church is the only place where she really has any contact with the opposite sex.

Let's see, oh um dating, I actually have a boyfriend now, he goes to William & Mary College, I met him through church, so I guess any interaction that I have with the opposite sex is mostly through church. Um, 'cause that's like the main way I am connected otherwise.

Melissa was one of only two young women I interviewed that had been in stable relationships for any length of time. Beth was still dating the same young man from high school. Melissa talks about how since coming to Salem she has become more confident in her dealings with her boyfriend.

I've been dating, um I've been dating the same guy since I was at State, um we've been together about three and a half years now. We could not be like more opposite me and him but it works. It works out so well, like he gives me a hard time and I give him a hard time. But he is especially prone to uh, because he knows it upsets me he will be like well you know where your place is, like he'll say things like that just to get me started. And it's nice because it's kinda like that you know like to destroy the master's house you have to enter the master's house and it's so nice to have that, that typical white male supremacist point of view being told to me as I'm saying these things and like well this is how I need to start saying it in order to get my point across. So I feel like that relationship has actually flourished since I've been here just because of what it's done on top of my education. It's made me more of an individual coming to Salem.

While Melissa spoke about her confidence increasing, Beth spoke about her problem with not being able to find her place on a campus where she was not a resident student. Beth, in her words:

Um it was difficult when I first came here um because like I said I didn't know anybody. It was kind of a shock going from high school to college. Um, and it seemed like the students that were on campus they made friends more easily because they had their roommates and their hall mates and they had different activities going on at night for residents that I couldn't necessarily come to. So it took me a few weeks to really fit in, in all of my classrooms and get to know people and start making friends. I think a lot of it may be because I live off campus and I have a boyfriend and a lot of guy friends outside of school.

Carli and Evie talked about how once coming to Salem, they realized that the relationships they were both in were very controlling. Carli speaks:

I was with the same guy so we were engaged because we were together forever it seemed like and I isolated myself so a lot of my friends would get tired of it, so I only had like two really close friends and my boyfriend, or my fiancé I should say and that was about it, relationship wise. We're not together anymore. Yeah, (chuckling), there's no ring on my finger. We haven't spoken in two years so. We ended it a month before my sophomore year here at Salem. He was very controlling but I didn't notice that until the very end of it, so, it's made me socially awkward when it comes to males, because there's no males really here on campus. I ended my last relationship a year ago April, because I was like every guy I've met can't function on the schedule that I have here. And we can't, we just can't work it out and they get frustrated with me and I get frustrated with them so I kinda cut off guys essentially during my academic years.

Evie echoes several of the same sentiments that Carli mentioned.

It has been a whirlwind of a year. During, I guess starting in January the guy I was dating um we broke up, and I didn't realize, and it's taken me a

few weeks to truly realize, we've been broken up for a month and half now. I was in a very controlling relationship and I'm still very aggravated with myself that I did not see how controlling. Went through a break up with him and it turned into he wanted me at his convenience and I was actually thinking of breaking up with him um just I don't I honestly can't say why I didn't. I was attached and I thought that there was more than what there was and I know so much better now. Um, and even after the fact he still thinks that we're going to be friends so I still hear from him occasionally and I just try to delete it off my phone and but it's just that was very aggravating, so I was dealing with that.

The transition to college is often an exciting and scary time, which can cause significant strain on dating relationships. During this critical time in one's identity development, the importance of this specific geographic space and the creation of relational places are vital in each young woman's experimentation with different identities (Hammers, 2009).

Several of the young women spoke to me about not wanting to be in any relationship while in college. Portia starts out talking about the friendships she had made since attending Salem and then segues into talking about why she did not date.

My first friend here S, we talked all summer. S and K, um we talk every single day. You know I was not used to being around women 24/7, I just was not, this was a lot. The friendships that I had, within or out of my group, I think especially being friends with G, freshman year I didn't like her, um but I think now we, we talk every day. There are certain friendships that I didn't even think that I would be, I wouldn't, I don't think I would've talked to G, because I had this negative label about her and I was like I don't even know this girl, she talks to much, she's crazy. I would have to say um this was probably the best experience that I ever had um here at Salem with all women. Um, I think this was probably the um the best environment for me here. We were on the same playing field and everyone, that's the part of everyone becoming so close, and, I mean, that was not the perception that I thought that I was going to get. I came in and I was like I'm not going to have any friends, this is ridiculous, I'm

just going to do my work and get out of here in four years. But I realize that I was wrong, I was wrong about that a lot. I'm just turned off about dating and going out. My relationships I feel, I've seen a lot of relationships in my four years and I'm very, very observant and I've seen people in relationships that they've had since high school, into college and then they break up and I'm just glad that I didn't have that. But um, I think dating wise, I think um, I've been very content in my own skin so I wasn't really kind of like oh my gosh I'm missing out on something.

Even though Portia made a conscious decision not to date, Bella focused more on the relationships she had developed with other young women on campus and since everyone else in her family dropped out of high school because of pregnancy, she chose not to date.

About my relationship with women, um, I have become more comfortable like being around them, I have made a small group of friends here that I really, really, really like a lot that I wish that our friendship lasts and carries on for years after we graduate. Whenever I stay on campus, I stay with my two friends. It's like we're, yeah, we're pretty much all really, really connected and we hang out a lot. Since starting Salem, I have not had a relationship because in my family I am currently the only one to finish high school without getting a GED, without being pregnant.

Jennifer never really addressed her dating life head on, except to state that she did not date; rather she focused more on the amount of lesbian and bisexual relationships she had noticed on campus, all the while affirming her straightness.

They comment about it being an all-women's school and all being gay and being very like just all lesbians, just completely like that because it's a women's college. There are a lot of lesbians but that does not make a school what a school is. Well one person asked me if that was why I didn't want to live on campus is because of all the lesbians, and I have gay people in my family. Being gay does not bother me one bit, if that's what makes you happy, that's where you want to go with your life, and that's

what you want to do fine, go for it. My only thing is that I respect you, you respect me. Don't come in on my personal space trying to push that on me and I will not push being straight on you, I respect your choices, you respect mine. I don't date, and haven't since high school.

Four of the young women were concerned with the lack of any young men on campus, yet in their own words, they admitted young men would have been a distraction. Emma found that it was more a lack of males on campus in the beginning that affected her choice in not dating.

I do not have a dating life (laughing) I am a straight girl at an all-women's college meeting men is not as easy as they led us to believe, so (laughing). I don't see that as a bad thing it's really let me focus on my education and my friendships that I have developed here.

Jeanette really enjoyed the all-female aspect even though she acknowledges that the lack of men on campus somewhat hindered her relationships with young men.

I liked the fact that it was female. Because like I said, at the time, I didn't want guys as a distraction, like I wanted my career first and then get married like when I'm like early thirties or something because that's kind of what my parents did. So um I have had a couple dating relationships. One of them I fell in love for the first time with a Wake guy from my college ministry and I got my heart broken for the first time. It was, it happened over a series of a couple of years we knew each other and um it's, I've seen now that Salem being an all-girls' environment changes the way that you relate to guys. Like there's like almost a disconnect because yeah, like maybe they conform to the world's view of the way men should be more than what we see, but at the same time I think based on that genetic difference and just personality based on gender So I think that definitely played a part in it.

Sally and Cathy talked about how neither of them even missed a man. Sally enjoyed being around other young women "*...who had their head on their shoulders.*"

When I was enjoying being at Salem, people were kinda like, what, you do not enjoy, there's no way you can enjoy going there, you know you're missing the boys, you're missing the parties, you're missing all the action and it wasn't, I mean to me it just wasn't that, I really wanted to go as an off-campus. I never really thought about staying on campus and even when I was looking at other schools, I didn't want to stay on campus there either. It was just all female, all the time and you just, you didn't think about it and especially when I got into my major courses, I was you know "stuck with the people who I was going to be stuck with" for three years or whatever and we just all bonded and it you know you never missed a man. I felt like being in that all female environment made us more geared toward what we were really there for anyway. We were there for an education; nobody was really there to screw off anyways. It's just a different; it's a totally different population. I'd never really been around women like this anyways, not a bunch, well I've never been around that many women. But a bunch of women who had their head on their shoulders so to speak and so um my relationships were really strong, really good, and with all of them, black, white, gay, lesbian, whoever you know, we just all, everybody pretty much got along.

Cathy, however, preferred to cultivate her friendships with the other young women on campus and really did not "*...miss a man in her life.*"

Um, I had a really hard first year, but I don't think it had anything to do with it being an all-women's college. Um it was my first time in like a single-sex institution, but I wasn't, it wasn't a weird feeling. The lack of men was never very obvious for me, because I don't really feel the need for a man in my life. Like I have never, I don't know, it just isn't something that I really, I don't know if it's paid that much attention to or noticed or cared about or anything. I feel like I've managed to cultivate a vast array of friendships with many different people but they happened at different times during um my four years, but I think I graduated with pretty strong friendships in a lot of different like friend groups. Um, I know some who like actively seek out finding a partner and then dating but I'm kind of content to not do that, so I haven't really dated at all.

Yeah, and it sounds really strange and weird, but yeah, it does, but it's not like that's a reason to not date.

Emma also discusses how Salem encourages the students to develop friendships as well as her first experience meeting a lesbian.

There's the first year bonding courses, where you go in, that let you meet more variations of people and now they kinda have to meet the same class twice; it gave me a chance to get to know some of my classmates and get to talk to people. I ended up making a friend on my hallway; she lived by herself, when I had first met her nothing had really struck me about her. But that relationship sticks out to me because I remember two weeks after I got here, um, she admitted that she was gay and I had never, my high school was one of those places where it wasn't, it wasn't something that was openly talked about. You weren't supposed to bring home someone of the opposite race let alone someone of the same gender. So when she had said that to me it was really, it was really an interesting experience, because I realized that I didn't care, it's not something that has ever bothered me in our friendship, but it was something that I had always thought would make me bristle, or um something about my upbringing would make me turn away or something and it didn't matter at all.

The time of transition from high school to college gives individuals the opportunity for intense personal and identity development. As stated earlier, this was the first time some of these young women had ever had the opportunity to be in an all-female space. For some young women this was problematic. A number of the young women I interviewed were at a crossroad in their personal journeys. Through their own words, several of them were trying out new identities and ways of being in their world. This facet of emerging adulthood offers many of these young women opportunities for identity exploration that can create feelings of angst within themselves as well as among their peers. Many of them spoke about 'finding myself' and developing new friendships as

reasons for ending romantic relationships as well as not actively participating in the dating scene. This signifies a powerful period of identity evolution and exploration where thoughts relating to love, work, and worldviews occur. According to Lemke (2008), “Each of us internalizes a great deal of the diversity in which we live.” (pp. 20-21). It is during this period of emerging adulthood when the friendships that are formed, are likely to become the most enduring and meaningful non-familial relationships that individuals have.

CHAPTER VII

THE SISTERHOOD

Among other challenges that develop towards the end of adolescence, an individual must also ‘choose’ both social as well as self-identities. It is the identity work that an individual does within herself, as well as how this work is accomplished around and with other people, which helps these young women map their identities. The groups that these young women consider they are part of, for instance, nationality, sexuality, student/teacher, as well as friendships, provide meaning to them regarding who they are in connection to these groups. Fitting into a group is considered a critical aspect of personal identity development. The relationship between place and identity indicate that personal identity work is impacted by the patches of geography we occupy and changes every time we interact with our surroundings both knowingly and reflexively.

As women, we are socialized from birth to perform for and compete against men. However, in an all-female educational space, this path is challenged; the rules are completely different. It is within this space that friendships are developed sans men, which changes the dynamics of these friendships dramatically. There are not many men other than professors and a few male continuing education students. The young women are expected to hold all the offices in the Student Government Association, Honor Council, and multiple student groups. For most of these young women, this is a radical

change from what they have been exposed to. An educational environment is one of the most important spaces for young women to do identity work (Bedard & Marks, 2010).

Young women's friendship groups are usually characterized by the dyad of best friends rather than multiple close friends and as being more emotionally close and supportive (Azmitia, Ittel, & Radmacher, 2005). However, within an all-female space the young women spend the majority of their time together, which tends to foster multiple close friendships with each other. There is a noticeable difference in the level of closeness between these friendships. This in turn creates a sense of community and sisterhood among the students. In this chapter, I will explore how these young women navigated these new friendships once they arrived on campus. One of the ways in which Salem promoted these friendships was via Big Sis/Little Sis. Several of the young women addressed this concept of friendship.

Jeanette describes how her Big Sis/Little Sis relationship began and how it was one of the most rewarding relationships for her.

I was leaving for Italy that semester, that was Fall, and I had met my little, I only had one little, and I had met her once before leaving and I discovered that no one was "dating" her if you will, so I asked her right there like will you be my little after what, meeting her two hours. Oh my gosh, she's so great! We connect even now, I was thinking last night, it's been a week since I've talked to her and I feel like lost like not talking to her. But, um we were great together, like I love her. This past year was a little more difficult too with just all the stresses being on us, and she got a boyfriend, which changed the relationship quite a bit, but I love her. It was great! Like you must have a closer relationship with just about everyone on campus, because it is so small. When you're in college, you see them just about every day. You live with them, you have, and you're with them more, so I think it yields itself to developing a stronger relationship than in high school.

Bella has four 'littles'. She explains how this occurred as well as how she lost her 'big'.

I have four littles. I argued over one because like three other people wanted her and that wasn't going to happen because I had talked to her all the summer before. But the other three, I adopted one of them, because her big is not doing anything so I adopted her, but I didn't have to fight for my other two. Because no one knew who one was and everyone thought the other one was too crazy to be a little, which is the truth, she's like insane. But I love them all. We were really comfortable around each other, well we actually talk about things, debate, we're not, we're not like if we don't agree with something that someone else has said we're not afraid to be like, to speak out I feel like I can say anything and won't be judged and my opinion will be respected. I don't have a big anymore. She went crazy my first year, like crazy insane crazy and left notes everywhere. There was this girl that she liked and she wouldn't take no for an answer, she was really weird (whispered). She started leaving notes around campus for this girl to find, it was really weird and she left campus without saying bye to anybody and never came back.

Emma addresses how hard being a 'big' is and what it is like trying to keep up with her 'little'.

Um, but being a big is really hard. You try to keep in contact with them, keep up with what's going on with them, see if they need help with anything um ask them about things that are going on or going wrong or ask them if they're frustrated with something and tell them how to get around it, especially study habits 'cause that's something that's hard to learn in college.

According to Diamond (2002), young women's friendships can develop into passionate friendships that emotionally look a lot like romantic love. These feelings may include enthusiasm, possessiveness, and a sense that losing the friendship would significantly affect their lives. As noted above, both Jeanette's and Bella's relationships with their 'littles' and Bella's description of how she 'lost' her 'big' involved some of

these scripts of romantic love. The patches of geography that these young women inhabit also influence these friendships.

Although typically we perceive (our)selves as coterminous with our bodies, our experience of (our)selves also involves the geographic space around us. Emma addresses how this particular patch of geography influenced her relationships with the other students as well as what it is like to be a 'little'.

We really are sisters on this campus, like there isn't a single one of them whom I would trade for anything, they're not all necessarily the best people, they're not going to be all my best friends, but you love them anyway. They make the environment what it is, um it's kind of a beautiful thing, it's this friendship with almost no expectation from you. My big just graduated, I miss her so much. She was about 4'8" maybe, she was really small, um but I loved her to death. When she finally adopted me and um actually became my big it was really, it was really like this heartfelt, really warm experience wherein this person was offering to make you a member of a family of sorts. There's just this huge fondness on this campus for that kind of mentorship and that kind of sister bond that you get with an older student. Big sis/Little sis is kind of what bonds us together as a family and it really encourages that sisterhood.

Beth was not quite certain how to understand the sisterhood initially since she lived off campus and did not have a 'big'. Yet, she did get to choose a 'little'.

It was a big problem with my incoming off-campus class, so we couldn't, we weren't able to sign up for one they had already chosen. I know me and two other girls never got one. I was kind of upset at first um because they had made such a big deal about big sis/little sis that I didn't get one and I didn't get to experience one. I actually didn't go through the traditional method you know where you read the profiles and you go through this big ceremony and everything. Our first day of classes one of my friends um was an orientation leader and she had met a lot of the first years, and she made a friend over in Babcock and she told me about her and said oh she's so awesome you need to come meet her. So we hung

out one night and a week later we went to the movies and we were talking about big sis/little sis and it was right before they chose, so um you know we had hung out several times and gotten along great and were becoming friends so I kind of adopted her.

However, now that she is a senior, she realizes just how much she has grown as well as how much the sisterhood will mean to her once she graduates.

I hope I'll still be talking to these people years and years and years from now. There's a reason they call it the sisterhood. Um I think it's very fitting this idea of the sisterhood. I think that Salem does a great job of fostering the idea of a close-knit community and sisterhood bonds.

Even though Cathy had just graduated when I interviewed her, she spoke about the sisterhood as a way to form bonds with her classmates.

I think that very specific smallness of it really helped because I was used to like such a small high school and such a close-knit community um that knowing, that like recognizing a lot of faces has been really helpful and I've been able to talk to a lot of people and get to know a lot of people and feel like I know the majority of this campus. When you're at Salem you're part of a sisterhood. To embrace this community and the other people in the community and then like have a growing sense of camaraderie but I think that's still relevant and is still an actual kind of sisterhood, it's just, I think sisterhood is just a way to form the bonds that we are forming with whomever it is with which we're forming them.

Jennifer voiced this same thought and went on to talk about how the sisterhood was a huge benefit in choosing to attend Salem.

That, that's my one thing I would say is just the sisterhood, the community, the willingness of others to be helpful, and to be knowledgeable about you and who you are as a person, and I think those benefits are huge.

Diamond (2000a) posits that many same-sex friendships are emotionally intimate and often provide a foundation for a young woman to experience same-sex attraction. This often blurs the line between romantic relationships and passionate friendships. Amy relates her experiences with the sisterhood and frames it around her relationships with her girlfriend.

The friend group I roll with now, I like them a lot because unlike the people I was hanging out with they're, they don't do drama, they just, they don't do it you know. They're very accepting and I'm, I mean I'm weird, so I mean like I do think Salem's female community is closer than other colleges. I can relax and open up around them more because I know I can trust them. Salem is a more open and accepting community of the LGBTQ thing, it gave me more confidence to be who I was and express who I was and start not caring about what other people thought about who I was. The main thing is it's easy to get into a relationship because it is an accepting area. There is definitely a sisterhood and camaraderie that you probably won't find anywhere else.

Joyce also frames her response around the community of acceptance that is fostered on campus.

I think a lot of people come here because they feel like it's safe to be gay, or queer, or trans, or whatever you classify yourself as, um and I think Salem doesn't realize that, that somehow, perhaps accidentally, or

unbeknownst to the administration, this community of acceptance has been created, because I don't think that the administration tries to foster that or helps that in anyway, they tell the um the people who hostess not to talk about if they you know have a girlfriend. But through that kind of interesting pressure or denial of the faculty, this like amazing community of acceptance and um sisterhood has formed. I know a lot of people that um would never have considered being honest about who they are at another place that was maybe less accepting or co-ed and here people just are free to kind of explore and express themselves and that's really nice and I think that does come from this idea of sisterhood and treating your fellow Salem students as sisters.

Portia speaks about how she perceived the sisterhood in relation to her race and her sexuality.

I feel like many of the women that I've met here um have changed my life for the better, have changed my perception, has changed a lot of different things. You know I had always heard, you know, it's going to sound awful, I'd always heard before I went into Salem uh it's just a bunch of lesbians that go there so I didn't know what to expect. I feel like they don't show that we have a lesbian culture here, they try to hide it and then when people come they're like oh my gosh I didn't know. We get the Sisterhood and we believe in the Sisterhood.

Three of the young women spoke about the sisterhood in relation to alumnae.

Abby met an alumna that also understood her campus experiences.

It's crazy to meet a Salem alum because they are soooo enthusiastic and energetic and about you and the fact that you are going to Salem. I wasn't really aware of like that connection or that even that, the fact that that mattered to me but I really like the sisterhood. Like I said it's like a sorority without the nasty aftertaste, like I don't have to wear pink or put my initials on my shirt if I don't want to.

Evie also mentioned meeting "Salem Sisters" outside of campus:

If you are in downtown Winston or where ever or somewhere out in the actually community with a Salem Sister or if you see a Salem Sister there is still the constant recognition, which exemplifies the tight knit community that we have. I don't truthfully know how to describe it, um but it's kind of a good feeling and it's definitely a positive because they know what you are going through. Truthfully I don't know if you can describe it in words, it's kinda something you have to experience I guess it's almost the way you have the connection with your family it's kinda like that it's the best way to describe it.

Sally talked about the connections she has with other alumnae.

If you want to go somewhere where you're going to make lasting relationships and have a damn good career one day then go to Salem College. You know it's, it's so cool to be able to have an alum book. You can call an alum in Seattle, WA, because she works at ABC firm, and say hey I'm interested in this, and you know without a shadow of a doubt, that every single person that you call would be like hey come on out here you know intern with us for a day, or shadow us, or how can I answer your questions, how can I help you, you know?

A few of the young women talked about how they thought the sisterhood was stressed too much. According to Patty:

I think that the sisterhood thing is maybe a little bit inflated. Um and it might have meant something in the past, it may have been more stressed. I think that the sisterhood idea would probably be bigger if I were here, but at the same time I don't know how much of the sisterhood idea is encouraged at events because it's like a traditional event, and how much like it's true, I think that it's kind of hard to distinguish. I mean personally I don't how people would get work done if they were always just like chatting and having a great sisterhood with the entire campus. I just kinda want to have my own space as well, but the relationships are something that I wish I could build more, because you are not like living with people you know.

Cathy also mentioned how not everyone felt a part of the sisterhood.

I don't think everyone feels like a part of the sisterhood, and I don't think that's because they can't or because of any like, well I'm taking that back, I, I know. I've heard a lot of people who say, who like just think the sisterhood is bullshit. But then I've also heard them say that they love the sisterhood here. They might, I think there are people who feel part of a sisterhood with certain groups of people and not within the whole campus community.

Melissa also mentioned how the sisterhood was not something that she really focused on and related it to a few same-sex relationships she had witnessed at the other university she had attended prior to coming to Salem.

I have made friends at Salem but not friends that I hang out with, outside of Salem, just because there's not, the only time I see people is class and that's, that's not the time to you know socialize for me anyways, 'cause I have a hard enough time as it. And so I'm here to learn I'm not here, I am here to make friends any you know that kind of thing, but that's not my priority whatsoever. We are supposed to be here to support each other. I think that the, the friendships and the relationships here are strong. You see girls holding hands or a kiss on the cheek and things like that, but it's never been PDA no matter what. I don't, it's weird to me, I feel like there is a time and place to have a relationship. I feel like it does happen here because it happened at State. At State they were called lugs, lesbians until graduation.

All of these young women brought a different style of reasoning with them to Salem. A history, if you will, of thinking about spaces, places, and relationships. While each young woman's grammar (logic) for working through their relationships was different, each had fashioned her own place via emotions and relationships within this

geographic space. If we look carefully at how each young woman responded to my questions, we can see their individual maps.

Even though these young women had started mapping their identities before they entered Salem, it was at Salem where their identities were solidified and made manifest. Most of the young women had positive views regarding Big Sis/Little Sis; however, some negative comments were made regarding this institutionalized version of “forced friendships” as well as the ideal type of student that Salem promotes in their marketing campaigns.

CHAPTER VIII

BUT IT'S REALLY NOT LIKE THAT

“Susie Salem” and the Iconic-Spatial Disconnect

It is one thing to inhabit a place singularly created for women and quite another to meet, figuratively speaking, the cultural image of the student who ideally occupies that place. Many of the young women that I interviewed described the personal distance they felt from this cultural representation of the ideal Salem student. This iconic figure inhibits the fashioning of place for these young women; she is quite alienating. Most of them used the term "Susie Salem" and still others, the term "Pearl Girl." This identity, the students rightly knew, had been meticulously crafted by the administration to create the ideal Salem College student. While ideal types are frequent conceptual constructs within sociology, created from identifiable facts, they rarely conform to reality because of intentional oversimplification and embellishments.

Many of the students spoke about their perception of Salem from viewing the website and from reading the pamphlets that were distributed at college fairs they had attended.

But they try to put on the perfect Salem woman, like if you look at that Salem magazine right there she's skinny, she's blonde, she's dancing she looks like what Salem wants to portray like all the pictures you see online, all the Salem students are like in their sundresses, wearing their pearls, like you know they're the Salem image and that's what they want to act like all of Salem is. They tend to, they try to put on this "Susie Salem" image.

Well you know just reading about Salem and looking at the pictures they have when I was applying it didn't look like a college, you know, I was like surely that is not what they do, that's not what they wear, that's not how they act, it's a college.

So the image that Salem really likes to portray is like kind of prim and proper southern girls, 240 years of educating smart, southern, pretty, prissy women kind of. Which is not who comes here anymore.

Um, so it's sort of a funny thing because the administration works so hard to promote this ideal that isn't here, but isn't here in a great way. And there certainly are girls who wear pearls every day and who put makeup on, straighten their hair every morning, and get dressed up but you have people that are like that everywhere, but I would not say that was the majority and that's certainly not the majority of my friends.

...those people that are on the pamphlets do not look like me. They are very much like me but when they put on those fancy, I mean they give you a requirement of what you have to wear in order to be on that thing, so that's not how they dress, they have like that outfit just for those things.

Problems that arise when using an ideal type include a tendency to focus on extremely polarizing issues, while disregarding the links between them as well as the challenges of demonstrating just how different groups and their constituents complement each other within a community, or as in the case of Salem College, an educational space. Several of the students discussed these challenges and how the college continues to portray the perfect Salem student and the subsequent results among the students.

...but they won't let us kinda like represent who we really are so that poses like a threat and it causes people to be like whoa Salem thinks this we have to show that we're not so it causes us to be cliquish and kinda like a revolt which is really weird.

Because like it will show in the like the website that it had like one of the black girls she was like dressed in what some people would call like white people clothing, I hate that term, but that wasn't her style but that's what they told her to wear so it caused a lot of people to get mad and it's just it's crazy. Because it, like I said the website, and like how they present Salem to be is what causes a lot of this that's going on, but if they were open saying yeah you know we have this we have this we have a very open LGBT community it would be different but they don't show that on the website or anything when they talk about Salem at all, so it causes a division like those people feel like then they have to stick with one another in order to help each other.

...the people who give the tours and stuff they all fit the Salem image, I mean um, like they try to portray Salem as just that and so the girls who are that come here thinking that I'm going to fit in here great and then they get here and they see someone like me walking by holding hands with a girl or you know they see the random like weird girl running around with face paint or something or they see the girl wearing the tutu, like the people who fit the "Salem image" that came here because they thought it was that are like what is this what did I get myself into. Like they didn't realize they were getting themselves into a very liberal college and they transfer out quickly because I've definitely heard girls make comments like I didn't know there were so many gay people here and like transfer out within three weeks.

Like Salem tries to portray itself as something it's not, not saying you know that Salem shouldn't try to make itself look nice I mean yeah definitely, but you never see pictures of real Salem students, you see the select few students that they want to like make their image about. And like they don't show the students the real Salem, they just put them with the people that fit the perfect image.

This disconnect fosters a subculture of subterfuge among the students. This feeling of living in a Petri dish creates the framework for several of these young women to have to forge their perception of who they are with this idea of "Susie Salem." Most of them are struggling to define themselves against an institutionally defined ideal. The

actual reality of Salem is jarring to the students and only adds to their confusion. This is in fact an element of the dramaturgical performance that Goffman (1959) describes with the concepts of front stage/back stage. The front stage, where the actor/student officially acts and adheres to traditions, may have significance to the target audience. The student is aware that she is being observed and behaves appropriately. By utilizing the “Susie Salem” persona, the students are able to act like the ideal Salem student within this particular patch of geography known as Salem College. For example, several students mentioned that even though Salem wanted them to dress and act a specific way, it was just that: an act.

Well there was a lot of people, who I felt like, um had that ego kinda control thing and they were, you know the pearl wearing um Susie Salem’s, exactly, that’s exactly what it was. It was the Susie Salem. So, um, uh, these, these girls were the ones who tried to control as much as they could of your life or what you were doing, or where you were going and this and that. The people who give the tours and stuff they all fit the Salem image, I mean um, like they try to portray Salem as just that.

It’s all the generic images um which is interesting just in that, it almost represents our campus but it leaves out a lot, it, it even miscon, like it doesn’t actually portray how the “pearl girls” are, it’s, I feel like it’s a very narrow and stereotypical idea of who it is that wears those clothes or enjoys pearls, which is kind of sad too.

I think Salem definitely chose the “pearl girls” to be like the Frem members and to be on the flyers or whatever those brochure things are that they hand out to prospective students, and what they put on the billboards downtown, and all of that. They definitely pick the All-American girls to be on there and that’s definitely not the way Salem is.

The back stage becomes the students own place, for example, their dorm rooms, and is where they can show their “true selves”; however, the main audience is not present. It is where the reality that has been concealed on the front stage can occur. The back stage is entirely independent of the front stage. The students are able to step away from the persona that Salem requires them to project without worrying about disrupting their performances on the front stage, the geographic space of Salem College. Virtually no members of the audience can be found in the back. When the students are in the back stage area they are still in yet another performance, that of camaraderie. The students addressed this concept as well.

We have this, we have a very open LGBT community. It would be different, but they don't show that on the website or anything when they talk about Salem at all, so it causes a division like those people feel like then they have to stick with one another in order to help each other. I came for an off campus lunch thing beforehand, like a week before school started and the girls they had there leading it were the Susie Salem's and Karen and I were sitting there like Oh God what did we get into, like I don't know if this was a right choice or not.

And then once I got on campus, and started meeting all these fun, vibrant, unusual people I was like ok this is great! But you know even walking around I could see girls in their pajamas and little cat fights going on (chuckling) and stuff like that. Um and then staying here you know overnight whenever I was applying I got to see some of, all of that first hand, so I knew when I got here that it wasn't like they described. Um, which kind of made me relieved.

I think it's really interesting when prospectives come because they have this image of what they think Salem is, what they think Salem should be, but when I am your hostess and I am wearing my Chucks and my cargo shorts, you're like but that's not like the girls we saw on the website with the cute little Aeropostale shirts like that's not what we saw, hmm. Salem

is definitely not what I thought it was going to be but I'm glad that it's not what I thought it was going to be because I wouldn't have come here; you have these people who you are like these are some token Susie Salem's but it's really funny because they look like Susie Salem until they open their mouths or until you, you hear how they feel about things and you're like you are a Susie Salem on the surface, that's what you are, you are a Susie Salem impersonator.

I think a lot of people come here because they feel like it's safe to be gay, or queer, or trans, or whatever you classify yourself as, um and I think Salem doesn't realize that, that somehow, perhaps accidentally, or unbeknownst to the administration, this community of acceptance has been created, because I don't think that the administration tries to foster that or helps that in anyway.

They are very much like me but when they put on those fancy, I mean they give you a requirement of what you have to wear in order to be on that thing, so that's not how they dress, they have like that outfit just for those things. And um many of them they don't ask to be on it, they're just like hey you're going to be on the pamphlet, we need you, sorry. Um, many of them are just like you know I'm just chilling with you all, I don't want to identify with that, but they are just put on it.

I know that they paid Kristen to stay in her room on visitation weekend. Kristen was a little wild dresser, she had curly black hair, she dressed in camouflage, no shoes, and she was an out lesbian. Kristen told me that administration paid her to stay in her room during visitation weekends and they furnished her food and movies. So, Kristen would stay in her room so they wouldn't have to see her.

The everyday life of these young women is divided into two realities: their actual lived experiences and the socially constructed ideal of the Susie Salem persona. The way the young women deal with these two very distinct realities sometimes can create conflicts between each other as well as the administration. This interaction between space, place, and students is where identity emerges. The role that each student plays is

made up of several different parts and they choose how and when they show these different parts to others. They may even show different parts to the same people, it depends on the occasion.

CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION AND COMPLICATIONS

The aim of this study has been to illuminate and explore how space and place affect young women's sexual identity mapping. The question of space and the notion of place in sociology trouble the margins of our discipline. We have an intuitive understanding of both—we know when we are in a space versus a place. At the start of this work, during the literature review phase, I drew a distinction between space and place. I argued that the key to constructing a more effective perception of these notions is to understand it is not the physical but the relational that defines place and allows for the development of different opinions of place for each individual in this patch of geography known as Salem College. I also included a brief discussion regarding how both sexual orientation and sexual identity make up a portion of the identity work we do over the course of our lifetime.

I have addressed this understanding by highlighting the particular ways in which space and place have played a role in these young women's lives in consolidating their sexual identity. By focusing on the particular instead of the general ways in which young women fashion their identities, I am challenging several expectations we have made in sociology regarding identity work. Personal identity work, as defined in sociology, is a social construct, which includes how we interact with our culture, our family, both chosen and family of origin, as well as our own personal experiences. The journeys we make

through this essential identity work sometimes reveal the internal conflicts that take place as we map and embrace specific aspects of our identities that we may have neglected in our pasts.

I have used the notion of ‘work’ to get at what Erikson proposed in his identity theory. According to Erikson, it is a bit of a labor, this identity work, in that we are conscious of the process of identity development. Sometimes we become acutely conscious of it and we have identity crises; but he alluded to the idea that as we are aging out of adolescence and even in our latter years we are still working through identity. The work required to move through each stage is met with a quandary, the solution of which, allows each individual to navigate to the following stage. Recognizing this strategy as the classical conceptualization of adolescent identity however, rejects the significance of how space and place help us to map our adult identities.

I have also brought together the ideas of space, place, and identity work around this important notion of who ‘I’ am as a sexual being. This is significant because while we think we have an all-inclusive working idea surrounding the normative order of sexual identity a close reading of the interview text illuminates nuanced as well as outright accounts that indicate that the generic mapping of who we are could be challenged in one way, shape, or form.

The places that are formed in this college setting, the relationships that emerge, along with the sense of ‘who I am’ act as sensitizing points in this process of identity work. In trying to answer this important question “Who am I?” these young women must devote a great deal of contemplation as well as make decisions to experiment with

different behaviors. In this process of experimentation, these young women must also examine different viewpoints and become more at ease with the completely new roles they are choosing to undertake.

To complicate matters further, our thoughts surrounding place are connected to our ideas surrounding community, group identity, as well as our individual identities. In addition, these ideas have very tangible effects since places are socially constructed and defined differently by different groups. Take for example the identity that Salem College portrays to the public, Susie Salem. This ideal type was created to help define Salem College as safe and nurturing for young women like Susie. However, the young women I interviewed suggest that, for many of them, this was not necessarily so. For these young women, Salem College was rife with places where they could explore and, for some, come to see themselves as someone other than Susie Salem.

Method of Analysis and Limitations

While both nomothetic and ideographic methods of analyses have their place within our discipline, I have chosen to utilize an ideographic method of analysis. By conducting in-depth interviews, I was able to get to the singular ways in which we live our lives. One of the strengths of using this ideographic method of analysis is that if read carefully one can begin to challenge some of the operative notions about how things are done, why things are done, and with whom things are done surrounding sexual identity work.

However, I am also cognizant of the fact that by focusing on the particular I am not able to move from this type of data into discussions of specific trends or general

statements regarding sexual identity mapping in young adult women. Sexual identity mapping is quite an intricate venture and can be confounded by a variety of circumstances such as cultural factors, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, genetics, as well as the patches of geography we inhabit.

For most young women, however, emerging adulthood is a time to develop close personal same-sex friendships. Usually when young women enter this period of emerging adulthood it is assumed that they have somewhat already begun fashioning their sexual identities. However, it is the setting of these close passionate friendships, where young women can share intimate, loving, and sometimes sexual feelings with each other, that aids in resolving identity crises and helps solidify who they are as unique sexual beings. Sexual identity mapping is frequently explored during the college years. Independence from family pressures oftentimes permits stigmas to be lessened, as well as having increased amounts of peer support and encouragement.

Possibilities for Future Research

While exploring the particular in the general, I have also been creating all kinds of possible leads for future research in this area. Several issues that need to be addressed are beyond the scope of this thesis. While much work has been done regarding male homosociality, there is a dearth of research surrounding female homosociality. We do not have the language to describe the relationships created between young women that are neither platonic nor romantic. To that end what exactly qualifies a relationship as romantic or platonic? How might these relationships change over time? How do women, who may identify as lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual over time, understand the

constructs of sexuality? How does a co-ed environment change the dynamics of passionate friendships between young adult women?

Final Thoughts

Each one of us craft (our)selves by joining certain groups and connecting to certain patches of geography to create place. However, we still have to make choices regarding how exactly we will respond to other individuals, our environments, as well as our own selves. Our identities are constantly evolving, shared, and individual works of art. In addition, our identities and selves are not determined immediately and permanently. Each of us has agency whether we decide to take action or not. Some individuals tend to be more open compared to other individuals to opportunities for various identifications and replacing (them)selves, yet there are unquestionably patterns in our performances and in our responses that preserve some stability or at least consistency.

In conclusion, by merging each of these singular case studies together into a collage of stories, I have illustrated how each story shares something with the other, yet remains unique. It is important to recognize how these young women move through this patch of geography known as Salem College, and form life-changing relationships that help mold them into the beings they become. The importance of such constructs cannot be under-valued. Much of their impact is taken for granted and shapes these young women unknowingly. How each of them turns that space into a place is exclusively personal. By identifying the complexity of the intersections of space, place, and identity, place becomes not just a fixed point on a map; rather, it becomes the social practices that

intersect with space and the relationships inherent in each place. This in turn defines who belongs to a certain place and how they experience it.

Our personal identities are strongly connected to the patches of geography we occupy. This connection between these patches of geography and place is the heart of our understanding of selfhood and belonging. As we move through these places, our personal and sexual identities are mapped around and through the interactions we have with others. Our identities are not fixed; they are constant creations. The sexual identities of these young women are continuously mapped via the ways in which they fashion this particular patch of geography into relational places where they can consolidate their sexual identities, and are as myriad as the young women I interviewed.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Are we there yet? The mapping of sexual identity over time

Project Director: Steve Kroll-Smith

Participant's Name: _____

This is a research project. The intent of this study is to understand and describe the personal identity mapping that occurs during the formative college years for women. The purpose of this research project is to gain knowledge and understanding about the effects of relational space on female personal identity mapping, with a specific emphasis on the question of knowledge and discovery.

Your part in this study will assist me in achieving a better understanding of identity mapping that occurs in an educational space. You have been selected as a participant in this research study because you are either an alumna or a current student at Salem College.

If you agree to be in the study, all that will be required of you is to sign this consent form and be interviewed by me, Myra Lynn Doyle. These interviews will take approximately one hour to one hour and a half. There will be two interview sessions over the course of two months. There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. The information that is gathered from this study will be used to write articles and/or book(s). With your permission, interviews will be audio taped. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed; however, the researcher will restrict access to the tape as described below. In the event of loss or theft of audiotapes, I will immediately terminate the study.

At no stage of the writing and publication process will your identity be revealed. I will use a pseudonym in my personal notes, and no one will have access to them besides me. My hand written notes and audio tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet, the interview transcriptions will be stored on a jump drive that will be password protected

and stored in a locked file cabinet. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. I guarantee that the following conditions will be met:

- 1) Your real name will not be used at any point in the articles and books further written and published; you and any other person involved in your case will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written reports, and publications. You can choose this pseudonym yourself if you wish so.
- 2) If you grant permission for audiotaping, no audio tapes will be used and/or played for any purpose other than to do this study. At your discretion, they will be destroyed or returned to you.
- 3) Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data, which has been collected, be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at 1-855-251-2351. Questions, concerns, or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Myra Doyle who may be contacted at mldoyle2@uncg.edu or 336-692-7117.

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. The information provided by this study will add to the literature already available concerning personal identity mapping over time. In addition, this study will identify the complexity of intersectionality of space, place, culture, and personal identity mapping.

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate; this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it, or that it has been read to you and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Myra Lynn Doyle.

Additionally:

Do you grant permission to be interviewed? Yes _____ No _____

Do you grant permission to be audiotaped? Yes _____ No _____

Do you grant permission to be photographed? Yes _____ No _____

Respondent _____ Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher _____ Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Theme 1: BEFORE

In thinking back on your high school years, talk to me a little about how you experienced yourself as a young woman in that context. What was it like to be you in high school?

- Relationships with young men
- Relationships with family
- Relationships with young women
- Feelings in each of these relationships

Theme 2: TRANSITION

In thinking about your decision to attend Salem College, talk to me a little about how you came to the conclusion to choose Salem College. What was the decision process like for you?

- Factors that played a part
- Role of family in decision-making process
- Feelings surrounding this decision
- Most important factor

Theme 3: AFTER

Now, fast forward to your experiences at Salem College, talk to me a little about you...

- Types of experiences
- Effect of all female environment
- Relationships with other students
- Relationships with family
- Dating relationships

Theme 4: SPECIFIC/PARTICULAR/PEOPLE/EVENTS/EPIPHANIES

In thinking about your time at Salem College, talk to me a little about specific events, people, realizations that you have experienced and/or encountered. I would also like to ask you to please use a pseudonym when you talk about specific people.

- Feelings about certain events or people
- Emotional reactions to events, people, and/or epiphanies
- Benefits
- Concerns