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**Home: Recreated in a College Setting**

By

Hannah Huggins

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
Honors in Geography

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# “Home: Recreated in a College Setting”

Hannah Huggins

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## **Research Question**

How is home, and its associated feelings, reconstructed in a college environment?

## **Introduction**

Within the field of Geography, many scholars have evaluated the association between identity and space (Katz 2003). Geographers, such as Bachelard (1994), Buffel (2017), Duncan (1982), Duncan and Schein (2004), Ratnam (2018), and Sheehan (2010) have addressed the ways in which attachments and identities are specifically connected to places of “home” as they produce “social and emotive relationships and meanings” (Ratnam 2018, 1). Scholars within various other academic fields, such as Sociology and Psychology, have also analyzed identity in relation to homes (Hurdley 2006, McAndrew 1998, Thornock, Nelson, Porter, and Evans-Stout 2019). There is additional scholarly dialogue concerning how identities and feelings of home are affected in transitional periods, such as after a move. These conversations often center around migrants, nursing home residents, and college students (Cicognani, Menezes, and Nata 2011, McAndrew 1998, Ratnam 2018, Buffel, 2017, Van Hoof et al. 2016).

The research regarding college students, however, tends to identify the ways one’s room says something about oneself or focuses on how people connect to and identify with their college town or hometown, rather than the physical dwelling they inhabit (Cicognani et al. 2011, McAndrew 1998, Walls can talk 2015). There has been virtually no research on college students’ recreations of home on college campuses. This research project seeks to address this gap and investigate the recreation of home by college students on college campuses through a qualitative analysis of student experiences in on-campus housing at the University of Mary Washington.

## **Home is Affective**

*“Our house is our corner of the world” (Bachelard 1994, 4).*

Home, defined for the micro-level scale of this study, is a physical dwelling in which one lives (Duncan 1982, Duncan and Lambert 2004, Low and Chambers 1989, Ratnam 2018, Thornock et al. 2019). However, home is also a social and “affective construct” (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Duncan and Lambert 2004, Ratnam 2018, Sheehan 2010, Thornock et al. 2019). It is a socially constructed notion that is culturally dependent. Thus, how one views and defines home is influenced and altered by cultural views of home. However, feelings within one’s home can be created in harmony with or in opposition to cultural views of home, for feelings within a home can contradict societal ideas of home. While homes are culturally associated with and often encompass feelings of comfort, security, intimacy, and acceptance, along with social interactions that are typically more intimate and personal (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Duncan and Lambert 2004, Ratnam 2018, Sheehan 2010, Thornock et al. 2019), they can also be places associated with negative feelings and experiences. Homes have many functions and are the places where people tend to spend a majority of their time (Ratnam 2018, Thornock et al. 2019).

Homes are important because they can give life stability, meaning, and order, as well as provide people with a sense of belonging and purpose (Cicognani et al. 2011). Even those without a home strive to create one (Sheehan 2010). Sheehan (2010) discusses how homeless youth hang out in abandoned buildings that act as homes. Further, Sheehan (2010) states that homeless people partake in activities intended to increase the homelike feelings in a space, such as socially and materially personalizing an area. Further, homeless people have altered typical definitions of home, thus, highlighting home as a flexible space that can be reshaped (Sheehan 2010). The notion of a flexible home is important to the discussion of college students’

recreations of home in on-campus settings. It demonstrates that a home does not have to be a conventional house to shelter the feelings and identities tied to home places.

How individuals perceive their home is central to the creation of a *sense* of home. The importance of perception is demonstrated through the fact that one's perceptions of home have a greater impact on family functioning or family relationships than the physical features of the dwelling itself (Thornock et al. 2019). Thus, how one perceives her or his home has the potential to create a positive social environment and sustain the well-being associated with home places or it can do the opposite.

If a sense of home is dependent on more than the mere physical dwelling, how is a sense of home made? Homes themselves are spaces that provoke a strong emotional attachment. This attachment coupled with the specific collection of narrative objects and momentos within a dwelling help create a sense of home. Residents personalize their new dwelling with memory-infused objects. The introduction of these objects into the home brings memories of the past residence into the new house and the connection between these objects and their associated narratives in turn develops a sense of home.

### **Objects and Memory**

People can recreate homes with the assistance of objects, which allows one to personalize the space (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Brown 2007). "From a migration perspective, the personal experience of uprooting and re-rooting involves the creation of intimate spaces where history, heritage and identity are inscribed in home possessions brought from the old country or acquired since arrival" (Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015, 98). Decorating the home with personal belongings often evokes positive memories and allows people to relive their past (Van Hoof et al. 2016). Possessions one brings from a former home to a new house can aid in the creation of

the new home because the objects bring past narratives and memories into the new dwelling (Miller 2001, Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015, Ratnum 2018, Van Hoof et al. 2016). These home possessions connect past houses to the current one (Hurdley 2006, Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015). For example, the material artifacts migrants bring to their new home connect past narratives and memories to the new space (Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015). This connection to the old home can assist in the creation of the new home (Hurdley 2006, Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015).

The new home is, thus, built upon, at least partially, the feelings and experiences one remembers from her or his old home. “Feeling at home is a layered emotion” (Van Hoof et al. 2016, 34). Objects work to layer the home and create the notion of home as a place (Finlayson 2012 and Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015). For instance, the same objects are capable of being associated with different memories (Hurdley 2006, Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015). The narratives of objects also interact with other memory-packed objects surrounding them to layer home space (Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015). These objects join together to connect individual past history to the home and reflect one’s sense of self (Hurdley 2006, Miller 2001, Moussouri and Vomvyla 2015). This is notably demonstrated in nursing home residents. A majority of nursing home residents who participated in the study by Van Hoof et al. (2016) said that bringing personal items to their new residence made the space feel more familiar and home-like. These possessions are, therefore, worth a considerable amount to the residents (Van Hoof et al. 2016). Personalization of a house, achieved through the addition of personal objects and modification of the space, allows for self expression and endeavors to create a sense of home (Aziz and Ahmad 2012).

We carry, quite literally and tangibly at times, past houses with us through memory, dreams, images, and imagination. Therefore, new ideas of “home” are created through a layering of the memories and experiences of previous home places in which one has lived. Memories are made in both physical and “non-material” (such as through narratives) space; however, they have the ability to connect experiences over both space and time because they are not explicitly tied to either (Ratnam 2018). The narratives that transcend space and time are dynamic and affect the creation of new home places (Ratnam 2018). The place of home allows the past to be processed and affects the present (Ratnam 2018). For example, family memories can shape how the home is constructed by influencing traditions and values (Ratnam 2018). The memories, narratives, and objects stored in homes are influential in the creation of home as they interact with both people and place (Bachelard 1994, Brown 2007, Ratnam 2018, Shamaï and Ilatov 2005).

### **A Sense of Place**

Through the layering of objects and narrative memories as well as the social and personal connections one forms, the everyday *space* of home becomes a *place* (Ratnam 2018). A *place* is a meaningful location containing a concentration of social interactions and performances that influence individual and societal values, ways of thinking, and identities (Lengen and Kistemann 2012), whereas *space* is often conceived of as more of a static location. When people have lengthy, deep, and/or habitual interactions with a meaningful place that is associated with memories of past experiences and social performances, they develop a sense of place and an attachment to that place (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Shamaï and Ilatov 2005). A sense of place is the affective bond, both conscious and unconscious, one has with a meaningful, symbolic, and value-filled location (Lengen and Kistemann 2012, Shamaï and Ilatov 2005). The term “affective bond” is used here to denote the emotional dimensions of the lived experience and its

associated effects as explored in geographic research (Finlayson 2012, Finlayson 2017). The felt sense of place and attachment then link individuals to the environment, invoking feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, and allowing people to better understand their surrounding space (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Shamai and Ilatov 2005). These place making and attachment processes develop one's sense of home as a *place*.

The sense of place is particularly strong in homes because we have such a deep emotional attachment to them, and they are highly affective (Bachelard 1994). Affect refers to the effects space has on those who encounter it (Finlayson 2012). Space that is highly affective can be paralleled to sacred spaces and the processes that make these spaces significant. For instance, much like in churches, different areas within the home are considered to be of more significance or are viewed differently (Bachelard 1994, Finlayson 2012). A corner, for example, has the capacity to become a child's place of solitude if they do not have a bedroom (Bachelard 1994). Additionally, feelings of familiarity, comfort, and social connections make religious spaces feel like home for many people (Finlayson 2012). Similarly, the rituals we partake in at home, such as communal meals or holiday celebrations, serve as place-makers.

Place re-creation can further mirror the creation of sacred spaces as Finlayson (2012) stated that "emotional experiences within religious spaces help create and re-create these sites" (Finlayson 2012, 1764). As in sacred spaces, a sense of place more broadly is dynamic, for it is constantly being created and recreated, such as through the performance of and reengagement with home rituals (Shamai and Ilatov 2005). This constant construction of affective place occurs in the context of individual minds and greater society, highlighting both the individual and social nature of feelings of place (Lengen and Kistemann 2012, Shamai and Ilatov 2005). The amount of attachment, or the connection one has with a space, is affected and indicated by how one goes

about creating the physical and social setting of the place (Aziz and Ahmad 2012). For example, does one attempt to develop social connections within the space or make the space attractive (Aziz and Ahmad 2012)?

Homes encompass individual and collective memories and identities (Brown 2007, Ratnam 2018) that combine with the social and daily life of its occupants to make home a distinctive, emotionally-attached place (Ratnam 2018). For instance, many people consider their home to be a place where they are comfortable socializing with neighbors, conducting day-to-day activities, and are familiar with the environment (Aziz and Ahmad 2012). These interactions and activities build upon one another to make home a place (Aziz and Ahmed 2012). Further, while homes are subjective, they are created in and express the society in which they are constructed (Duncan 1982, Ratnam 2018). On the other hand, homes can be constructed in opposition to this society and, therefore, can be an act of resistance. Social structures also have the capacity to shape, and at times constrain, one's ability to both obtain and create a home, and culturally define the sort of home she or he should have. Thus, to truly understand home, particularly in a nontraditional setting such as a college campus, one must look at the connections between an "individual, social worlds, and social structure" (Duncan 1982, 1, Ratnam 2018).

## **Identity**

*"House is part of you and your identity" (Bachelard 1994, 11).*

Low and Chambers (1989) characterized identity as "a person's sense of self" (Low and Chambers 1989, 208). One's identity is defined not only by who they are, but by who they are not (Duncan 1982). The notion of associating and dissociating oneself from different facets of

society is connected to the concept of conditional identity as stated in Duncan's (1982) definition.

Identity is made in relation to and can be changed by time, space, and social interactions (Hurdley 2006, Katz 2003, Shamai and Ilatov 2005). Individual and collective identity is shaped, at least in part, by a sense of place (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Shamai and Ilatov 2005). Identity is formed in, affected by, and acted out in space (Katz 2003, Shamai and Ilatov 2005). This is demonstrated with diasporic identity, which is "the complex sense of belonging that people can have over several places, all of which they might think of as home" (Katz 2003, 255-256). These identities vary across different spaces and times, for they are modified by differing spatial attributes, social characteristics, and scales of a location (Katz 2003). The concept of a diasporic identity demonstrates that identity can be felt in different places and that one can identify with more than one home place. Consequently, college students are able to identify with and feel a sense of home in both their college housing and their previous dwelling.

Identity building, both individual and group, is a social process and, therefore, individuals form new identities based on variations in social experiences (Duncan 1982, Hurdley 2006, Low and Chambers 1989, Katz 2003). Consequently, a transition to a new dwelling with different people, such as that seen on college campuses, can affect one's identity and feelings. Ordinary and familiar encounters within the home make it a foundation for meaningfulness and identity (Ratnam 2018). Accordingly, people become very attached to the places they spend their lives, such as home (Cicognani et al. 2011). Cicognani et al. (2011) call this intense affinity for and attachment to a place "Place Identity" (Cicognani et al. 2011, 34). "Place Identity" expresses the connection between identity and place by highlighting the importance of place in identity development (Cicognani et al. 2011). Place is associated with identity development because who

one is depends on experiences and living situations; hence, homes are fundamental locations for identity production and performance (Cicognani et al. 2011, Duncan and Lambert 2004).

Homes are sites of lived experiences that affect and are altered by identity (Ratnam 2018). It is the “locational core” (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, 276) that steadies identity and organizes both spatial and social interactions. A home’s meaning, influenced by the expression of one’s identity, is further affected by one’s capacity to identify with both the social and physical environment (Aziz and Ahmad 2012). Hurdley (2006) stated that “there is an active meaning-making process” (Hurdley 2006, 719) between people, homes, and the material culture that forms identity. For instance, narratives of objects can be important to individual and family identity, especially heirloom type objects (Hurdley 2006). In this case, objects and the associated biographies are profoundly influential in the development of identity (Hurdley 2006). Narratives are also fundamental in the development of home places (Bachelard 1994, Brown 2007, Ratnam 2018, Shamai and Ilatov 2005). Both memory and identity are “meta-concepts that coalesce with the home and home-building practices.” (Ratnam 2018, 1). Therefore, the construction of a new identity can assist in the creation of a sense of home (Aziz and Ahmad 2012).

### **College Students**

The transition to college is significant. It is an experience accompanied by profound changes in living space and social experiences (Cicognani, et al. 2011). Each year students move into empty rooms, bringing with them objects and decorations used to personalize the space and make it one’s own (Brown 2007, Walls can talk 2015). These attempts to create home on college campuses are important as they have the capacity to provide students with a place to center identity creation and maintenance (Ratnam 2018).

In Cicognani et al.'s (2011) study, first-year students expressed concern about loss of connection to their hometown. Along with the concern over lost connections, moving can lead to negative outcomes, such as stress, health symptoms, a feeling of being overwhelmed, and an interruption in the production of self identity (Cicognani et al. 2011, Duncan and Lambert 2003). For example, stress associated with crowding could potentially affect college students because some have never shared a room before (Thornock et al. 2019). Therefore, the physical differences between the former and new dwelling have the potential to create stress. Students can also be grieving for the home they recently left (Duncan and Lambert 2003).

While moving away from one's family can decrease one's ability to recreate home in a college setting, students have the capacity to produce, place-based identity both at home and school (Duncan and Lambert 2003). They can have a diasporic identity in which they belong to both places but have different identities in each place based on the spaces' spatial and social features. Moving can allow adolescents to construct new identities or adjust previous identities, which is a desire for some (Cicognani et al. 2011, Duncan and Lambert 2003). Adolescent's identity is affected by their living location and sometimes one's home can be incompatible with the creation of a new or at least partially altered identity. Consequently, moving can allow one to alter their identity in a desired fashion, especially if the move is voluntary (Cicognani et al. 2011). Therefore, the transition to college has the potential to provide some students with the opportunity to align their space with their desired identity (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Cicognani et al 2011).

## **Methodology**

To better understand how the experiences and senses of home are created and recreated, I analyzed student experiences in on-campus housing at the University of Mary Washington. I

focused specifically on on-campus housing because students must move back into the space each year even if they are remaining in the same room. Qualitative research was most appropriate for this study following the framework by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3). Since this research attempts to evaluate subtle differences in individuals’ experiences of home, I carried out open-ended, in-depth interviews.

The confidential interviews focused on the participants’ experiences in their houses and on-campus dwellings. Questions were asked with the intention of illuminating how participants consciously or unconsciously recreated or did not recreate temporary homes in on-campus housing. Geographers such as Buffel (2017), Finlayson (2012), Holloway (2003), and Sheehan (2010) have used in-depth qualitative research when studying individual experience. In my research, each interview was slightly different because the concentration was on each individual’s experience. Consequently, the interviews were semi-structured as there was a basic guide of general questions based on the main focus of this research (see Appendix A), coupled with unique follow-up questions based on the participant’s responses (Rubin and Rubin 2012). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus specifically on the recreation of homes on the University of Mary Washington’s campus, while still being able to capture individual differences (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Participants were asked a variety of questions about their experiences in and memories of their home and on-campus housing during the interview. The questions addressed the gap in the literature concerning college students’ use of physical dwellings. This study has received Institutional Review Board approval. Some

interview questions and their accompanying rationale are listed below (To see the full list of questions, view Appendix A):

“What do you think makes something feel like home?” (This open-ended question was designed to determine what participants view as important to a home environment.)

“What is your favorite activity to do at home?” Possible follow-up: “What about this activity makes it your favorite?” (An open-ended question designed to see how the activities conducted in a home can work to make the space feel like a home environment. Additionally this question showed what about the activity helps make it a home environment, for example, social encounters, associated smells.)

“Do you feel a sense of community with your roommates/suitemates, dorm mates?” Possible follow-up: “What about the dorm environment makes you feel this lack of community or make you feel part of a community?” (A question intended to look at the social relationships that could affect one’s home experience.)

“What do you think is different about your house and your dorm room?” (This question is focused on differences between one's pre-college dwelling and their on-campus housing in order to see how much either of these spaces feels like home to the interviewee.)

These interviews, which were in-depth and open-ended, were audio recorded and then transcribed. Once transcribed, I coded the information by creating categories based on the main

ideas and themes seen throughout the interview data (Creswell 2014, Hay 2010). These categories included feelings of comfort, safety and relaxation, decorations, memories/nostalgia, social experiences, levels of homeyness, and diasporic identity. I used these categories to organize the information gathered from interviews (Creswell 2014, Hay 2010). All identifying information about the interviewees, including gender, age, and other personal references were taken out and their names have been changed. I used snowball sampling for the interviews (Miles, Huberman, Huberman, and Huberman 1994). I asked people I know who live on campus if they would like to be interviewed and then asked them to give my contact information to other people who might be interested in the study.

The intent of these interviews was to illustrate how individuals recreate home and the associated feelings in a new setting and ascertain how Mary Washington students feel about their recreated dorm home to better understand the process of place-making and how notions of home might be present or absent in a nontraditional space.

## **Results**

The transformation of a space into a home is a complex and individualized process. No space has a universal feature or combination of features that make it a home place for everyone. There are even contradictory factors that can make different people feel at home or quite the opposite. However, taking into account the individual variations in home building, there are main elements that, when combined, work to create a home space for many people. These components include decorations, memories, and social relationships.

### ***Cultural Views of Home: Comfort, Safety, and Relaxation***

While individual experiences of home are uniquely embedded in personal memories, they are influenced, even altered, by the social and cultural context surrounding them. There are

widely held cultural and societal views of home. Specifically in the United States, homes are culturally associated with feelings of comfort, security, intimacy, and acceptance (Aziz and Ahmad 2012, Duncan and Lambert 2004, Ratnam 2018, Sheehan 2010, Thornock et al. 2019). Many of these commonly held cultural views of home were expressed by participants in their definitions and descriptions of home, whether they reported actually feeling that way in their home or not.

These ideas are clearly expressed by participants through their consistent use of the words *comfort*, *safe*, and *relax* when defining and discussing home. Of 21 interviewees, six used the word *cozy*, 12 used *relax* or *relaxing*, 15 used *safe* or *secure*, and 17 used *comfortable* or *comfort* when referring to what homes should be. Every single participant, even those with the most literal definitions of home, used at least one of these words when defining and/or discussing home. Fourteen participants discussed home as a place one is able to be open and themselves. When defining home Alex said, “It's where you can feel comfortable with being yourself, where you feel loved... and you feel safe,” and Riley stated, “A place that I can just go to and relax, like after a long day, Um. doesn't look like anything particular just somewhere I feel safe.” The widespread use of these words and references to ideas of comfort, safety, openness, and relaxation indicate that a majority of people's ideas of home reflect, at least to some extent, the positive cultural ideas commonly associated with home. These cultural ideas, thus, provide a framework form which one's idea of home is built.

### ***Decorations and Memories***

Of 21 participants, 15 discussed the importance of personal space. The addition of decorations and personal items help one personalize a space and assist in the creation of their sense of home. Participants expressed feeling their home to be more comfortable and less

temporary with the addition of decorations. Many also stated that decor is one of the elements that make them feel at home. When asked if decorations were important to their home Jaime stated, “I think decorations are a big part of it (feeling at home), or just what things look like not necessarily decorations.” How a space looks has, for many, an influence on whether they feel at home or not. When discussing their off campus house, Casey stated that their room is “pretty barren, which I guess also is probably another reason why it doesn't feel exactly like home when I go back.” While the lack of decoration can cause a place to not feel like home, it can also be the distinguishing feature that makes one’s house their home. Kerry stated that they and their family made their, “house, become something rather than just being four walls,” through the decorations they put up, along with the memories and experiences associated with the space.

Twelve of the 21 participants feel that memories and nostalgia, either associated with the home space or represented through the decor, such as old concert tickets or art that previously belonged to a loved one, make a place more *homey*. Many participants felt that memories make a home and some considered memories to be their favorite part of their off campus dwelling. Peyton stated, “the house that I live in is actually the house that my mom grew up in. It's just renovated so it looks completely different from when she lived in it but I guess that's a really cool thing because that's where my mom had her childhood.” Further, Jessie commented, “I love my home because it's all I've ever known,” which helps demonstrate the importance memories and familiarity play into feeling at home.

Along with the importance of memories, seven of the 21 participants stated that feeling familiar with their space helps them feel at home. Some older students commented that their feelings of being at home at UMW have increased as they have spent more time there, growing more familiar with the school and the Fredericksburg area. While students can bring memory-

infused pictures and items with them, the difficulty of living in on-campus housing is that it is temporary. One does not have the ability to collect as many memories in an eight- to nine-month long academic year as they do in a permanent home. This is demonstrated by the fact that while some participants listed memories as their favorite thing about their house, only one reported it to be their favorite thing about their on-campus dwelling. The decrease in importance of memories in on-campus dwellings could be connected to the idea of nostalgia or a sentimental, affectionate view of or longing for the past. Students do not feel nostalgic for their on-campus room because they are currently living there, thus, eliminating the need for memories. Jaime even discussed their plan to add pictures of college friends post graduation because of the nostalgia they will feel for college days when they are over.

Some participants seemed to take the lack of memories as an opportunity to create a space that better suits them, much like a blank slate. Some participants got new furnishing and decorations specifically for college. Many feel that their room at school is more representative of their current self and interests, for their rooms at home have remained unchanged since middle or high school. Therefore, in some cases, moving to a space with a lack of personal memories allows one the space and freedom to modify identity and better mold the space to their current identity.

Even while memories within on-campus dwellings appear to be less important to feeling at home, several students discussed how all of the decor in their on-campus room is transferred back and forth from their house each year. While this is for practical purposes as opposed to a conscious attempt to feel at home, the use of the same decorations brings memories of their past home or homes to school with them. The resulting layering of home memories, and the act of re-creating home every academic year can, in itself, help form memories and a sense of attachment.

Putting up pictures is one of the decorating acts that participants reported consciously using to connect to their home and the people there. Many students reported having photos of their family, home, pets, and highschool friends. These material artifacts connect people to those most important to them. It is interesting to note that many older participants felt their pictures were a little outdated if they contained mostly high school friends and sometimes they switched them to represent mostly college friends. This indicates a decreased connection to the surroundings of one's original home and an increased connection to UMW, which many reported made them feel more at home when in their on-campus dwelling.

Memories can also be triggered through actions one often does at home, such as playing games, decorating for the holidays, or cooking. Several participants discussed how the act of decorating for holidays reminds them of their house and makes their on-campus dwelling feel very homey. This memory-infused ritual, thus, connects past homes and its memories to a new home space. Another ritual that can serve a similar function is cooking. Cooking and having dinner was mentioned by 18 of the 21 participants when asked what they like doing at home and how they connect to their living mates (family members, roomates, and suitemates). While many participants cook alone at school, they discussed how it sometimes reminds them of cooking with their parents. This daily ritual has the capacity to make a temporary room feel more like the home they came from. The physical structure of the room, thus, has an impact on feelings within the home, for not all students have a kitchen in their room. Jaime, whose room has a kitchen, commented, "I really like this dorm because it feels like an actual house home and not just the dorm," demonstrating the physical aspects that make a dwelling feel more like a home.

The memories most important to a college student's sense of home seem to be memories of their former home. These memories, often centering around people, seem to be reached most through the addition of decorations, often photos, and the production of rituals and day-to-day activities.

### ***Social Experiences: Both People and Pets***

*“There are a lot more aspects to home than just the actual space.” - Peyton*

To many a home is more than just a space; it is the people in it. A home space typically supports social experiences, many of which are intimate. These experiences morph the space into a place. Therefore, the social interactions one has in one's dwelling are significant, and at times crucial, for the creation of a sense of home. Participants seemed to consciously acknowledge the importance of social encounters within the home. For instance, Jessie stated, “I think the people make the home,” and Kerry said, “the people in it, make a safe space.” These comments demonstrate the important role living mates play in the creation of a home place. Many participants feel that home is a combination of both the place and the people in it, some even expressed views that people are more important to home than the physical space. For example, when reporting what they imagine when they think of home, Jackie stated, “it's really not a geographical location, it's more my immediate family,” and Quinn commented, “home is less of a place, more of the people who make you feel good.”

On the other hand, negative social interactions can diminish or block the creation of positive feelings associated with one's dwelling. Casey stated, “me and my step dad don't have a good relationship at all so sometimes coming back home just doesn't feel like home and it just kind of feels like a burden.” Casey's negative social experiences with their step dad have made their house feel less like home, because of this Casey expressed feeling more at home on-campus

with their roommate whom they enjoy. Living mates, thus, play a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of both positive and negative feelings associated with any home.

Indeed, people are important in the creation of both on- and off-campus houses. Participants tended to feel more at home on-campus when they felt close to their roommates and/or suitemates. Playing board games, cards, and videogames, along with talking, watching TV, hanging out, and eating dinner were stated as common activities participants do with their roommates, suitemates, and families. These activities serve as community builders and were said to make people feel closer to their living mates. When discussing their roommates and suitemates, Jessie stated, “It feels good to know that you have people in your room that you want to hang out with, and at the end of the day just watching a movie together is fun,” and Justice commented, “ it doesn't even matter what type of game I think just the interaction. Being able to laugh and just talk and mess around is important.” On the other hand, participants reported feeling less comfortable in their on-campus housing when in conflict with their roommates and/or suitemates. When discussing having an argument in the room Jessie stated, “It's frustrating and it makes it feel like being at the HCC (Hurley Convergence Center) is better than being at home.” The notion that quality relationships with living mates is important to the creation and preservation of positive feelings at home demonstrates the intensely social nature of home creation.

Social interactions have such a significant impact on feelings of home that individuals can associate home characteristics with people. Of 21 participants, 18 feel that a person can be *homey*. The qualities most commonly stated for making a person feel *homey* are someone who makes one feel safe and comfortable and/or someone that an individual can be open with. These ideas of feeling open, safe, and comfortable were also commonly discussed when defining and

discussing home spaces; further, these feelings line up with cultural views of homes. Thus, *homey* people are given the same cultural associations as home places. This indicates both the strength of cultural associations tied to the home and the importance of people and social experiences when analyzing all homes.

The social relationships that build homes are not limited to human interaction. One of the most commonly stated reasons people like going home is seeing their pets. Of the 19 participants who have family pets, 14 spoke about them and 13 discussed their pets in a positive way. Of the large majority of pet owners who spoke about their animals in a positive way, most stated that they view their pets as family members. Some, including Skyler who stated, “the highlight of being home is definitely my dogs,” consider seeing and playing with them as one of their favorite aspects of going home. Many of the participants reported missing their pets during the school year. Skyler commented, “it really sucks that we can't have pets in on-campus housing,” demonstrating how important animals are to their experience of home.

### ***A Diasporic Identity***

*“I feel like you can have many different homes” – Alex*

The idea of “diasporic identity,” or the notion that one can identify with multiple home spaces mentioned in Katz’s (2003) research, seems to capture the experiences of many college students, for many of the participants feel connected to both their on- and off- campus dwelling. An overwhelming majority, 18 of 21 participants, feel that their on-campus dwelling is home. While many participants feel their on-campus dwelling is home, they do not all feel exactly the same way about this space. Four of the participants feel that their on-campus dwelling is their main home, seven feel like their on-campus housing is a second home, and seven feel that it is just a different home.

Many of the participants who see their house and on-campus dwellings as different associate each place with different times of year. For instance, when discussing their on-campus and off-campus homes, Jaime stated, “I don't really compare the two that much or I don't really connect the two in my mind like they're really separate things to me. They both feel like home at different points of the year.” Jaime went on to discuss, which many participants mirrored, their view that feeling at home in their two dwellings is based, at least partially, on time. Many discussed wanting and being excited to be in their house over breaks and then feeling the exact same way about their UMW room during the academic semester.

The different, often time-based, feelings many participants experience in the two homes are further influenced by their different social interactions between their families and their roommates and/or suitemates. For example, many participants see their parents as authority figures while viewing their roommates and/or suitemates as peers. The participants, thus, interacted with each group differently. This different view of parents and roommates and/or suitemates did not play out the same for every participant. Some participants feel that the difference in relationships does not affect the home all that much because the home's basic social aspects are being fulfilled. This notion is demonstrated by Jaime's comment that while her family and roommates are “really different... they serve kind of the same purposes like people to hang out with, people to talk to, people to do board games with.”

On the other hand, some students seemed to be more affected by the distinct social relationships experienced between families and roommates and/or suitemates. Some participants who noticed the difference discussed being more open with their families, but more feel that they are more open at school because of the peer relationship. Kerry felt that it is “kind of surprising, maybe, in a way, but I feel like I can open up or talk to someone about my actual feelings, to

someone at school, rather than my family.” Other participants expressed feeling unable to be their full selves with their families, whether that be opening up about their mental health, sexuality, etc. Even while Skyler feels at home at Mary Washington because “all my friends are here and here I actually can be myself and all that stuff,” Skyler still feels at home in their off campus house “because that's where my family is.” Thus, while both of the spaces feel like home to Skyler, and many others participants, they reported feeling different in their different homes. The fact that students have varying levels of openness in different places indicates a change in identity or at least expressed identity from place to place.

This change in identity from one's hometown to university is also demonstrated through the growth many students experience in college. Many interviewees feel that living away from home and their families has been an integral aspect of their becoming more independent. Some participants even mentioned liking to do certain activities at school more than in their off campus house because they are able to do their own thing without parental interference and questions. While students expressed enjoying their increased independence and growth, many commented on the difficulty that can come with returning to unchanged homes where families do not always recognize the transformations their student has undergone. Skyler stated, “ I think they have kind of a fixed image of me since high school, but obviously I've changed in the two years that I've been here,” when discussing their family's view of them. Eleven participants discussed feelings of outgrowing their home or the feeling that going home has become a burden. This can lead to feelings of frustration in both students and families. This frustration, in turn, can cause some students to feel more at home at UMW as they feel it suits them better now. The transformations a student experiences in college can change how they identify with different places. Home creation is a dynamic process and how one identifies with different homes can change over time.

## **Conclusion**

The recreation of home by students on college campuses is an individualized process. There are, however, fundamental factors and cultural influences that impact many students' feelings of home in on-campus housing. Main aspects of the home-building process for many students include the decor, the enactment of rituals, memories of past homes, social interactions, and the time of year. The combination of these or some of these factors, often unconsciously, construct feelings of home. While these are the main elements of the home-building process for a majority of people, they do not all manifest in the same way for everyone. For example, some people prefer clutter and others prefer to keep their space neat.

This individual home-building process is further altered on college campuses due to the temporary nature of the housing. On-campus dwellings are, thus, flexible spaces that students can mold and reshape every year based on changes in their personal identity. One of the most important takeaways from this study is that college students can indeed recreate home on college campuses. Further, this home re-creation does not necessarily take away from their identification with their past home or homes. During the transformational time of college, students can identify with both on and off campus homes and can vary their identity between the two places. The creation of homes on college campuses demonstrate the flexibility of home and the wide variations of experiences one can have in a home space. It is also likely that elements and memories of their UMW home will be infused into the fabric of their future home places.

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions:**

What year are you?

What type of dwelling do you live in?

When you imagine home what do you think of?

What do you think makes something feel like home?

Can a person be homey?

How many years have you lived in your home?

How many people do you live with at home?

Do you share a room at home? If so, with whom?

Do you like your house?

What do you like most about your home?

What is your favorite part of going home?

What is your favorite activity to do at home?

What makes your home your home?

Where do you live when in school?

How many people do you room with at school (including suitemates)?

How well do you feel you get along with your roommates/suitemates?

How many years have you known your roommates/suitemates?

How many years have you lived with them?

Do you feel a sense of community with your roommate/suitemates/dorm mates?

What do you like most about your dorm?

What is your favorite activity to do in your dorm?

Do you call your dorm home? If so, how often?

Do you have pictures of people on your wall? Who are they, what is the relation?

Does your dorm feel like home?

Do you do anything to make your dorm feel like home? If so, what?

What do you think is similar and different about your house and your dorm room?

What do you think is similar and different about the social relationships in your house and your dorm room?

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