

5-2015

You Are Where You Eat: A Gendered Analysis of Dining Commons at Bates College

Alexandra Adolph
Bates College

Follow this and additional works at: http://scarab.bates.edu/amercur_studies_theses

Recommended Citation

Adolph, Alexandra, "You Are Where You Eat: A Gendered Analysis of Dining Commons at Bates College" (2015). *Standard Theses*. 1. http://scarab.bates.edu/amercur_studies_theses/1

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Standard Theses by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

You Are Where You Eat

A Gendered Analysis of Dining Commons at Bates College

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of American Cultural Studies
Bates College**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts**

By

Alexandra Adolph

Lewiston, Maine

April 10, 2015

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my advisor Professor Aimee Bessire for her guidance throughout my thesis process and my entire college career. The support and encouragement she has given me during my time at Bates is something for which I will be forever grateful. Her passion, brilliance and enthusiasm inspired me daily and helped me develop as a writer, student, and person.

I would also like to thank my friends who have been by my side since freshman year. Their friendship got me through all of the ups and downs of the writing process. Thank you for inspiring me to work just as hard as each and every one of you, and supporting me through all of my confusion and uncertainties during this process.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. I would like to thank my dad for teaching me everything I know about writing. Your endless help and support on all of my writing endeavors throughout my entire academic life has taught me so much. Thank you for always taking the time to thoroughly and thoughtfully go over my work. I would also like to thank my mom for the emotional support throughout this process. Thank you for listening to me complain every time we talked and never failing to help me believe in myself by reminding me constantly that I'm doing a good job. Finally, thank you Nick for being the best big brother and answering every question I threw your way.

Without the love and support from all of these people, this thesis would not be possible. Thank you all for being such important parts of my personal as well as my academic life.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Spatial Analysis.....	12
Chapter 2: Gendered Gathering Space.....	22
Chapter 3: The Body, Gender and Food.....	35
Conclusion.....	47
Works Cited.....	52

Introduction

Ask a student at Bates College and without hesitation they will tell you that it is impossible to avoid anyone, thanks to Commons. With a small campus and only one dining hall for the student body, Commons is the social hub of campus life. After dining on campus for a short period of time, faces become more and more familiar, and acquaintances soon become friends. Almost everyone knows everyone, but if you don't know someone, you're likely to have a friend who knows them. Commons is the notorious place on campus where you will run into the person you are trying to avoid every single time you are in the building.

An interesting social environment is created within Commons, as students use the space to eat their meals three times a day, and bond with friends in a communal setting. Although it's practical use is for students to eat food and fuel their bodies, it inevitably becomes a gathering space and central location for the whole campus community to interact and socialize. Commons is a unique social platform on the Bates

College campus because it demonstrates habits and patterns among the student body that are not displayed anywhere else.

This thesis provides a close examination of Commons through a deconstruction of the architecture of the dining hall and analysis of how the space is used by students. I will look at how the social dynamics play out, and how patterns and behavioral routines develop. I'll first examine the physical space of Commons through a spatial analysis, then examine the seating arrangements, then how the space encourages certain types of behavior. Following will be a look at how Commons is also a prime social gathering place and social platform on the Bates campus. I will specifically look at how personal relationships are developed, enacted, and maintained within the public space of Commons. This is key to the atmosphere and dynamic of the social scene on campus. Finally, I will analyze the body within this space and how American society as a whole has encouraged specific eating patterns that differ for females and males. Such patterns are deeply engrained within American culture, where assumptions are made about what each gender prefers to eat. American society has undoubtedly shaped behavior surrounding food consumption in Commons and has influenced the social behavior within the population. My thesis will show how the Bates College dining Commons reflects gendered experience in relation to the use of space, social connections, and relationships to food and the body.

Methodology

I employed a variety of approaches and methods to aid my research on Bates College dining in Commons. The focus of my work was gender and the gendering of space within the dining hall and the analysis of how this affects Bates students and created a specific culture. Notions of gender are constantly being perpetuated and

reinforced within society as a whole, so I chose to focus my work and on how these notions and gendering aspects are taking place in one, confined location. The three main sources of research I used were scholarly, theoretical, and popular cultural literature that could be applied to various aspects of Commons, as well as my own participant observation and unstructured interviews with fellow diners.

The textual information I gathered was useful to my research because it allowed me to provide background and theoretical context to support my own ideas and theories on Commons. I focused on finding textual information that related to space, gender, and the physical body. Anthropological theory, spatial theory, and gender theory were the most useful; however, literature from popular culture websites and news sites also provided valuable insights and helped inform my research.

Participant observation was a key part of my research process. Being in the physical space and examining what I saw was very beneficial and revealing. Because I dine in Commons every single day, and have for the past four years while attending Bates College, spending time in the building was not something new. However, examining and analyzing the space was a new endeavor, and it forced me to think critically about what I was really seeing and taking part in. From my multiple observations I noticed specific gendered patterns of behavior. I found that depending on the time of the day, actions within Commons varied and students had established routine approaches to how they used and maneuvered through the space.

These observations of Commons were supported by multiple conversations I had with students. I used unstructured interviews and casual conversations with peers to gain a better understanding of how they viewed and used the space. During my conversations, I asked peers how they felt while navigating through the space, and how

they perceived themselves and others while dining. I discussed stereotypes they believed existed among the student body in regards to Commons, and how this shapes and structures how they present themselves while in the space. Interviews were a crucial part of my process, as they allowed me to understand how the students themselves, use the space. Learning about other people's habits, insecurities, perceptions, and overall understanding of Commons brought fresh ideas, new insights, and a more complete deconstruction of the space for my analysis. When I learned the motives behind people's actions, I could more clearly evaluate the differences in how genders approach the space. The various perspectives and opinions of the sexes provided key material for my analysis of Commons.

History of Gendered Dining at Bates

In order to understand how Commons became the space it is today, it is necessary to know the history of dining at Bates College. Although the college has been coeducation since it's founding, the dining halls on campus were separated by gender for many years. The first dining hall for men was located in John Bertram Hall, while women dined for many years in Rand Hall (Ardia). Dining remained separate on campus until 1950, when Chase Hall provided a space for men and women to dine together for the Sunday noon meal (Ardia). It wasn't until 1967 when a renovation was made to the dining hall, that all meals became coeducational. This was a big step for the campus community, as it provided a space for everyone to come together and enjoy meals. Dining became a time for students to bond with one another in between classes and created a sense of collectivity and unity among the whole student body.

It is interesting to note that the name of the first communal dining area was "Memorial Commons." This name was chosen to represent the Bates men who had

passed away during World War I and World War II (Ardia). Over time, students on campus shortened “Memorial Commons” to just “Commons”. However, once the next dining hall was constructed in 2008, the name switched to “New Commons.” Although many students refer to the building simply as “Commons,” many faculty and staff still refer to the one dining hall as “New Commons.” The names are used interchangeably when discussing the current dining hall, however I will use “Commons” throughout this thesis.

Hegemonic Analysis of Commons

Ever since the construction of the new Commons building at Bates College, the space and location of the structure has made a prominent mark on the present campus community. Especially significant is the structural hegemony of Commons, which creates a foundation for social interactions. Viewing the building from campus, the dominant architecture conveys power and presence. The building is one of the largest at Bates College and is strategically placed at the end of the main walkway through campus, apart from other buildings. The location and scale of Commons evokes a sense of power, and suggests its superiority as a social gathering space and the frequency of its use on campus. Additionally, the shape of the building itself displays hegemony. The shape suggests that specific parts of the building hold more significance than others. For instance, inside Commons, the upper level of the building is used for meetings, gatherings, and a dining area that is generally for organized meals. This set up constructs a sense of a “superior gaze” from the upper levels, as those there look down on the students who are below them. The implications from this design suggest that the power and authority of the work, meetings and gatherings that are conducted in the space varies depending on where one is located, and create levels of power.

Unstated norms and assumptions standardize the social interactions of Commons, and create patterns within the space that produce a structured atmosphere and demonstrate hegemony at the individual level. An example of this hegemony in Commons is the routine of marking the table with a cellphone and Bates identification card. Students leave these as place markers on the tables while going up to the food stations, and no one seems to worry about theft. Although in public places in society we are generally taught to hold on to such valuable possessions, there seems to be a hegemonic understanding within Commons that provides safety and acceptance of leaving these out in the open to mark territory. In addition to this, the fact that all students understand what the placement of phones and identification cards symbolize on the tables is another example of the hegemony in the space. Students know it is acceptable to sit at a table that does not have any phones or identification markers, yet unacceptable to sit at one that does. This hegemony demonstrates the high degree of trust and faith students have in the community and fellow classmates, which is representative of the collectivity of the Bates campus.

Literature Review

Obtaining research materials was a difficult process, as there are no specific texts on the Bates College Commons or gender in college dining halls. I collected literature that pertained to the areas I wanted to explore within my thesis, and from the results of those searches, shaped my argument to fit the information I had acquired. Although it was not always easy to find information that was relevant to the topic, I found that broad, multidisciplinary searches yielded the most information. For instance, I used information from the Bates College website, articles from the school newspaper *The Bates Student*, online popular culture articles, and scholarly and theoretical literature by

anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists. The wide array of resources I used provided material that I could then relate to aspects of Commons I noticed from my observations and discussions with peers.

Theoretical materials on the power of space were key to my thesis research. The most useful literature I acquired surrounding this theme was Foucault's writing in *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault's theory helped me to understand the idea of the Panopticon, and how it functions within structures. The Panopticon is a circular prison cell with a single guard tower in the center that allows prisoners to be watched at all times. Because prisoners do not know if they are being watched, they begin to regulate and control their own behavior due to the feeling of an ever-present gaze. This theory was pertinent to my analysis on Commons' structure, and helped me apply theory to the building.

Using Jay H. Burns's article "A Commons Solution" in *Bates Magazine*, and the article "Groundbreaking Ceremony for New \$30 Million Dining Commons" on the Bates website, I was able to tie everything back to the Bates College campus. These texts helped me to better understand the space I was examining, and informed me of the cultural context behind the construction of the building, and the desire to incorporate aspects of the larger community and Bates society within it. From these texts, I was able to grasp the importance of this space for the College community, and how it was shaped by values the community holds.

Texts analyzing the notion of public and private space supported my research of Commons. I used literature to understand what kind of space Commons is to the Bates community, and how it relates to other similar spaces within greater American society. I used Ray Oldenburg's, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers*,

Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day.

Oldenburg's book was especially useful because it went into specific detail on locations that he coins "Third Places." Oldenburg explains that "Third Places" are areas in society that are separate from both the home and the workplace. His analysis of spaces in American society labeled "Third Places" perfectly fit my analysis of Commons dining hall at Bates. Because of this, I could easily apply his theories to enhance my observations and findings.

Lesa A. Stern, Mark Callister, and Lynn Jones' *Together Alone: Personal Relationships in Public Places* also hinted at variations between public and private settings. This work was especially helpful because the authors had conducted a similar study of a college campus recreation center. Their anthropological approach guided my own observations of Commons and revealed similar patterns of behavior.

Furthermore, Emma G. Fitzsimmon's article in *The New York Times*, "A Scourge Is Spreading. M.T.A.'s Cure? Dude, Close Your Legs," allowed me to focus on a specific trend I had noticed in Commons, and relate it to a national trend in American society. Her discussion of the development of "man-spreading" on public transportation systems helped me investigate the pattern of males taking up significantly more space while dining in Commons. By connecting this pattern of behavior seen in Commons to something witnessed in greater society, I was able to more thoroughly investigate how and why this develops among males, and why it is so commonly displayed.

All of these texts focus specifically on examining how people act in social spaces. The study of how public behaviors shape our culture and shape an individual's sense of self was particularly useful in relationship to Commons. The texts discuss how private

and public actions vary depending on the spaces people are in, and also focus on how gender plays a role in shaping our presentation of self.

My research was also supported by the topics of social gendering of food and diverse perceptions of the body. I used psychology studies to provide support and focused on approaches males and females display while dining in Commons. Morgan et al.'s study, "Eating Regulation Styles, Appearance Schemas, and Body Satisfaction Predict Changes in Body Fat for Emerging Adults," published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, was especially helpful because it provided statistical evidence of the various ways in which college aged students view their bodies and eating habits. The article allowed me to relate their published findings to observations and patterns I noticed within Commons. Their findings were useful because they supported my own analysis and argument suggesting that there is in fact a difference in the way men and women view their food and their bodies.

Eva Wiseman's article, "The Truth About Men, Women and Food" published in *The Guardian*, contained very important and insightful information that guided the development of my research. Wiseman's article was helpful in addressing the theme of gendering of food and perceptions of self. She uses social examples and information from nutritionists and researchers to uncover why society has "gendered" certain foods that males and females eat. Within the text, Wiseman discusses how patterns of learned behaviors shape food consumption patterns. This argument contributed to my analysis of Commons, and allowed me to dissect what "gendering" of food happens in the particular space.

Chapter Overview

Using this literature, my first chapter will discuss how the community oriented atmosphere of Bates College influences patterns of behavior in the dining Commons. I will investigate the motives behind constructing only one dining hall on campus, and how the spatial layout of the building influences diner's experiences. I will look at historical accounts in the Bates magazine, newspaper, and website in order to understand why and how the decision to construct Commons was made. Additionally, I will use Foucault's work on the surveillance from the ever-present "gaze" of the Panopticon's structure and apply it to the design of Commons. I will look at how the power dynamics within the space create specific patterns of behavior and contribute to specific seating arrangements.

My second chapter will investigate how Commons is used as both a public and private space that displays gendered characteristics. I will examine the various patterns of behavior between males and females, and how they move through Commons and display themselves. I will also discuss how Commons can be seen as a "Third Place" on campus, meaning a location that is neutral and conducive to both public and private activities. I will look at how time spent in the dining hall is intended for socializing with friends and peers, and how the spot offers a retreat from the stress from academic life and other demanding activities on campus.

My third chapter will look at previously conducted psychological studies on college students in relation to eating habits and perception of the body. I will look at how male and female perceptions vary, and how American society has shaped these different views. This chapter will also examine how food is gendered within American society, and how that is displayed in the Bates College dining Commons. I will examine

patterns of students, and discuss how each gender approaches the various food stations and food consumption in general while in Commons.

Conclusion

Commons is a crucial part of the everyday life for all students attending Bates College. A thorough examination of the space and how it affects and shapes the students is necessary in order to understand the campus community. Because of the significant amount of time that the student body spends in the building, patterns of behavior, uses of the space, and dichotomies between males and females are necessary to investigate and attempt to understand how they are constructed and reinforced. Dining is a vital ritual in society as it brings people together for a common purpose. However, it is interesting to see how dining is produced and sustained within a dining hall on a college campus when it also acts as a social platform and gathering space for the entire student population.

Chapter 1

Spatial Analysis

Commons is the only dining hall for all students on the Bates College campus. It was purposefully designed and constructed in 2008 order to create a sense of community within the student body. The desired sense of collectivity instilled by the architectural design aims to unite the campus in one central location. This sense of community is something Bates prides itself on and aims to incorporate into all aspects of the institution. However, a spatial analysis of the design of Commons reveals that not only is there stratified seating sections within the dining area, but also stratified aspects of power. Philosopher Michel Foucault's analysis of Bentham's Panopticon helps explain how this power is both derived from and reinforced by the architecture. Ideas of "seeing" and "being seen" drive and create specific social patterns and characteristics within the student body when together in the space.

Commons Layout

When walking into Commons dining area, guests are immediately exposed to a large, open space. The dining area consists of rectangular tables, as well as circular tables, which are located in the front and back of the room. Five large white pillars separate the dining area from the food serving area. This large dining area can seat 750 people, while the mezzanine dining area above, overlooking the lower area, can seat an additional 250 (Renderings).

In addition to the central dining room, there are two smaller adjacent rooms that are also used for eating. The dining area known as “The Green Room” is located to the left of the main entrance to the dining area. The room is made up of green upholstered booths surrounding the perimeter, and circular dining tables in the middle. This location was once part of the convenience store and snack bar Milts. However, the store was removed in 2014 and the space is now solely used for Commons diners.

The other adjacent dining room is the Fraites Dining Room - more commonly known as “The Fishbowl.” This room got its nickname because of the moveable glass walls that separate it from the main dining area, as well as the glass windows on the front of the building and side facing the main entrance. Because of these architectural aspects, diners are on display to people outside of the main eating area, making the space feel similar to that of a fishbowl. Eating at one of the many circular tables allows diners to feel as though they are a part of the main dining crowd, yet creates a sense of intimacy and privacy within the room.

Dining Together

Commons dining hall represents the idea of dining together has been an important part of Bates College since it was established. Elaine Tuttle Hansen,

President of Bates College from 2002 to 2011 highlighted the importance of collective dining: "...a student wrote in the June 1887 issue of the student newspaper, 'It is so common a thing for students to meet three times a day at their meals, that it has been overlooked. But common things have the greatest molding influence. The uncommon may startle, but rarely produces any lasting change...'. This sentiment still holds true" (October 10). The longstanding beliefs surrounding the Bates community on the importance of dining together and centrally on campus explains why the architecture of the building was so carefully designed.

The architects Saski Associates Inc. suggested that Bates maintain a single dining location as opposed to "distributed" dining options (Burns 32). Elaine Tuttle Hansen agreed with this idea, stating: "Because students are so engaged in different activities and communities, a home base where they can come together and reconnect over meals may be even *more* important today" (Burns 32). This opinion was supported by the dean of students at the time, Tedd Goundie, who explains just how much a central dining commons contributes to a Bates education as a whole: "Bates people have a great affinity for gathering and being with each other... And Commons is where students talk about what's going on in their lives, with each other, with workers, with faculty. We need to preserve that" (Burns 31).

Incorporating the idea of togetherness and community even further into the dining experience is the distinctive layout of the food options. According to the Commons Fact Sheet created when the new building was being presented, the food stations were specifically designed in "marketplace-style" dining, to allow "easy traffic flow" (fact sheet). Additionally, the set-up creates a much more visible social platform, as students are constantly in close contact with one another. The Pasta Bar, Bobcat Bar,

Bakery, Deli Bar, Vegan Bar, Brick Oven and Grill all make up the contents of the food options, encouraging diners to walk around and browse at the contents of each station before deciding on a meal. Director of Dining Services Christine Schwartz explains: “[Commons] incorporate(s) a ‘servery’ that clusters nine themed stations into a sort of critical mass of temptation. Rather than a strict flow from check-in to serving line to chair, students can enter, scope out the scene – who’s where, what’s to eat – then circulate through the marketplace” (Burns 32). Diners are encouraged to converse and acknowledge the presence of one another while occupying the space because of the circular and compact design. This style encompasses the idea of collectiveness within the physical space of Commons as diners walk freely around the food stations, inevitably running into people who are doing the same. The openness creates an unrestricted flow of activity for those within the space, and awareness of the presence and gaze of others is unavoidable. Peers and classmates are easy to spot among the food stations, designed in hopes of creating a friendly relationship outside of the regulated campus and academic settings.

Seating Patterns In Commons

Although commons was created to unify the student body and serve as a physical location to connect peers, patterns of behavior have developed within the space that divides the student body. The most prominent divide occurs within the seating arrangements in Commons, where over time various locations have become associated with particular “groups”. In general, students on campus refer to the side of the cafeteria closest to the entrance as the “athlete” section, and the side farthest from the entrance the “hipster” section. Additionally, the Green Room that is adjacent to the main dining hall is known as the room where most international students eat. These seating

arrangements inevitably divide the campus according to specific traits and characteristics of the students.

Frequently, sports teams eat together in Commons either before or after practice or a game. Generally they sit at the larger rectangular tables, making it obvious that they are one “unit.” It is also widely known that male students tend to sit at the front of the dining hall, closest to the food. When discussing this with a male athlete, I ask why he thinks this is the case. He responded: “Honestly it's just how it's always been. It's the ‘jock section’ but some people say they sit there because it's closer to the food.” He continued, “Yes, closer to food for sure is a reason we sit up in the front, and we like seeing everyone. We love watching people come in and viewing everyone and being in the midst of everything” (Male #1).

On the other hand, female students will often sit farther back within the dining area, in more private settings and more intimate, smaller tables. Friend groups often enter Commons together, filing in and choosing a spot based on their social preferences. Often same sex friend groups enter together at dinnertime, and mixed sex groups are more commonly seen at breakfast and lunchtime. Students generally know where their friends will be located based by their social inclinations – either right side or left side – and often head in that direction right when entering the dining area.

Especially due to Commons’s massive size, the unspoken “assigned seating” helps students feel a sense of belonging and comfort when entering the dining area. Starting freshman year, students quickly pick up on the location in which they feel most comfortable to eat their meals and what group they associate themselves with. A female peer explained: “I was friends with athletes in the beginning of freshman year, so I sat in the area right when you walk in. For me, that defined what kind of student I was at

Bates, without necessarily realizing it.” She elaborated: “A lot of it for me is the routine, but I do find comfort in knowing the people I’m immediately surrounded by while I’m eating. At this point as a senior it’s really something that I’ve just gotten used to and don’t plan on changing. Its very well-established” (Female #1).

Even though Bates prides itself on having a dining hall that connects the student body, it appears as though a divide naturally occurs, even within this open space. John Miley, addressed the issue of cliques in his article published in the March 2008 issue of *The Bates Student*, entitled “New Commons Presents a chance to make new, Strange Friends”. Miley wrote this piece right after Commons was opened to students. He compared the new space to the older dining hall the campus had. He observed:

Where we sit has obviously changed and it is harder to have the cliques that we did in the old place. Because New Commons is so opened up, it may be impossible to separate the student body into distinct groupings and go back to our old habits. At first I was scared because I couldn’t figure out where the nerds were going to sit. I had no idea where to go (Miley).

This personal anecdote reveals that at Bates College, a history of cliques and divisions while eating meals has been present on campus. Although Miley was hopeful about the physical layout of Commons in presenting a solution to the divide, it is clear that over time, students found a way to segment the seemingly open space.

Commons and the Panopticon

The rigid dynamics of Common’s seating patterns and social culture are indicative of the overwhelming power within the structure, similar to the structural power analyzed by philosopher Michel Foucault in Bentham’s Panopticon. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault’s writings on Bentham’s Panopticon explains how the specific architecture of buildings can influence the behavior of those

inside. The Panopticon is a circular jail structure with inmate's rooms lining the circumference of the circle and a guard's watchtower placed in the center. The purpose of this design is to allow a single guard to stand in the center, and watch all of the inmates at once. Blinds in the window of the tower let the guards see out but prevent the inmates from seeing in. This feeling of being seen at all times relates to Commons at Bates College.

Bentham created the Panopticon in order to make guarding prison inmates more efficient. As Foucault described it: "...in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing, in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (Foucault 202). This exercise of power by the guards is implemented through the architectural design of the building, and inevitably leads to the inmates own self-regulation and control of their behavior, without any influence from others. Seeing and being seen in the Panopticon directly relates to seeing and being seen within Commons at Bates College. Foucault described:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action... in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers (Foucault 201).

The inmate's actions perpetuate the power dynamics that were strategically installed within the building and thus demonstrate the concept of a superior, ever-present gaze within certain architectural designs, such as Commons.

The exceptionally high ceilings and remarkably open dining room of Commons bares a similar architectural condition to that of the Panopticon, and inevitably controls the human behavior and power elements within. This is not uncommon, as Foucault

explained: “Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used” (Foucault 205). Similar to how the prisoners began to regulate their actions due to the overwhelming presence of a superior gaze, students entering Commons establish specific norms and procedures due to the ever-present gaze of peers while in this dining area. These behaviors perpetuate the established, stereotypical assumptions of where certain people should sit within the space, and inevitably make the students themselves the bearers of the power that is defining them. However, this power is only present when all students are also present. This is due to the architectural layout of the space, which allows diners to see and be seen. The power of the gaze is incredibly strong within Commons when the space is filled with students, however without them, the power relationship is gone and the individual has no restrictions. This is similar to what Foucault noticed within the Panopticon: “Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (Foucault 202). This explains how students dining in Commons are “caught up” within the numerous aspects, and together construct the power that constrains them.

For instance, one of the most obvious examples of how power dynamics and constraint to individuals is created is through the layout of the dining tables. The tables create rows that diners must walk up and down in order to maneuver through the space. When someone is walking, students sitting at the tables can easily gaze at those who are moving around. Because commons is an open space with bright lighting and large windows, it is easy to watch others as they walk through the building. Thus, the feeling

of always being watched by an ever-present gaze is engrained into students' behaviors.

One female student noted how she handles this, she said:

I usually always go up with another girl to get my food, and I always ask at the table if anyone is going up and I always feel awkward if no one is getting up...I feel more comfortable with someone else, [if not], I feel like all eyes are on me...I feel like people are staring at me so I want someone else up there with me (Female #4).

Individual students become conditioned to act a certain way while in Commons due to the perception of others, and structural aspects of the building that implement a panoptic effect.

The interesting circumstance of individuals assuming responsibility for their own categorization is greatly due to Bates College's decision to provide only one dining hall for the students. Although, as mentioned earlier, Bates prides itself on purposefully choosing to create one space for the student body to connect over meals, the creation of this space has also generated new problems and perpetuated previous social dynamics. As John Miley stated in his article, he was hopeful that the new architecture and dining location would help reduce cliques – something that appears to be inherent to Bates College students. However, the building that was designed ended up presenting new problems due to its “panopticon effect.” These effects reveal that the architecture of the building forced students to seek out comfort within the open space, and become the bearers of power on themselves to create order. Although the space was originally designed to bring students together and end the cliques that were clearly present, the architecture inevitably appears to encourage divisions among the student body, and shape human behavior due to the feeling of being watched by an ever-present gaze. Conducting a spatial analysis in addition to applying Michel Foucault's analysis of Bentham's Panopticon to Commons reveals that the power dynamics within the space

are derived from and reinforced by the architecture and the ideas of seeing, and being seen. Above all, it is clear that everyone is aware of the powers within the building that control how they present themselves. In Chapter 2, I will look at how gendered patterns of behavior have been developed, and how they shape the Bates College dining hall.

Chapter 2

Gendered Gathering Space

Students at Bates College treasure their meal times in Commons because it provides an escape from academic life and allows them to feel at ease amidst a hectic day. Specific patterns have developed among students to encourage relaxation, yet they also transform the building into a gendered space on the Bates College campus. Differences in male and female behavior are easy to recognize while in the space, and can be observed on a day-to-day basis. Stemming from these differences in gendered behavior is a set of rituals and routines that shape the dynamics of the space. These norms and patterns of behavior create a unique atmosphere within Commons, and give structure to the use of the space for every individual. Although it is a very public location on campus, Commons is also a place that fosters privacy and intimate relationships between individuals. Because of this, the act of eating becomes more than just a necessary aspect of survival for students. The entire process of dining while in

this space becomes a display of the societal norms that have been inscribed and engrained throughout time on campus. Commons acts as a social platform for the Bates community. The characteristics of Commons align with Ray Oldenburg's definition of a "Third Place," from his book *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day*. He considers these spaces crucial, neutral spot in society where people can gather and come together. Being a "Third Place" Commons provides a venue unlike any other where students can interact and relate with one another. Observing and analyzing the public and private aspects, the displays of gender, as well as the importance of communal rituals and characteristics within the dining hall, it is clear that Commons is a "Third Place." As such, Commons is vital to the social interactions, formation of identity, and display of gendered patterns of behavior for students at Bates College. I will use the characteristics of "Third Places" that Oldenburg describes to explore how Commons provides privacy in a public space, encourages positive experiences and segregates sexes in the space.

Overview of Gendered Spaces

In order to understand the dynamics of Commons, I spent time sitting and observing what was taking place. I watched the scene unfold during the dinner rush, and noticed patterns of behavior that were prominent among students. Although I dine in Commons every day, for every meal, I wanted to take the time to study what was happening around me, and approach the dining hall in a more analytical way. I focused on the ways in which people used and moved throughout the space, and noted the gendered differences.

It is important to note, however, that my own subjectivity must be taken into account when addressing the observations I have made. I have been dining in Commons for four years now, and have had time to develop a routine and establish my own set of opinions and ideas about the space and how people use it. My personal perspective as a white, heterosexual, and female senior at Bates College has inevitably influenced the way I have approached my findings. These factors contribute to a specific way in which I view the school, and contribute to the way I act socially and within social spaces on campus. Thus, the observations I note may be obvious to me, but another observer might have a different perspective. As I describe what I have seen in Commons, I intend to remain as objective as possible, fully aware of my subjective position.

The very first thing I noticed was the gender segregation among the tables in Commons. Of all the tables that were filled up, only a handful consisted of mixed sex seating arrangements. The rest of the tables consisted of only male or only female groupings. The majority of the male athletes sat in the front, often with signifiers that they played a sport, or had participated in some athletic activity. Backpacks, sneakers, and athletic bags were scattered around the table, hanging off of chairs, or placed by the sides of the chairs. Additionally, the apparel that the men were wearing suggested athletic activity. It was common to see this display among male diners. Female diners, on the other hand, were more likely to keep their possessions closer to them, or under their chairs by the table. They were less likely to take up as much space, and kept their belongings orderly and neat. Although some of the female students also wore clothes that signified athleticism, their belongings were more compact and they did not seem to have as much with or around them.

Female Confinement

The difference in the amount of physical space that males and females take up while dining in Commons demonstrates power dynamics between the sexes. In American society, women are taught to take up less space than men. This restriction is seen in Commons by the repeated occurrence of women crossing their legs while seated and crossing their arms over their chest while walking down the isles of the dining space. Patterns are formed and learned from interactions in public, starting at a very young age. These patterns are inevitably engrained in the behavior of males and females, and are reinforced and sustained within American culture. Exhibited displays of confinement of the body are easy to identify while in a public space, such as Commons.

Authors Lesa A. Stern, Mark Callister, and Lynn Jones noticed this same pattern of behavior among college students during their observation of a recreation center on a college campus. They cited Carol Brooks Gardner, saying "...women are 'situationally disadvantaged' in public because of the long American tradition of private and public discrimination toward them" (28). They continued, "... women still operate with 'provisional acceptance' in public that assumes they have only 'limited competence'" (28). This observation and stereotypical assumption about the role of women in public contributes to specific patterns of behavior in females, and perhaps reveals why women feel uncomfortable taking up as much space and sitting in the front of the Commons. Although they may not consciously think about their space and the location in which they sit, learned behaviors engrained in American society shape and construct the decisions that are made within Commons. The men demonstrate power and authority to sit wherever they choose and take up as much space as they would like, while the women's suggest they are mindful of the choices they make and the social implications.

Man-spreading

The frequent observation of men spreading out and taking up space while in Commons is a developing societal concern. Recently, the New York subway system has had to implement an ad campaign in order to stop what they are calling “man-spreading.” This occurs when men sitting on a crowded subway seat spread their legs apart in a V shape, and take up two seats instead of the typically allocated single seat. Not only is this a problem for the already crowded subway cars of the city, but it also demonstrates the perceived sense of entitlement that men have.

A *New York Times* article written by Emma G. Fitzsimmons that began the popularization of the term “man-spreading” described the act as “the lay-it-all-out sitting style that more than a few men see as their inalienable underground right” (Fitzsimmons). Men will refuse to move and allow others to sit, and believe that they are entitled to take up extra space while in public. In the article, one man named Fabio Panceiro, was labeled as “unapologetic about sitting with his legs spread apart” (Fitzsimmons). He is quoted saying, “I’m not going to cross my legs like ladies do,” he said. “I’m going to sit how I want to sit” (Fitzsimmons). The stigma surrounding acting or looking feminine while in public drives male subway riders to emulate masculinity in spatially selfish ways. Announcing their male presence through demonstrations of body positioning could be interpreted as an assertion of power. Male riders that practice this type of seating appear as though they feel it is their right, as a man, to sit however they would like even if it is detrimental to those nearby.

Although this article discusses man-spreading specifically on the subway system, the trend of males taking up excess space can be linked to the patterns I have observed in Commons. Similar to those who man-spread on the Subway, the male students in

Commons take up excess space to present an image of power and privilege. They appear to recognize their masculinity and display it in the front of the dining area for all to see. But why do they do this? Fitzsimmons revealed: “Women have theories about why some men sit this way. Some believe it is just a matter of comfort and may not even be intentional. Others consider it an assertion of power, or worse” (Fitzsimmons). No matter what the reasoning may be, it is clear that beliefs are engrained within society that deem certain behaviors acceptable for males, yet unacceptable for females. These beliefs shape not only how we act, but also how we conduct our lives and ourselves while in various settings and spaces in society.

Dining Patterns and Rituals

Spending time in Commons, it is clear that specific patterns and rituals have developed among the students. The majority of students at Bates appear to display similar patterns of behavior, while some patterns are unique to individuals or smaller groups within the space. Every person who walks through the door seems to have a strategy behind their approach of the space, with the same routine in mind before they even enter. Although the tactics to eating a meal may be slightly different for each diner, the importance of dining together and sharing a routine not only enhances the experience, but also creates a connection within the campus as a whole.

Because of the class schedule Bates College has established, the times during the day that students have free are generally very similar. The similarity of routine within the institution creates a particular flow around campus, and forces the majority of students to eat meals within very similar periods of time. Additionally, because of the limited hours that Commons is open for dining, students must make sure to eat within the time slots. This shapes dining experiences for all students. Generally, the most

populated times in Commons during the week are as follows: 7:30am before 8am classes begin, 9am before 9:30am classes begin, 12pm lunch rush that lasts until 1pm, 5:30 dinner rush that lasts until about 6:30pm. These times are known on campus for being exceptionally busy, so many students shape their meal times accordingly. Some choose to eat during the busy hours with other students, while others wait until it is less crowded and more private in Commons.

This pattern of behavior is again similar to what authors Lesa A. Stern, Mark Callister, and Lynn Jones noticed when observing a recreation center on a college campus. They noted within their observations that the idea of timing and planning visits to the space was key, as students could participate in what they called “face time”. Face time is described as time when you are visible to others within a space (Stern et al. 29). The idea of exposing yourself and being recognized is key to participating in and implementing face time. The authors discovered: “When one *can* visit the rec center, however, is not the sole consideration for those engaged in face time...students wishing to engage in face time visit the workout room *because* it is crowded during peak hours” (33). This is similar to Commons, where some students shape their meal times not only around their schedule, but also when they can dine with their peers and their friends, while others attempt to avoid peak hours, and dine in a less populated setting.

For the majority of diners who eat at the most populated times of day, the communal atmosphere creates an important experience. Jeffery Kluger, Christine Gorman and Alice Park’s *Time Magazine* article entitled “Why We Eat,” explained the importance of eating together, and why it has been done within our society throughout history. The article cited Sidney Mintz, professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, who stated: "Interaction over food is the single most important feature of

socializing...The food becomes the carriage that conveys feelings back and forth” (Kluger et al.). Students dining in Commons represent the ideas behind this statement, as some of the most important social interactions occur within this space and over food.

The importance of sharing conversation and connecting with others in such a routine manner is important to the culture of Bates College, and additionally, American society as a whole. Kluger et al. noted: “We solve our problems over the family dinner table, conduct our business over the executive lunch table, entertain guests over cake and cookies at the coffee table.” The act of eating takes place during momentous and important events in our lives. By choosing to share our meals at Commons among peers, students at Bates College are creating their own rituals and patterns of behavior that hold great significance to their experience as a student.

Commons as a Third Place

The majority of students at Bates College live full time on campus. Off-campus housing is only allowed to seniors, and even with this option, many still choose to live in the dormitory housing provided. Because of the small size of the school and the very contained campus layout, students live and learn in very close proximity. The major academic areas along Alumni Walk (a pathway through the center of campus) are often no more than a five minute walk for students from their rooms. Although the separation of public life from private life is distinguishable on campus, the spaces in which separate activities take place are quite close to one another. Due to the extreme proximity of buildings and spaces on campus, it is important to incorporate what are known as “Third Places” for students to have a neutral and comfortable environment for socializing. Commons dining hall acts as the “Third Place” for the students at Bates College, using Ray Oldenburg’s terminology.

Commons can be labeled as a “Third Place” because of the characteristics it embodies. Like many other “Third Places,” Commons is a place that is conducive for private conversation, while still being a public environment. Additionally, it is also a “Third Place” because it functions as a space that enhances and encourages positive experiences for its visitors. Lastly, Commons is categorized as a “Third Place” because of its tendency to encourage the segregation of sexes within the space.

The characteristic of being a private yet also public space on campus is key to Commons’ label as a “Third Place”. In his *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg explained how a “neutral ground” for people to meet up and get together is vital to society. Oldenburg wrote: “There must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and in which all feel at home and comfortable” (Oldenburg 22). This is particularly significant for students at Bates, as they do not have houses or large spaces for gathering. The only spaces available are dorm rooms, which are not the most practical for entertaining a large group of people comfortably. Commons, on the other hand, offers a location for students to meet up and come and go as they please that is welcoming and open to all. Additionally, because it is the one dining hall on campus, students go to Commons for each meal of the day. Commons is the one space that almost every student is guaranteed to go in to at least once a day while on campus. This is unlike any other building or space.

Commons’ reputation as the central hub of the social scene on campus allows students to feel confident that no matter when they enter the space, they will see people they know. Because of the limited hours of operation, as well as the open floor plan that the space provides, it is likely that upon entering students will start to recognize more and more people. They can expect someone they know being there at the same time

they are, almost any day. This is important for “Third Places” to provide, as Oldenburg wrote:

Third places that render the best and fullest service are those to which one may go alone at almost any time of the day or evening with assurance that acquaintances will be there. To have such a place available whenever the demons of loneliness of boredom strike or when the pressures and frustrations of the day call for relaxation amid good company is a powerful resource (Oldenburg 32).

No matter what happens during the day, when entering Commons, students are visibly more social with one another. Commons provides an escape from the reality of school and work and is a place where students can simply chat with friends, fuel their bodies with food, and enjoy unstructured time to relax while they eat. Some students go into Commons just to socialize, as I noticed while observing that many of the tables appeared to be full of groups of students simply chatting and lingering long after they finished their meals. A release from academic pursuits in a space designated to the enjoyment of company from peers and classmates is a key function of Commons.

Although Commons is a public space within the campus community, there is still the opportunity to have private interactions. This intersection of public and private happens at the dining tables. The tables create an intimate atmosphere within the larger social setting of Commons. This allows people to come together and bond in a way that they may not have otherwise (Oldenburg 23). Conversation among students while eating meals displays a type of interaction that is both intimate, and personal. Eating food is an everyday activity, but it can also be very revealing about a person. Thus, when sitting down at a table in Commons, the act of dining becomes a chance for people to interact with one another, and get to know those around them.

An especially significant characteristic of Commons is the upbeat and constant energy that fills the space. Although it varies from day to day, meal to meal, there is often a light and positive mood filling the physical space of the dining hall. This is quite typical of “Third Places.” Oldenburg revealed: “The temper and tenor of the third place is upbeat; it is cheerful. The purpose is to enjoy the company of one’s fellow human beings and to delight in the novelty of their character...” (Oldenburg 25). Especially dining in Commons on a Friday or Saturday night, when music is playing from the speakers and students are energized for the weekend, the atmosphere of Commons is undeniably upbeat and cheerful. Commons encourages peers to interact and bond with one another, and provides an environment that counters the classroom environment. Oldenburg stated:

Conversation’s improved quality within the third place is also suggested by its temper. It is more spirited than elsewhere, less inhibited and more eagerly pursued. Compared to the speech in other realms, it is more dramatic and more often attended by laughter and the exercise of wit (Oldenburg 29).

Commons allows students to unwind, relax, and free themselves of the restrictions they may feel in other areas of the college community. The space acts as an escape from the strict routine of academia that many students find exhausting and overwhelming. By providing a location where students can socialize with all of their peers, conversation is inevitable and encouraged. By allowing students to let-go, enjoy the meal they are eating and company they are with, Commons improves conversation and moods of those who are within the space.

A final characteristic of Commons, which contributes to its categorization as a “Third Place,” is the tendency for the space to be sexually segregated. The majority of

the time Commons tables are divided by sex. This is not uncommon in “Third Places,” as Oldenburg wrote:

Most third places are sexually segregated, some exclusively so, while in others separation by sex is a matter of degree. Far more often than not, these institutions of joyful and animated relaxation erect barriers between the sexes and promote the ancient division of social life into men’s and women’s worlds (Oldenburg 248).

The tendency within society for women and men to interact in separate social spheres is revealed by the seating arrangements of Commons. As in “Third Places,” Commons also embodies the social division of sex from table to table. An explanation of this phenomenon could be the comfort and self-awareness students feel while dining. Because eating food can be an act that displays self-control, food preference, and health choices to those around you, it is possible that each sex prefers to dine with others who will eat similarly to them, in terms of quantity and type of food.

Additionally, the separate tables show different interests that males and females have. Generally, friend groups want to sit together in order to discuss shared interests. Stereotypically, topics of conversation vary between men and women. Oldenburg recognizes this in “Third Places” as well, he stated: “The difference in interests between men and women and the reduced inhibition of same-sex association accounts for and justifies the “little polarizations” always found in third places shared by both sexes” (Oldenburg 256). Although males and females do have many shared interests, when in a place to relax and let go (such as Commons) they prefer to converse separately. Oldenburg noted that this is a frequent pattern within “Third Places.” He explained: “...third places serve to separate the sexes...” he continued, “Sex identities are never forgotten and either same-sex association or mixed association will dominate any

establishment that regularly hosts sociable gatherings” (258). Oldenburg revealed that sex is unavoidably dominating while in social places, and this factor will inevitably control the dynamics of the space.

Commons’ function as a social platform for the students at Bates College is revealed through the numerous characteristics that define the space in both public and private ways. The public qualities of the dining hall encourage actions of gendered behavior that are reinforced and engrained within the campus community. These acts promote certain behaviors, and shape the general atmosphere within the dining hall. However, the private and intimate acts of interaction at the tables within Commons represent how the act of dining connects and relaxes students while in the space. The numerous functions of Commons and its role as a “Third Place” for the students gives Commons a unique purpose. This purpose is necessary, as students do not have many locations on the small campus that allows them to gather in a neutral place where they feel comfortable and welcomed. The specific unspoken norms and rituals that are adhered to by students demonstrate key ways the space is utilized. In Chapter 3, I will examine these patterns of behavior more closely, and examine how perceptions of food and food consumption have been gendered in society.

Chapter 3

The Body, Gender and Food

Is it possible to make gendered assumptions about food choice and college dining? Can food choices conform with stereotypical ideas? Examining behavior of Bates College students eating in Commons, it is clear that perceptions surrounding food consumption in American society have been shaped and influenced greatly by gender. Dietary expectations for each gender are embedded within all corners of our social world, and unsurprisingly, patterns surrounding food and eating for men and women have sustained and evolved over time. The various perceptions surrounding food choices in society are developed because of the association with consumption patterns and physique. The stereotypical ideas surrounding what a male and female body are supposed to look like directly impact the type and quantity of food being consumed. These patterns have manifested themselves within the routine of students eating at Bates College dining Commons. Subtle differences in the way in which men and women

at the school approach dining in Commons reveal significant implications about what we are taught within society and create varying dining experiences for each gender. The relationship between the body, gender and food in society directly affects how dining in public spaces is shaped for men and women. I will examine this by looking at psychological studies conducted on college-aged students, various newspaper and magazine articles and observations and interviews with diners in the Bates College dining Commons.

College Students and Food

An especially significant aspect to note while discussing the perceptions of food and the body in Commons is the increased awareness that college-aged students have regarding physical appearance. According to a study in the *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, the “emerging adulthood period” during college is known to cause major changes in the body composition (Morgan et al. 1127). This is due to the new psychological influences, as well as the change in eating patterns and behaviors that develop during this time (Morgan et al. 1127). While studying the emerging adulthood patterns and trends, Morgan et al. found that: “Females were less likely to be overweight, but more likely to be trying to lose weight” (Morgan et al. 1128). They also found that “it is typical that females report higher body satisfaction when they have lower levels of or when they decrease percent body fat; however, this is not always the case for males” (Morgan et al. 1131).

These findings demonstrate the feelings that females have regarding the desire to be skinny. This common trend among college aged women and not men, shows the varying societal influences and ideas on what the appropriate physique is for each sex. Morgan et al.’s research supported this. It stated: “Differences in investment in

appearance are most striking between males and females” (Morgan et al. 1130). Because females tend to be more aware and more in tune with how they look and appear to others, the act of eating food in a public space, such as Commons, is much more complex.

Supporting these theories surrounding food and college students, Annette Levi, Kenny K. Chan and Dan Pence found that both men’s and women’s food choices and eating habits are “rooted in the ideology of what it means to be female and male in contemporary American society” (Levi et al. 91). They specifically looked at the decisions in quantity of food being consumed by each gender, and the factors behind these decisions. They discussed the social aspects that influence females to be conscious of their food consumption, and stated:

95% of the female population has dieted at some time, and content analyses of magazines most commonly read by young men and women showed that those aimed at girls and young women contained nearly 11 times more articles related to dieting and weight than did the men’s magazines (Levi et al. 92).

This clear marketing strategy aimed towards females demonstrates the societal pressure and influence for females to feel the need to restrict their consumption patterns and simultaneously makes restriction and control of appetite a feminine and womanly pursuit.

This “gender ideology” creates ideas and aids in “defining what behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate for women and men” (Levi et al. 92). However, although women are more commonly subjected to criticism surrounding eating habits, Levi et al. exposed the difficult societal pressures placed on men as well. They stated: “Adherence to this gender template is particularly compulsive among men, anchored by the proscription that ‘real men must never, never display feminine characteristics.’ Often

fueled by debilitating stigma, such as being labeled 'sissy'" (Levi et al. 92). The desire to appear masculine and powerful encourages men to eat more and not think about restriction while eating. The results of their study confirmed that men typically have "low interest in food choices" (Levi et al. 94). Men simply don't care as much, or don't feel the need to think as much about what foods they are eating. This is something considered more feminine. Due to the public nature of dining in Commons, with its visible eating spaces and students constantly on display, diners are aware of their body and physical appearance at all times while in the space.

The Gendering of Food in American Society

It has been socially constructed in American society that certain foods are for men and certain foods are for women. As Eva Wiseman wrote in the article "The Truth About Men, Women and Food": "It's a complicated business, eating. And one made knottier by the idea that some foods are masculine (hamburgers, steak), while others (yoghurt, quiche) are strictly for girls" (Wiseman). This sentiment rings true throughout society, with eating patterns engrained and learned from a young age. Some argue that the difference in dietary preference is due to biological reasons, for example:

Director of the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research centre David Katz believes our gendered diet can be explained by evolution. As cavemen, he suggests, men were hunters, relying on protein to build muscles, and seeing meat as a reward, while women were gatherers of fruit and vegetables. (Wiseman).

However, although this explanation might hold some evolutionary truth, numerous other experts have discredited it. Wiseman quoted nutritionist Yvonne Bishop-Weston, who explained: "...men are drawn to fats, meats and proteins, but it's not down to an "evolutionary need – it's down to socialisation. Boys are encouraged to have big appetites from a very young age" (Wiseman).

An example of an extremely gendered food is chocolate. Chocolate's association with females is constantly reinforced within American media and advertisements. As Kate Bratskeir pointed out in her *Huffington Post* article "This Is Why Women Crave Chocolate, Men Want a Burger," advertisements in American society regularly depict women enjoying a chocolate treat, "because they *just* can't resist" (Bratskeir). This gendered portrayal suggests that chocolate is something forbidden and naughty, that goes against their strictly controlled diets and healthy eating habits.

These societal beliefs impose stigmas on women who eat too much, or who eat unhealthy foods. As Shalini Wickramatilake explained in her article on American culture and body image:

A woman with a large appetite is considered unhealthy, slovenly, and lacking self-restraint. Conversely, men who eat large portions are thought to be strong, masculine, and formidable. We assign foods with distinct meanings for different genders, forgetting that on the basic level, food is meant to simply energize and sustain us (Wickramatilake).

She discussed the phenomenon of men being congratulated and applauded for consuming high calorie meals, while women feel shame and embarrassment when they do the same.

From the existing literature and discussions, it is apparent that gendered eating is due to societal shaping and upbringing through media, advertisements, and trends. Authors David Bell and Gill Valentine discussed this sentiment in their book *Consuming Geographies*, which goes into great detail about gendered eating patterns. They wrote:

The body is far from being a natural phenomenon. Discourses in the media, the fashion industry, medicine and consumer culture map our bodily needs, pleasures, possibilities and limitations. These cartographies produce geographically and historically specific social 'norms' within which we each locate, evaluate and understand our bodies (Bell 26).

Bell and Valentine blamed the media, especially advertisements and advertising, for encouraging bodies to look a certain way, and creating discourses centered around bodies being a certain size, shape and look (Bell 26). Wiseman quoted Bell in her article, offering the explanation:

...men don't eat steak because they are men, men eat steak to show they are men. Women aren't hard-wired to crave dessert – we've learned that women crave dessert, so we follow, mouths open. "It's comforting," Bell says, "It's reassuring when we make sense of things (Wiseman).

Attributing the eating patterns to learned behaviors and prototypes of perfect male and female bodies, we understand what appearance is desired and rewarded, and enact the process of achieving that through food consumption. The reiteration of desired behavior within society and in public places sustains these eating patterns in American society, and perpetuates existing stereotypes.

Gendering of Food in Commons

Throughout my examinations of Commons, I noticed the differences and similarities in each gender's use of the physical space. The gendered norms and patterns of behavior were easy to detect; however, this could be because of my position as someone who is used to observing and enacting these behaviors myself. Again, it is critical to remain aware of my subjective perspective as a Commons diner in my observations and analyses.

Observing the food stations and choices made by each gender, it was clear that there were differences between the sexes. Upon analysis, I noticed that many of the female diners would wander around in pairs or even small groups, when trying to decide what to eat. Females would stop and talk to each other while in the food station area, while the male students did not appear as interested in stopping to talk while

preparing their food. The male students often looked more “on-a-mission” than the female students, who could be seen and heard discussing their options more openly with fellow females. A female diner noted this as well, stating: “I feel like guys don’t meticulously look around and spot out what they’re going to eat. They are just like, ‘oh food!’ and put it on their plate” (Female #4). Females in contrast appear to have more difficulty with the act of physically obtaining and choosing the food to consume. This could be a display of discomfort and insecurity. As discussed earlier, studies have found that female students are much more aware of the type and quantity of food they are associated with, due to cultural constructions of what foods are appropriate to eat. This may explain why many of the female students use the bowls available in Commons, as opposed to the plates. Said one female: “I put pizza in cups so people don’t see it...or in bowls. I feel like I’m really weird. I’m even embarrassed to say this out loud, but its true” (Female #3). Added another female student: “I walk really fast when I’m in Commons. I feel like everyone’s looking at me and staring at me and it makes me nervous. If I feel like I can get my food and get out of there quickly, then I’m good” (Female #4). These actions support the idea that Bates students share the same hyper-awareness that other studies have detected among college women.

Movement Through Space

While discussing what some students noticed about their own patterns of behavior in Commons, the dichotomy between males and females was clear. The use of the space differed dramatically depending on sex, and their perceptions of how other sexes navigate the same space revealed interesting insights. Within Commons, the stereotypical perceptions in greater society surrounding foods considered to be for “females” and foods considered to be for “males” are easily identified. In conversations

with numerous male students, almost all stated that their go-to approach to getting food in Commons was to start at the pizza, grill, or bobcat bar. Female students, however noted a much more complex approach. Said one female student: “First I go to the salad bar, then I walk by euro quickly, then vegan bar then circle back to salad bar” (Female #2). Then said another: “I usually go to the vegan bar first. I don’t ever go to the bobcat bar” (Female #4).

When describing what behaviors they noticed in the opposite sex, each observed a similar pattern to what they had self-described. A male student noted: “Girls definitely hit the salad bar harder, and a lot of vegan.” He continued: “I’d say that men definitely do get more meat, and that falls in line with the salad thing, that girls are a little but more conscious of what their getting. Definitely less protein and more greens and vegan bar” (Male #2). Another male added: “I think girls definitely check out the salad bar first... straight to the salad bar. I don’t even know if girls even really go to the grill station” (Male #3). On the other hand, females also noticed specific patterns among the males. One female noted: “I feel like guys just kinda eat whatever is there. They probably go to the bobcat bar first – they just go straight to food” (Female #4). These differences reflect the gendered notion of food that is prominent in our society. As the studies revealed, certain foods are considered “manlier” while others are considered better suited to women. This directly correlates to the stations each gender chooses to go to, and the stations others expect them to go to as well.

I also asked peers if they were aware of the food they were carrying and how they were carrying it. A male student noted: “I never think about what I’m holding or how much food I have” (Male #1). His response is simple and straightforward. The issue appears to be something he is not consciously aware of. However, a female

student's response to this question was much more complicated, demonstrating the additional thought and analysis she has given to her action. She stated: "I wouldn't take more than one plate of food at a time. I prefer to get up and get more once I'm done. I don't usually take two plates at one time" (Female #2). In contrast, she said, males do not seem to think about the quantity of food they have at all: "I think guys are more likely to get so much on their plate and not even eat it all. They'd rather have more, and will get multiple different plates and not finish the plate... They're not embarrassed by how many plates they have" (Male #4). Additionally, one female student noted: "I would feel uncomfortable if I had a whole plate of fries or something unhealthy, *but* if I have something healthy, I'm not self-conscious about it" (Female #2). Another female student agreed: "Sometimes I feel embarrassed walking back to my table with my food, [if it's] something that I'm not proud of eating. Like ice cream or something" (Female #3). Again, this self-consciousness around food quality and quantity displays the cultural narrative surrounding the food that females feel they are "allowed" to have.

Furthermore, the type of plate used to carry food has specific connotations. "Girls always use black bowls, and football players always use trays," one student noted. "People use bowls so that others can't see what's inside" (Female #5). A male student agreed with the gendered eating plates, he stated: "I always use the oval plate. I will go out of my way to go get that. Probably because it's bigger...I'd rather not use a bowl and use a plate, I hate using the little [bowls]" (Male #4). The feelings of self-consciousness demonstrated through female's worries of having too much, visible, unhealthy food, show how society has shaped the beliefs surrounding what should be consumed.

In conversations with male Commons diners, they mentioned the quantity of food that *female* diners had, and not males. While a female diner said that she did notice if male diners were taking “extreme amounts of food” (Female #2), men never noted other men’s behavior. They only commented on the quantity of food females took. In fact, they were highly judgmental of the females while explaining their observations. One male stated: “Sometimes I notice how much food girls are carrying...Just the amount, like if its toppled on [the plate].” Another added: “I definitely notice if a girl that eats a lot of food. I definitely judge them.” He continued: “I judge girls for eating desserts. If some girl has like two pieces of pie, then I’ll definitely think, ‘Come on you don’t need that’” (Male #2). Continuing these judgments, while talking with a different male, he noted: “When I see a girl picking up three cookies, I say, ‘You don’t need those’... I feel like I only notice it when it’s kinda a bigger girl, and she’s like loading up on desserts. But if a fit girl was, I wouldn’t think twice about it, [it depends on] body type and what they’re getting” (Male #3).

These overt cultural stereotypes stated by the male diners demonstrate the basis of what females are aware of while they make their food choices. Because men clearly hold strong beliefs surrounding the correlation of food consumption to body type, their judgments affect how women feel about themselves and the food they are eating while in Commons. Women may frequently analyze their situation in order to represent themselves and their bodies in a specific way. This is deeply influenced by cultural constructions regarding the female body and food that are engrained in American society through representations in the media and popular culture. Women have clearly developed specific routines and patterns of behavior, (for example walking fast while near the food stations or using bowls to hide their food) because they know that if men

see, they will be criticized and judged on their choices. The men, on the other hand, do not need to worry about this because fellow female diners are not judging the quantity and quality of food they consume. It is not considered inappropriate or against the status quo for them to eat a lot. In fact, it is encouraged. Women are held to higher standards of self-control and restriction, which results in insecurities and distorted body images, which I revealed within the psychological studies mentioned earlier. These beliefs are reinforced throughout all of American society, and views of the female body are held to a much higher degree of scrutiny. These statements by men at Bates College expose the underlying societal beliefs in American culture, and reveal the skewed notions and unfairly targeted standards for women and their consumption of food.

Commons is a unique place on campus where the body is constantly being restricted and shaped, while simultaneously put on display in terms of existing gendered notions within society. The relationship between the body, gender and food within our society is constantly affecting male and female dining experiences in public places. The body and the food that makes up the body's composition is relentlessly examined by others in the area, creating dining patterns and behaviors among the individuals. Gendered notions about what is socially acceptable or considered "normal" are developed, influencing the diners to adhere to norms and routines that follow certain dietary patterns and restrictions. These patterns are inevitably learned outside of the Bates Community; however, they permeate into the Commons environment due to their profound impact on college aged males and females. As the studies earlier in the chapter revealed, "emerging adults" are especially susceptible to body awareness issues. In Commons it is clear that females are more frequently scrutinized by their peers, as well as themselves. The intense judgment in Bates College dining Commons, and also within

American society as a whole, reveals the inequalities of gender stereotyping of food within our culture.

Conclusion

When entering Commons today, I recognize that my actions represent something much more significant than simply grabbing a bite to eat. I am being shaped, as well as shaping the environment around me, and contributing to a community of people that display particular gendered patterns. I understand that every person is affected by the subtle yet powerful influences that manifest within the space. Specifically, I have come to recognize the gendered influences in the dining hall, whether produced by the students consciously or subconsciously. I now view the patterns of behavior that used to confuse me with a greater understanding of what contributes to these norms and rituals. I recognize that Commons is a social platform on the Bates College campus, one that puts gendered expressions on display. Not only are the power structures that influence social culture on the campus revealed within the dining hall, but so too are eating habits and relationships with food.

From my examination of the Bates College Dining Commons, I can confidently conclude that the dining hall reflects a gendered experience in relation to use of space, social connections, and relationships to food and the body. Individuals create a power structure every time they are in the space. The Panoptic design of the dining area is especially significant in highlighting the feeling of an ever-present gaze; this produces patterned behavior within the space. The power of this gaze contributes to heightened awareness of the self and inevitably leads to the development of different male and female norms and rituals.

As one of the most popular buildings on campus, Commons is home to social interactions that contribute greatly to life at Bates for all students. The space's communal environment and function as a central meeting place where students can go to relax and take a break from academia provides a positive and necessary outlet for students. However, in Commons the relationship between food and the body is put on display for others to observe, creating an atmosphere of vulnerability for some students. The discomfort that might arise from the strict social patterns has the power to create awkward and unwanted experiences for diners and members of the Bates community. Aspects from greater American society that are reflected in the dining hall must be recognized as influential, as this suggests that space, social relationships, and food in relation to gender all shape who we are.

My thesis proves that gendered notions are present within the physical space, the social environment, and the relationship between the food and the body in Commons dining hall. Each chapter covers how these factors are displayed as a whole, within the building and institution, all the way down to the individuals on a micro level. Power

structures in the building display how actions and behaviors are constantly shaped and reinforced.

My first chapter demonstrates how the strong sense of community at Bates College aided the decision to construct one single dining hall. The central location was chosen to avoid the feelings of fragmentation and separation evoked by previous dining halls on campus. Additionally, the new dining Commons was specifically designed with a food station layout that encouraged visibility and interaction among students. These spatial factors and design decisions all contribute to the way in which students carry and position themselves through the space. Connecting this communal and open space to Foucault's analysis of the all seeing "eye" of surveillance in the Panopticon structure provides an explanation for why students enact certain patterned behaviors and why stereotypes surrounding seating arrangements exist.

My second chapter highlights how Commons functions as both a public and private space, evoking gendered patterns of behavior. I discovered that trends of male assertion of power and dominance in greater American society are displayed in the dynamics of Commons. Through an analysis of "man-spreading," and female confinement, I examined how genders present themselves while in public spaces. This affects interactions surrounding food, which are some of the most important and beneficial ways to connect and interact with others in society. Being a "Third Place" on campus, which serves students as an area that is not their home or workplace, Commons presents many significant contributions to the student body. Time in the dining hall is recognized as an opportunity for students to socialize and interact with their peers. I revealed how the space is specifically created in order to provide students with a spot on

campus that does not interfere with other aspects of their life and provides neutral ground for interactions and conversations.

In my final chapter, drawing from psychological studies conducted on college-aged male and female participants, I discuss how eating habits contribute to perceptions of the body. The studies show that male and female perspectives vary significantly. I argued that ideology rooted in contemporary American society has the largest impact on personal feelings of physique and body shape, and marketing strategies and messages in popular culture have drastic implications on student's diets. This pattern of gendered behavior has made its way on to the Bates campus and Commons. Gendered beliefs shape the specific spaces in Commons used by men and women, and the food stations that each gender visits. The assumptions surrounding gendered food in greater American society are equally present on the Bates College campus.

It is important for the Bates community to understand that the unseen structures and subconscious choices that are made within Commons may not be something that all students are aware of. Choices and decisions are routinely engrained within each person in the dining hall, and gendered patterns have developed over time and get passed down year after year. Significant changes in patterns of behavior would take time to develop and resonate within the dining hall. However, simply noticing that interactions are influenced by the structure of the space is valuable for students and the community to recognize.

After conducting this research and becoming aware of the power of subtle differences on our gendered choices, I will have difficulty using a large dining hall space in the future without being fully conscious of my own actions. My research aims to expose some of the patterns of behavior that are frequent within the dining hall, and to

raise awareness about what is taking place. After reading my thesis, I hope that other students and the Bates community as a whole can gain a better understanding of our campus culture at this moment in time. I hope that in the years to come my research can be used to inform the community about the way Bates College was in 2015, and shed some light on an integral campus space that all students use and value every day. Above all, it is clear that dining in Commons is an experience that shapes Bates College culture and community, in ways that many students may not be aware of.

Works Cited

- Ardia, Elaine, and Pat Webber. "HISTORY OF BATES CAMPUS BUILDINGS." *Bates College: Muskie Archives: Bates History*. N.p., 16 Mar. 2010. Web. 9 Apr. 2015. <<http://abacus.bates.edu/muskie/archives/BatesHistory/campusBLDG.shtml>>.
- Bates College Dining Commons Fact Sheet, Series IIIc Subject Files, Box 23, Communications and Media Relations records, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.
- "Bates Opens State-of-the Art Dining Facility." *News Bates Opens Stateofthe Art Dining Facility Comments*. Bates College, 13 Feb. 2008. Web. 27 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.bates.edu/news/2008/02/13/bates-opens/>>.
- Bell, David, and Gill Valentine. *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat*. London: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Bratskeir, Kate. "This Is Why Women Crave Chocolate, Men Want A Burger." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 11 Nov. 2014. Web. 10 Mar. 2015. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/10/chocolate-craving-pms-men-vegetables_n_6102714.html>.
- Female #1, interview by author, March 5, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Female #2, interview by author, March 10, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Female #3, interview by author, March 17, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Female #4, interview by author, April 1, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Female #5, interview by author, March 30, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Fitzsimmons, Emma G. "A Scourge Is Spreading. M.T.A.'s Cure? Dude, Close Your Legs." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 20 Dec. 2014. Web. 02 Mar. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/nyregion/MTA-targets-manspreading-on-new-york-city-subways.html?_r=1>.
- Foucault, Michel *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books (1995):195-228. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan, 1977.
- "Groundbreaking Ceremony for New \$30 Million Dining Commons." *News Groundbreaking Ceremony for New 30 Million Dining Commons Comments*. Bates College, 10 Oct. 2006. Web. 27 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.bates.edu/news/2006/10/10/dining-commons/>>.

- H. Jay Burns, "A Commons Solution" *Bates Magazine* (Winter 2006): 30-32, Series IIIc Subject Files, Box 23, Communications and Media Relations records, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.
- Hubley, Doug. "Campus Construction Update: Dining Commons Opens." *News Campus Construction Update Dining Commons Opens Comments*. Bates College, 3 Mar. 2008. Web. 27 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.bates.edu/news/2008/03/03/new-commons/>>.
- Kluger, Jeffrey, Christine Gorman, and Alice Park. "Why We EAT." *Time* 163.23 (2004): 72-76. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 7 Mar. 2015.
- Levi, Annette, Kenny K. Chan, and Dan Pence. "Real Men Do Not Read Labels: The Effects of Masculinity and Involvement on College Students' Food Decisions." *Journal of American College Health* 55.2 (2006): 91-98. *Heldref Publications*. Web.
- Male # 1, interview by author, March 10, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Male # 2, interview by author, March 31, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Male # 3, interview by author, March 17, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Male # 4, interview by author, March 31, 2015, Lewiston, Maine.
- Miley, John, "New Commons Presents a chance to make new, Strange Friends" *The Bates Student* 137 (March 2008): 3. Series IIIc Subject Files, Box 23, Communications and Media Relations records, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.
- Morgan, Ali Z., Margaret K. Keiley, Aubrey E. Ryan, Juliana G. Radomski, Sareen S. Gropper, Lenda J. Connell, Karla P. Simmons, and Pamela V. Ulrich. "Eating Regulation Styles, Appearance Schemas, and Body Satisfaction Predict Changes in Body Fat for Emerging Adults." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41 (2012): 1127-1141. *Springer Science & Business Media B.V.* Web.
- Renderings and Floor Plans, *Commons: Where Bates Connects*, Series IIIc Subject Files, Box 23, Communications and Media Relations records, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.
- Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day*. New York: Paragon House, 1989. Print.

Stern, Lesa A., Mark Callister, and Lynn Jones. "FaceTime." *Together Alone: Personal Relationships in Public Places*. Berkeley: U of California, 2005. N. pag. Print.

Wickramatilake, Shalini. "You Are What Your Gender Eats: On Nutrition and Body Image in American Culture." *Matador Network*. Matadornetwork.com28, 28 Mar. 2014. Web. 11 Mar. 2015. <<http://matadornetwork.com/life/how-your-gender-dictates-what-you-eat/>>.

Wiseman, Eva. "The Truth About Men, Women and Food." *Food and Drink*. The Guardian, 16 Oct. 2010. Web. 10 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/oct/17/gender-eating-men-women>>.