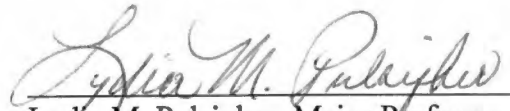


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kimberly Stetson entitled "Hair Out of Place: Women with Body Hair Negotiating Everyday Spaces." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Geography.


Lydia M. Pulsipher, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:




Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

HAIR OUT OF PLACE
WOMEN WITH BODY HAIR NEGOTIATING EVERYDAY SPACES

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kimberly Rose Stetson
December 1999

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Abstract

This study focuses on women who choose not to remove leg or underarm hair despite the norm in U.S. society for women to do so. Qualitative interviews were conducted with ten women in order to understand their motivations for not removing body hair, as well as to understand how having body hair affects women's perceptions of themselves and the various spaces that they move through on an everyday basis. The results of this study are presented in participants' own words and demonstrate that women with body hair are "out of place" in certain contexts and therefore subject to regulation. How participants define the spaces in which regulation of their body hair occurs is also discussed.

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Chapter 1

The Norm of Female Body Hair Removal

Introduction

This study focuses on women who choose not to remove leg or underarm hair despite the norm in our society for women to do so. It is about how having body hair affects women's perceptions of themselves and how this relates to the various spaces they move through in their everyday lives, as well as the ways in which these women's behaviors promote and challenge body hair removal as a gender norm. While there are obviously other forms of body hair (e.g., pubic hair), this study focuses solely on leg and underarm hair. For the sake of brevity I have used the phrase "body hair" interchangeably with "leg and underarm hair" throughout this text.

My approach to this study is descriptive. Rather than starting out with a hypothesis derived from theory and then testing it, I set out to describe and document how women see their everyday lives as affected by their decision not to remove leg and underarm hair. I have grounded this study in the theoretical concept of being out of place, that is, that women who display leg or underarm hair are "out of place" in certain contexts, hence the thesis' title, *Hair Out of Place*. This concept will be discussed in Chapter 2, which covers the study's theoretical framework and demonstrates how a feminist geographic perspective can uniquely contribute to a study of women and their relationship to body hair. Chapter 3 is about research design and the methodology used in conducting my research. Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of this study and a discussion of those results, respectively. The goal of this chapter is to review the

literature on female body hair removal, address potential areas for further research and to outline the limitations of this study in more detail.

The Literature

In this section I would like to discuss the literature that addresses the phenomenon of female body hair removal. The general literature on hair-related topics is enormous, covering hairstyles, hair coloring, hair fetishes, male balding, male facial hair, female hair loss, female hirsutism, and various hair transplant and removal techniques. There is also a significant amount of work focusing on the racial and ethnic dimensions of hair, particularly African-American head hair (see, for example, Gaskins, 1997, Jones, 1995, Rushing, 1988); non-contextual hair symbolism (Cooper, 1971, Hallpike, 1969, Hershman, 1974); as well as anthropological studies which examine the role of hair in particular cultures and communities (Delaney, 1994). Despite the variety of literature related to head hair, literature addressing the gender norm of female body hair removal is virtually nonexistent. The four papers discussed in this section focus specifically on this topic.

The Development of the Norm

What little is written about the development of the norm of female leg and underarm hair removal focuses on Caucasian women in the United States. For that matter, it has not been established in the literature whether or not body hair removal *is* the norm for non-Caucasian women in the United States. Hope, (1982) who analyzed

advertisements appearing in women's magazines between 1915 and 1945, is largely responsible for what we know about the development of this practice.

Nevertheless, the absence of leg and underarm hair is an important part of physical attractiveness for Caucasian women in the United States and many other Western cultures (Basow and Braman, 1998). Women's removal of leg and underarm hair, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon, and wasn't the norm in U.S. society until around 1945 (Lewis, 1989).

Prior to 1915, most women in the U.S. did not remove leg or underarm hair and there were few advertisements suggesting the practice, probably because clothing styles of the time did not allow this hair to be seen. The only women who did remove body hair prior to 1915 were "women who displayed large portions of skin," such as vaudeville dancers (Basow, 1991, pg. 84).

Between 1915 and 1919, however, fashions began to rapidly change, exposing more of women's bodies. During this time the "Great Underarm Campaign" began, in which advertisements instructed women that new dress styles dictated removing the now-visible hair because it was "unwanted," "ugly," and "unfashionable" (Basow, 1991, pg. 84). It has been suggested that leg shaving probably began to gain acceptance during the 1920s when advertisements emphasized the importance of a woman's appearance for her husband. During this period, there was also a societal emphasis on "cleanliness and meticulous hygiene," the appearance of shorter skirt lengths, and movies that showed "leggy chorus girls [who] showed no visible body hair" (Basow, 1991, pg. 85). However, while legs were becoming more visible, the word "legs" was considered too racy to be associated with women, who, according to advertisers of the day, had "limbs." So it

wasn't until the period 1941-1945 that the word "legs" became acceptable in advertisements and the real assault on women's leg hair began.

A likely reason for the acceptance of the ideal of the hairless female body has to do with the fact that it was introduced and promoted during the years 1915-1945, a time when women's roles were rapidly changing in the United States. Thus, one function of women's body hair removal was to reassert the distinction between genders (Basow, 1991).

It has also been suggested that the removal of women's body hair was accepted because U.S. culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sought to "establish a more pronounced national identity," and to separate itself from the influx of over 12 million immigrants between 1890 to 1910 originating primarily from Southern and Eastern Europe (Lewis, 1989, pg. 12). In other words, the practice of body hair removal may have been accepted because of racism against all but Anglo-Saxons¹. During this time, Southern and Eastern Europeans were often referred to as "The Great Unwashed" (and body hair is often associated with poor hygiene) and were described as "dark and swarthy," meaning hairy. Racist assumptions about body hair also extended to African peoples who were often described as more "animal-like" than Anglos.

Still, one has to question why women and not men adopted this practice of removing leg and underarm hair. If it were solely an issue of body hair being considered "dirty" or a sign of bad hygiene, one would expect that men, who generally have more body hair than women, "would have been encouraged to remove what the culture

¹ Given today's notions of racism, it may seem incongruous to label discrimination by white Americans against immigrants who were also white as racism. During the late 1800s to early 1900s, however, notions of race were based, not on skin color and phenotype as they are today, but on culture. During that time, for example, the English considered the Irish to be a different and inferior race (Ignatiev, 1995).

prescribed as unclean” (Lewis, 1989, pg. 13). Although one may point to the cultural norm of male facial shaving, neither men with nor without facial hair challenge their gender category (Lewis, 1989). However, a woman who displays underarm or leg hair does often challenge what is acceptable for her gender category. As will be discussed later in this chapter, women with body hair are for the most part perceived negatively by both men and women.

Perceptions of “Hairy” Women

Two of the four papers on female body hair removal focus specifically on people’s attitudes towards and perceptions of women with body hair. The first paper, by Lewis (1989), reported on an exploratory study in which attitudes toward and treatment of body hair were investigated among Caucasians in the United States. In this study, 24 Caucasian, middle-class males and females, age 27-55, in three geographic regions of the U.S. were interviewed. While this first study focuses on all types of body hair among men and women, including facial hair, it does suggest a few things about attitudes toward female leg and underarm hair. In particular, this study suggests that both men and women are more critical of women’s body hair than they are of men’s.

Overall, participants perceived that the less body hair a woman has, the more feminine she is. However, male and female participants had mixed attitudes toward the presence of leg and underarm hair in particular on women (as opposed to other types of body hair or facial hair). Lewis suggests that while leg and underarm hair may not be “acceptable”, it has become at least “understandable”, possibly as a result of the socio-political issues of the 1960s and early 70s when the feminist movement encouraged the

acceptance of the female body in its natural state. As a result, Lewis concludes that presence of leg and underarm hair on women is only “quasi-taboo” compared to the more “problematic” areas of body hair, such as facial hair or female hair loss (pg. 13). Despite this, the majority of the participants in Lewis’ study found female leg and underarm hair “aesthetically unappealing” (pg. 9).

In general, participants’ attitudes toward women with leg and/or underarm hair were negative. Female participants who removed underarm and leg hair were less tolerant of women who did not and felt somewhat threatened by them. The women who removed their hair stereotyped women with underarm and leg hair as “feminists,” “hippies,” “odd,” “Mother Earth”-types, “foreign,” and “slovenly” and associated them with sexual and political liberalism (pg. 10). The level of tolerance of a woman with leg and underarm hair depended on the darkness of such hair. Even the few women in the study who did not remove leg and underarm hair described being appalled when they saw a woman with leg or underarm hair that was too abundant or too dark. The idea seems to be that only women with leg hair that lies flat and blends in with their skin tone can ‘get away with it’.

Lewis’ study also revealed some differentiation in attitudes toward leg and underarm hair. For example, when asked if they had a preference between leg and underarm hair on women, male and female participants chose underarm hair simply because it is not visible as often as leg hair. Participants said that female leg hair is “distracting,” “funny,” and “dirty” (pg. 10). At the same time, Lewis theorizes that underarm hair has much more of a sexual stigma on females than does leg hair. Both

male and female participants associated hairy underarms with pubic hair. This association was often used as a reason for either liking or disliking underarm hair on women.

Lewis' overall conclusion is that body hair taboos among middle-class Caucasian heterosexuals in the U.S. focus primarily on women. Lewis says her participants exhibited "anxiety and deep fears" when talking about women with body hair because hair on a female body crosses a gender-specific boundary that exists in U.S. society (pg. 13).

Another study (Basow and Braman) was conducted in 1998 to measure attitudes toward and perceptions of women with body hair. In this study questionnaires were given to 195 undergraduate students regarding a 2-minute video that they watched individually. Two videos were shot for this study, each with the same 22-year-old, Caucasian model. In the video, the model exits a pool in a two-piece bathing suit and dries off with a towel. One video shows the model with leg and underarm hair, while the other video shows her without. One video was shown to half the men and women; the other video was shown to the other half. Both groups filled out the same questionnaire. The students, most of whom were upper-middle class, attended a small private college in the Northeast. Most (88%) were first or second year students, and 92% were Caucasian.

The authors conclude that participants perceived the model with body hair to be less "intelligent" and "sociable" than the same model without, although it is not clear in the paper how these variables were worded in the actual questionnaire. "Although the model with hair...was rated only marginally less physically attractive than the model without hair, she was rated as significantly less sexually attractive" by both men and women (pg. 643). The model was also perceived as stronger, more active and more

aggressive in the video in which she had body hair. It is hypothesized that this could have to do with the fact that traditional stereotypes of femininity do not include those traits. Or it could have to do with the perception that women with body hair are feminists or lesbians, and are thus labeled according to the stereotypes associated with those social categories. The authors' hypothesis that women would judge the model with hair more harshly than would men was disproved, and they instead found that overall, women "expressed more positive attitudes toward body hair than did men" (pg. 643).

The authors also hypothesized that feminists would judge the model with body hair less harshly than would non-feminists. While there was some support to this hypothesis which the authors say may indicate "a broader definition of female attractiveness...as well as more criticism of cultural mandates to shave" (pg. 643), identification with feminism did not eliminate differential perceptions of the model with and without body hair. Basow and Braman conclude that the cultural norm of female body hair removal "is powerful, and affects everyone to some extent, regardless of gender or feminist identification" (pg. 643).

The Norm of Female Body Hair Removal

One only need look around to know that female leg and underarm hair removal is the norm. Negative perceptions of female body hair abound. For example, the September 20 issue of *People Weekly* (1999) placed Julia Roberts in the "What Were They Thinking?" column because of a photograph that shows her wearing a sleeveless, sequined dress in which her armpit hair is visible. The caption reads, "Helloooooo,

France,” which is not only a social criticism, but a reinforcement of the cultural misconception that all European women do not shave.

Two studies, one in the United States and one in Australia, have attempted to show just to what extent leg and underarm hair removal is the norm. Both studies indicate that female body hair removal is the norm in the United States and Australia—at least among educated white women. In a study by Basow (1991), 235 professional women were surveyed in an attempt to provide empirical evidence regarding the universality of female body hair removal in the U.S. and to find out why women either do or do not engage in the behavior of leg and underarm hair removal.

Basow sought a sample in which feminists and lesbians were over-represented, based on her hypothesis that not removing body hair would correlate with feminism and lesbianism. Her sample consisted of female members of the National Women’s Studies Association and the American Psychological Association. However, despite Basow’s assertion at the beginning of her paper that her purpose was to provide empirical evidence regarding the universality of female body hair removal, 91% of her sample was white, hence her sample was culturally biased.

The majority (85%) of the women in Basow’s study started removing leg and underarm hair, most by the age of 14. About 81% were still doing so at the time of the study. Roughly half of these women removed hair at least once a week, but another 25% only removed hair seasonally, during warmer months when body hair tends to be more visible. Tiggemann and Kenyon (1998), who set out to replicate Basow’s findings in Australia, had similar results. Using a modified version of Basow’s questionnaire they found that 92% of the women in their study removed leg hair while 93% removed

underarm hair among a group of 129 undergraduate women (average age 22) at a University in Australia.

The women in these two studies say that they shave for two primary reasons. While most women indicate that they started removing body hair because, "It was the thing to do" (Basow, 1991, pg. 89), women say they continue to remove hair because they "like the soft, silky feeling" and because it makes them feel attractive (Basow, 1991, Tiggemann and Kenyon, 1989). Indeed, Lewis (1989) reported that some of her female participants "expressed positive feelings toward body hair removal," describing their hair-free legs as "clean" and "feminine" (pg. 11).

Few of the women in Basow's study report removing leg and underarm hair for the functional reasons of comfort or cleanliness. Also, few women said that leg and underarm hair is "gross, ugly, or disgusting; or that they shave to avoid looking like an animal or...like a man" (Basow, 1991, pg. 93). While few of the women in Basow's study said the reason they remove body hair is to appeal to men, some of the participants in Lewis' study did indicate that being with a man influenced whether or not a woman shaves for a particular occasion.

Women With Body Hair

Drawing again from these last two studies (Basow, 1991, Tiggeman and Kenyon, 1998), the primary reasons women give for not removing leg and underarm hair are "Women's bodies are fine as they are," and "Women shouldn't have to remove their body hair." These reasons challenge the normative nature of body hair removal.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the questionnaire used in both studies only allowed 7 possible reasons why a woman might not shave:

- Women's bodies are fine as they are.
- Women shouldn't have to remove hair.
- It's stupid.
- I don't really need to.
- I'm too lazy.
- My skin is sensitive.
- It goes against my cultural background.

In Tiggemann and Kenyon's study only 8 of the 129 women surveyed did not remove body hair. Because the non-removers were so few, this study provided little statistical information about women who don't shave.

About 20% of the 235 women in Basow's study, however, did not remove leg and/or underarm hair at the time of the survey. Many women stop shaving and then start again. Thirty percent of the women in the sample quit shaving at some point in their lives. Eighteen percent of these went back to shaving their legs, while 7% went back to shaving their underarms. "The women in this study who stopped shaving generally did so in the early 1970s, although many restarted in the 1980s." Those who stopped were probably responding to a sub-cultural norm in which women "'proved themselves' by defying conventional standards for female appearance" (Basow, 1991, pg. 95).

Basow found her hypothesis, that not shaving would correlate with feminism and lesbianism, to be correct, finding that 76% of those who do not shave identified themselves as "very strong feminists" and 64% identify themselves as "not exclusively

heterosexual” (pg. 93). Only 13% of “exclusively heterosexual” women do not remove leg hair.

Despite this correlation, many feminists and lesbians continue to remove body hair. About 72% of those women identifying themselves very strongly as feminist, and 61% of lesbian and bisexual women continue to remove leg and/or underarm hair. Basow concludes that the idea that “smooth, hairless skin is part of female attractiveness appears to be accepted by both feminists and nonfeminists” (pg. 94). Interestingly, reasons given for removing body hair differed according to sexual orientation. Heterosexual women say that they remove body hair because it makes them feel attractive, while among bisexual women it was, “I like the soft, silky feeling.” Amongst lesbians, the most highly rated reason for hair removal was “People would look at me funny if I didn’t” (pg. 92).

Potential for Further Research

Clearly, given the scant amount of research on female body hair removal, there are a number of directions in which one could pursue further research. The conclusions and assumptions contained in the four previous studies raise a number of questions. For example, it has been suggested that the norm of female body hair removal probably applies less so to African-American women. How does ethnicity relate to the removal of leg and underarm hair in the United States? Second, there is the issue of cultural diffusion from the U.S. to other parts of the world. Where, specifically, has leg and underarm hair removal become the norm and why? Is there a relationship between levels of education and women who accept this norm? Finally, there are questions about the enforcement of this norm. How is this norm enforced? Who are the regulators of this norm? How do

women respond to regulation? Do women with body hair respond to regulation by covering the hair with clothing?

A main component missing in the literature is a voice for women who do not remove body hair that carries us well beyond reasons for not shaving supplied by the researcher. The literature repeatedly makes references to “intense social pressure” and “social criticism” but no one has asked women with body hair what form this social pressure takes or how they react to it. It is the perspective of this group of women that I am particularly interested in and which I think is particularly suited to analysis through the lens of feminist geography.

Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on those women who choose not to remove their leg and/or underarm hair, despite the fact that most women around them do so. Although a number of women do not remove leg or underarm hair when it is not exposed (e.g., when it is covered by clothing in the winter), the subject of this study is limited to women who not only *have* leg or underarm hair but who also “display” this hair sometimes. The sample size and sampling methods will be explained in Chapter 3, Research Design and Methodology. The research focuses on how having body hair affects women’s perceptions of themselves and the various places they move between in their everyday lives, as well as the ways in which these women’s behaviors promote and challenge this norm. The research will also focus on how regulation of female body hair occurs, to what extent regulation varies across space, and how women react to this regulation. Research questions will be outlined in Chapter 2, Hair Out of Place.

Significance of the Phenomenon

The universality of body hair removal among women in the United States communicates the idea that women's bodies are neither attractive nor acceptable in their natural state, and should therefore be modified. While hair removal is not harmful to women like chronic dieting, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery can be, it has been argued that body hair removal is part of the same "oppressive social norm that women must change their bodies in order to be socially acceptable" (Basow, 1991, pg. 88). And although much has been written about other ways in which women modify their bodies, body hair removal has received relatively little attention (Tiggemann and Kenyon, 1998).

It has been further suggested that the norm of body hair removal serves two functions. It exaggerates gender differences between men and women and conveys a message of control over female sexuality by requiring the removal of an outward sign of sexual maturity (Basow, 1991, Lewis, 1989). It is ironic that in meeting the cultural ideal of femininity, women are expected to remove leg and underarm hair, which are signs of sexual maturity. It seems that when it comes to body hair, "feminine" does not equate with "womanly" (Tiggemann and Kenyon, 1998, pg. 874).

Finally, Basow (1991) points out that feminists often discuss the taboo against female body hair but generally focus on facial hair or "excessive" hair growth, while ignoring the socio-cultural norm of female leg and underarm hair removal. Tiggemann and Kenyon (1998) argue that "perhaps the major reason that hair removal has received so little research attention is that the practice is so socially normative as to go

unquestioned” (pg. 874). However, behaviors which are taken for granted may be key in understanding and deconstructing cultural attitudes about, for example, gender.

Chapter 2

Hair out of Place

or

What Has Body Hair Got to Do with Geography?

Introduction

Not surprisingly, neither the subject of female body hair removal, nor any hair-related topics for that matter, have been examined by geographers. When I began this project my “research questions” were, how might a geographer study women’s perceptions and attitudes about having body hair? What can a geographic perspective contribute to a study of this subject? I was becoming more and more convinced that body hair was often “out of place” and that the phenomenon could be examined from a spatial perspective, for a couple of reasons.

First of all, despite the fact that I myself usually did not shave, I still had shocked reactions to other women overtly displaying body hair, particularly underarm hair. I stopped shaving around the age of nineteen. It has been so long since I made this initial decision that it is difficult for me even to remember why the decision was made. I think it mostly had to do with not wanting to shave, feeling like it took too much time and effort, and the idea that I shouldn’t “have to” shave.

The hair on my legs is fairly light and my complexion is very pale, so my leg hair is not terribly visible. For a long time, I absolutely would not wear anything that exposed my underarm hair, despite the fact that I believed I shouldn’t have to remove it. Still, people reacted to the hair on my legs in a number of ways. For example, when I worked at a summer camp, girls who were only six or seven years old would constantly remark

about the hair on my legs. Over time, the political implications of being a woman with body hair started to become important to me. Not shaving became something that I did on principle because I felt that I was challenging, in a small way, a gender norm that I felt was being imposed upon me, as well as the notion that the category “woman,” or what it means to be feminine or beautiful, had to be homogeneous.

Despite my personal beliefs or ideals, it was impossible for me to look at other women without the baggage of society’s gender norms. On one occasion, for example, I was in a department store and I noticed this very femininely dressed woman who was probably in her mid-thirties. She was wearing a sleeveless blouse and when she lifted her arms to arrange her hair it was suddenly apparent that she had very hairy armpits. I had seen my share of women with hairy armpits before, most of whom “looked the part”; but this woman in this place completely took me by surprise. From my perspective, the appearance of her body was sending conflicting messages and she seemed out of place. At the time, I probably thought that if this woman doesn’t look like she is making some kind of statement by displaying body hair, then she must be from another country.

The second incident that made me think about the spatiality of women with body hair occurred when a woman in one of my geography classes told me about some of her experiences with body hair. In particular, she described an experience that she had at a time when she did not shave her legs or armpits. One evening, she found herself at a party in a hot tub with the chief of police and the county commissioner of the town she was in. She was the only woman of three (including the county commissioner) who did not shave. She said she had always “fit right in” with her hairy legs but suddenly found herself feeling uncomfortable around this group of people. Soon afterward, she started

shaving again, saying that it was easier to put up with shaving than the "majority gaze." She said that not shaving "took too much energy for what I was getting out of it."

The goal of this chapter is to present the conceptual framework of the study, that is, the theoretical lens through which I will examine the phenomenon of female body hair. In this chapter I will also discuss the significance of the conceptual framework, and outline the research questions.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the theory of feminist geography. There are several concepts central to feminist geography which will be reviewed here. However, this is not meant to be a comprehensive overview, merely an introduction to those aspects of feminist geography which are applicable to the phenomenon, and I will focus primarily on ideas concerning the relationship between gendered/sexed bodies and space. While Bell and Valentine (1995) would argue that some of these topics have been "misaligned with feminist geography," (pg. 11) they are for the most part currently placed under the ontological heading of feminist geography and so I will refer to them as a whole in this way.

Body hair is a topic that most people would probably consider outside the realm of geographic enquiry. However, geographic questions are now a central concern in feminist scholarship, which is more and more concerned with the idea of "location." (McDowell, 1999, Friedman, 1998). "This claim is made not only by...geographers but also by scholars in other disciplines" (McDowell, 1999). My goal in this section is to demonstrate what a geographic perspective can contribute to a study of the phenomenon

of women with body hair and, further, how this phenomenon illuminates the larger theoretical issues of feminist geography.

Through this thesis, I hope to develop what Hanson and Pratt (1995) refer to as a “spatial story.” This is the spatial story that I hope to tell: Women who have and display body hair visually challenge society’s gender norms and as such are out of place in some of the spaces they negotiate on a daily basis. Gender and sexual norms are naturalized through repetition and regulation. When female body hair is perceived to be out of place, regulation occurs.

Space, Place, and Boundaries

Before examining the idea that gender is socially constructed and that gender expectations vary spatially, I should begin by looking at how feminist geographers define gender and space, as well as place, boundaries, and movement within space. Tuan (1977) described “space” as more abstract than “place.” “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition. ...Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (pg. 6).

Feminist geographers define space and place in terms of relationships, more specifically, in terms of power relationships. McDowell (1999) argues that a place is not a fixed set of coordinates on a map, a “defined and bounded piece of territory,” rather places are defined by “socio-spatial practices” and have constantly changing, overlapping boundaries, “constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion” (pg.

4). Massey's (1992) definition of space is equally dynamic. She argues that relationships not only "occur *in* space and time; it is these relationships themselves which *create/define* space and time" (pg. 79). More importantly, Massey defines space in terms of power relationships: "Space is...a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation"(pg. 81).

Based on this idea of the fluidity of social relations which define space and place, the concept of constantly shifting boundaries becomes important. Boundaries are both social and spatial ("socio-spatial") and they not only define the locations of our experiences, but also "who belongs to a place and who may be excluded" (McDowell, 1999, pg. 4). Boundaries acknowledge interconnection, interaction and exchange. "They also invite transgression, reconciliation." Boundaries between "individuals, genders, groups, and nations erect categorical and material walls between identities. Identity is in fact unthinkable without some sort of imagined or literal boundary" (Friedman, 1998, pg. 3). McDowell (1999) argues that these boundaries are being constantly shifted in subtle ways when different groups of people inhabit the same spaces. At the same time, boundaries are shifted in not-so-subtle ways when, for example, new nations of Eastern Europe "are defined by excluding 'others'" (pg. 5).

The Scale of the Body

The concept of scale is also related to boundaries. McDowell (1999) defines scale as "a boundary between different kinds of places" (pg. 40). Thus, the bounded spaces of households, neighborhoods, communities, cities, states, nations, which are all at different scales, are ways of differentiating between places. However, if we think of spaces and

places as dynamic, defined by social relations of power and exclusion, then the most immediate place is the body. "Although geographers might not readily think of the body as a place, it is one. The body is the place, the location or site, if you like, of the individual..." (McDowell, 1999, pg. 34).

So this study takes place at the scale of the individual body. The body is the primary physical site of personal identity and as such, is a surface for social inscription. The idea that the social world is inscribed onto our bodies in the form of tattoos, scars, hairstyles, makeup, straightened teeth, and shaved skin is not a new one. Anthropologists have long focused on this idea. For example, in 1979 the anthropologist Brain wrote that "All human communities have their own map of the body and they know what the signs are for the beautiful, erotic, magical or socially significant. Body ornaments within a single society are ordered in a complex of signs which amount to a kind of language understood by its members" (pg. *[I will find this page number when I get to Knoxville]*). Recently, however, geographers (particularly, Ainley, 1998, Grosz, 1997, and Rose, 1995) have been drawn to Foucault's metaphor of the body as a map marked by voluntary and repressive practices, habits and lifestyles that distinguish one body from another (McDowell, 1999).

Social differences such as gender and race are constructed around and inscribed upon the body (McDowell, 1999). Hence, "bodily distinctions are crucially important in the production of inferiority as dominated groups are defined as nothing but their bodies" (McDowell, 1999, pg. 48). This "confinement to the body...is the basis of inequality and oppression" (pg. 46).

Toni Morrison describes it this way: "It's just impossible to extricate oneself from the expectations [of] other people's gazes. And you always have to struggle against that; no matter how wonderful one's work may be, it's always seen through another lens" (Morrison, 1999).

Bodily Performances

Essentially, body hair on a woman *is* an issue because of our gender expectations. Since gender expectations focus on the body, and specifically on one's appearance, body hair becomes an issue. We have been conditioned by the dominant Anglo aesthetic not to expect to see hair on the female body.

Feminist authors differentiate gender from sex. Most maintain that sexual or biological differences are real, while gender is regarded as a cultural construct. Butler (quoted by Valentine, 1996, pg. 146) defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a repeated set of acts...that congeal over time to produce the appearance...of a natural sort of being". In other words, what is acceptable for the female gender in a particular time and place is *naturalized* through repetition. Therefore, gender is not something that we are born with, it is something that we learn to "do" (Cream, 1995). In our society, "male and female are posited as mutually exclusive categories" and therefore men and women have to be distinguishable, bodies must be "understood to be either male or female" (Cream, 1995, pg. 33). The production of mutually exclusive gender identities is very much tied into the naturalization of heterosexuality. So, even though gender and sexuality are not the same thing, they are interrelated and reinforce one another. "The specific 'feminine shape' and 'look' that is perceived as *heterosexually*

desirable...may change over space and time but essentially being a woman is about performing a gender identity” (Valentine, 1996, pg. 147, emphasis added).

Related to the idea that the expected feminine heterosexual look depends upon time and place, is the idea that all spaces and places are imbued with gender identity and sexual identity (Duncan, 1996, Valentine, 1996). Despite the ideal that sexuality is confined to private spaces, it is not, and the distinction between public and private spaces has been challenged and shown to be problematic by McDowell, 1999, Duncan, 1996, and Valentine, 1996. “Naturalized heterosexuality [simply] makes sexuality in public spaces nearly invisible to the straight population” (Duncan, 1996, pg. 137).

So, for example, while a heterosexual couple walking through a mall holding hands would probably go unnoticed, the appearance of a homosexual couple holding hands would suddenly make the sexual identity of the mall quite visible to, and an issue for, the heterosexual population as well as the homosexual population. In the same way that women see themselves and see other women through the male gaze, gays and lesbians see the world through the heterosexual gaze.

Heterosexuality and gender expectations are constantly being naturalized through *repetition* and *regulation*. Heterosexual space, which the heterosexual majority assumes is “natural” and “normal,” is naturalized as simply “space” through the process of repetitive behavior (Valentine, 1996). This is based on the assumption that sexuality is, and should be, restricted to private spaces and is reflected in surveys in which the majority of respondents insist that they “have no objection to homosexuals as long as they ‘do not flaunt their sexuality in public’” (Duncan, 1996, pg. 137). Examples of repetitive behavior that naturalize heterosexuality include heterosexual couples kissing or

holding hands while taking a walk, advertisement containing heterosexual couples and nuclear families, heterosexual conversations, and “piped music articulating heterosexual desires” (Valentine, 1996, pg. 146).

Like heterosexual space, gender expectations are naturalized through repetition. For example, what we think of as the “normal” or “expected” way for a woman to look in a particular place seems so because the patterns are learned and repeated constantly by the majority of women. If a woman does not repeat this pattern, it is a social transgression subject to regulation. Naturalization through *regulation* will be discussed in a later section, Regulation and the Gaze.

Bodies Out of Place

Despite the large amount of attention paid to the body by geographers in recent years, this work often does not connect us with real bodies but instead focuses on a theoretical agenda (Cream, 1995). It is for this reason that the very real, concrete work by geographers on bodies out of place is particularly interesting.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the body is its malleability. Feminists often use the words “body” and “embodiment” interchangeably. However, McDowell (1999) argues that the term embodiment is more useful, as it carries with it “the sense of fluidity, of becoming and of performance that is a key element in the recent theoretical approaches that question the relationship between anatomy and social identities” (pg. 39).

The body’s malleability is inextricably related to space. While this may seem obvious when considering that “what is possible or permitted in some cultures, at certain times, is

impossible or forbidden elsewhere and at other times,” (McDowell, 1999, pg. 54) bodily performances also vary in our day-to-day negotiations of space.

The concept of mobility is central to an understanding of how bodily performances are related to space. In their everyday lives, women “must move to secure their economic support, integrate their productive and reproductive activities and take advantage of opportunities for personal development and autonomy. Their capacity to do so is often constrained or enhanced by the places and spaces they must negotiate, “by ideologies about sexuality and appropriate behavior for women...” (Katz and Monk, 1993, pg. 266).

“The ways in which bodies are presented to and seen by others vary according to the spaces and places in which they find themselves.” For example, you may find that “your gestures, bodily adornment and the freedom with which you take up space are all quite different” from one place to another (McDowell, 1999, pg. 34). It follows, then, that gender is performed differently in different spaces.

What is appropriate gendered behavior varies not only between different cultures and over time, but also in everyday spaces and interactions. In other words, there are “multiple ways of being female or male, masculine and feminine—some are more or less appropriate, more or less socially sanctioned in particular spaces and at different times” (McDowell and Sharp, 1997, pg. 1). So gender expectations, what is considered gender-appropriate behavior, varies not only in different kinds of places (e.g., the workplace vs. a bar, a college campus vs. a nightclub) but also according to the various social boundaries that define spaces (e.g., ethnicity, age, class, gender, sexuality).

To take this idea further, "particular bodies in particular sites" that do not "fit" traditionally accepted categories of sex and gender are "out of place" (Cream, 1995, pg. 33). Recent studies have focused on the idea that pregnant women and disabled persons can be out of place. For example, Young (1990) and Longhurst (1996) both examined the changing form of the pregnant body and its effect on women's perceptions of space. While Young found that women often have a great deal of satisfaction with and confidence about their bodies, Longhurst found that "the response of pregnant women to their changing bodies" was often "to feel uncomfortable in certain, mainly public spaces." As their bodies changed, the spaces pregnant women occupied also changed. "A common response was to withdraw into an increasingly private and localized arena..." (McDowell, 1999, pg. 60). Another example of out of place bodies can be found in disabled bodies in spaces that were designed with able-bodied individuals in mind.

However, probably the most interesting work concerning bodies out of place involves the phenomenon of homosexuals in straight spaces. It is through examining this phenomenon that geographers have shown that out of place phenomena are regulated in an attempt to put things "back in place."

Regulation and the Gaze

Duncan (1996) argues that it is often difficult for people to recognize "normative geographies" until the norms are transgressed (pg. 139). Like the process of repetition (discussed in the previous section, Bodily Performances), *regulation* is a way in which gendered and sexual behaviors are normalized and naturalized. While this process begins

with self-regulation of one's appearance and behavior, regulation is also carried out by others when bodies are out of place.

Valentine (1996) argues that heterosexuality is an ideological category, because the assumption or belief that everyone is heterosexual is fiction. Because of this, the category of heterosexuality is "insecure" and must therefore enact "regulatory regimes...in order to maintain the 'naturalness' of heterosexuality" (pg. 148). One of the ways in which this naturalness is maintained is by removing those who cut into and disrupt heterosexual spaces, thereby producing another kind of space.

In this way, "regulatory regimes...constrain the possible performances of [other] gender and sexual identities, in order to maintain the 'naturalness' of heterosexuality" (Valentine, 1996, pg. 148). Sometimes regulation takes the form of removal. Valentine uses the example of a lesbian couple thrown out of a Nottingham supermarket in 1991 for kissing in the store and argues that the "lesbian kiss caused panic because it cut into a space in which it didn't belong" (pg. 146).

Other examples of regulatory behaviors aimed at lesbians include "heterosexual looks of disapproval, whispers and stares...used to spread discomfort and make lesbians feel 'out of place' in everyday spaces. These in turn [pressure] many women into policing their own [behaviors] and hence reinforce the appearance that 'normal' space is straight space" (pg. 149).

One of the most talked about regulatory behaviors is "the gaze." Most feminist authors concentrate on the notion of the "male gaze." For example, Rose (1993) argues that women's experience of space has to do with "self-consciousness about being noticed." Women "are expected to look right, and to look right for a gaze which is

masculine” (pg. 145). However, the gaze extends to all forms of social regulation and is not reserved solely for women, nor is it executed solely by men.

It should also be noted that regulation does not occur only in “public” places. The home is usually thought of as private space where one has the “ability ‘to relax’ and ‘to be yourself’ away from the gaze of others,” (Johnston and Valentine, 1995, pg. 100) where one “can escape the disciplinary practices that regulate our bodies in everyday life (pg. 99). However, “it doesn’t necessarily guarantee freedom for individuals from the watchful gaze of other household members” or from visitors (pg. 100). For example, one of the participants in Johnston and Valentine’s study described what it’s like when her parents come over to her house. “I freak out and run around and de-dyke the whole place” (pg. 100). Women also describe covering up tattoos when they go to visit their parents (not unlike wearing pants in order to cover hairy legs).

While gender and sexuality are not the same thing, they are nonetheless closely related and reinforce one another. The production and reinforcement/regulation of heterosexual space is very much tied in with the performance of gender identities.

In many cases [regulatory] incidents are not ‘provoked’ because lesbians are articulating their sexuality...but rather because they are not performing their gender identity in an ‘appropriate’ heterosexually identified way. Similarly, many women who identify as heterosexual but who do not perform their gender in a way that can be read as differentiated from the opposite sex in a heterosexually desirable way also encounter harassment... whilst very ‘feminine’ lesbians can be taken for heterosexual.

(Valentine, 1996, pg. 149)

Research Questions

In developing a set of working research questions, I drew from research on the phenomenon of women who choose to keep leg and underarm hair as well as the

theoretical concepts of feminist geography. Over the course of this study, the following research questions have emerged.

- How does having body hair affect the way women perceive and experience different spaces and places? How do they define these spaces?
- What form does regulation take? How do these women's actions and reactions to regulation contribute to and disrupt gendered spaces?
- Does having body hair and experiencing regulation affect the ways in which women negotiate space?

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this research is to give a voice to women who keep their body hair and to examine what these women have to say through the lens of feminist geography. Additionally, my intention is to demonstrate that female body hair removal is an often taken for granted gender norm that is spatially regulated when female body hair is perceived to be out of place.

At the end of Chapter 1, I delimited the focus of this study based on gaps in previous research on the norm of female body hair removal. In particular, I emphasized the need to focus on women who do not conform to the norm of body hair removal, and how regulation of this group occurs. While there are certainly contributions to be made to the literature on the subject of female body hair by applying the analytical lens of feminist geography, I hope that this particular study will further illuminate the larger theoretical issues concerning bodies out of place.

It has been argued that there is an urgent need to look at the relationship between bodies and places, "because the ways in which we live out body/place relationships are political" (Nast and Pile, 1998, pg. 1-2). Studying women who keep their body hair is a concrete way to look at these relationships and is important because it allows a focus on the ways in which women negotiate space in their everyday lives.

Finally, I think the significance of this project lies in further addressing the naturalization of gender norms through the regulation of out of place phenomena. That female body hair removal has been virtually ignored as a topic for analysis is indicative of the insidious ubiquity of the norm. Expectations of what is feminine or womanly are assumed to be either 'natural' and in no need of explanation, or trivial and therefore "unsuitable for serious academic analysis" (McDowell, 1999, pg. 12).

The importance of recognizing out of place phenomena should not be underestimated, because their occurrence is the first step in denaturalizing gender norms. It is the first step in "destabilizing and eventually overturning [repressive expectations] of gender and sexuality" (Duncan, 1996, pg. 139). However, because this is not a piece of applied research, whether or not this research means anything will be determined by the ability of other people to read about the results of this study, comprehend it, and maybe change their expectations about the female gender regarding body hair.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This study focuses on the phenomenon of women who choose to keep their leg and/or underarm hair despite the gender norm in our society of removing it. It is about how having body hair affects women's perceptions of themselves and the spaces they must negotiate in their everyday lives, and the ways in which these women's behaviors promote and challenge this norm. This work is grounded in the theoretical concept of being out of place, that is, that women who display leg and/or underarm hair are out of place in certain contexts and therefore subject to regulation.

My approach to this study is descriptive and I intend to describe the phenomenon as much as possible in the words of the participants. This chapter covers the topics related to the design of my research, that is, the overall research strategy, research questions, site selection, sampling methods, data collection methods, and analysis strategies.

Overall Research Strategy

Traditionally, there are two major strategies for doing research: qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research methods are a part of the scientific paradigm that says there is an absolute, knowable reality. According to this paradigm, if we set up our research experiments correctly and objectively, our results should apply to any setting in which the same circumstance exists. Deductive reasoning is an important part of quantitative research, meaning that the factors considered important to the research are

determined in advance by the researcher. A quantitative strategy is often advantageous when trying to explain the forces shaping a phenomenon or when trying to predict something. Research variables are clearly defined, can be measured (quantified) and results are often in the form of numbers (Kane, 1996).

Qualitative methods tend to be used when the researcher wants to look at a subject holistically, rather than experimentally. The phenomenon of interest is investigated within a particular context, rather than being broken down into variables by the researcher. In *quantitative* research, generalizations are made about the variables that were studied. The point of *qualitative* research is not necessarily to generalize but rather to paint a picture of a situation, to construct an in-depth illustration of the phenomenon (Wright, 1999). The advantage of using a qualitative strategy is that it enables the researcher to study a particular phenomenon in context and to “appreciate the complexity and interdependence of the various aspects of the situation (Kane, 1996, pg. 22).

Choosing an overall research strategy (quantitative or qualitative) has a lot to do with the purpose of one’s research. There are four general reasons for doing research: exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, and experimental. Descriptive research documents the phenomenon of interest in terms of “salient behaviors, events, beliefs, attitudes, structures, processes” (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, pg. 41). The purpose of my research is to describe the phenomenon of being “out of place” because one does not adhere to the gender norm of female body hair removal. Because qualitative methods are particularly suited to “research that is descriptive, that assumes the value of context and...that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences” (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, pg. 39), my overall research strategy will be qualitative.

Site and Population

Doing human research involves making decisions about the site or setting of the research, as well as the population to be studied. An ideal research site can be described as a place where entry by the researcher is possible and where there is a high probability that people of interest are present (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). My research was conducted in two locations: Knoxville, Tennessee and the San Francisco Bay Area. I chose these locations for three general reasons. The first reason involves the concentration of potential participants. I wanted to focus on urban areas because I thought that they would have the largest numbers of women (proportionately and based on total population) of women who do not conform to the gender norm of body hair removal. The second general reason for choosing these two locations involved expediency. I was living in Knoxville and San Francisco over the course of the study period. Finally, I felt that having data from two different locations would add to the diversity of the data and ultimately make it more interesting. However, the point is not to compare data between participants in San Francisco and Knoxville; what is important here is the relativity of different spaces and places and how they relate to the phenomenon, not absolute places or settings (e.g., particular cities).

A population includes everyone that falls into the category of people being studied. This study focuses on the population of women who do not remove (e.g., shave) their leg and/or underarm hair. Although there are other types of body hair controlled by women (for example, facial hair, pubic hair), it is leg and underarm hair that the majority of women in the United States remove on a regular basis (Basow, 1991). While it is not

uncommon for women who normally shave to stop doing so during winter months when leg and underarm hair are hidden by clothing, I am interested in the population of women for whom the *norm* is not shaving at all. In other words, this study focuses on the population of women who not only choose to keep leg and/or underarm hair, but who also *display* this hair sometimes, thereby challenging mainstream society's gender expectations of a hairless female body.

Sample Size

Most guidance regarding qualitative research methods suggests that the researcher should interview participants until she has all the information she needs (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, Peacher, 1995). "In qualitative research, an 'N of 1' can be just as illuminating as a large sample... However, there are instances in which the researcher may want to sacrifice the depth of understanding that comes with focusing intensively on a single setting or person for the breadth that comes with studying a range of places and people" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, pg. 91). In other words, there is an inverse relationship between the number of participants and the depth to which each participant must be interviewed.

Based on the depth of the interviews that I wanted to conduct, I decided to look for ten participants. I find it difficult to imagine ever reaching a point where new participants would not yield new insights. After interviewing 10 participants, however, I felt that sufficient themes were apparent in the data for analysis and discussion.

Sampling Methods

Because it is usually not possible to collect data from an entire population, a sample of the population is studied. Probability sampling is random, meaning that each person within a population has an equal chance of being selected for the study. In order to conduct probability sampling, however, one has to know whom the individuals are that make up the population. As it is not possible to identify the entire population of women with body hair in a given location (for example, there is no directory of women who do not shave), my only option is the use of nonprobability sampling. In nonprobability sampling, some people in the population have no opportunity to be included in the study (Kane, 1996).

For this study, I used two types of nonprobability sampling. Before finding potential participants, permission to conduct research involving human subjects was granted from the Office of Research Administration at the University of Tennessee¹. After permission was granted, the first sampling method, snowball sampling, was used in Knoxville to locate the first five participants. I started by asking everyone I that knew for names of women who don't shave and who might be willing to participate. Snowball sampling means that after an interview, participants were asked to identify other people (in this case, other women who don't shave) that might be willing to participate in the study, and so on, until enough participants are identified for the study (Myslik, 1991). Using this method, I was able to identify about 20 potential participants in a short period of time.

¹ A copy of the approved Informed Consent Form is located in the Appendix.

After interviewing the first five women, however, I began to have serious qualms about whether or not to continue interviewing women whom I had found using the snowball sampling method. When I wrote my initial research proposal, I was adamant that I would not select participants based upon gross social categories such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or politics, because I did not want to presuppose the factors that might be correlated to not shaving. And anyway, the point was not to make generalizations about the total population of women who don't shave, but to look at the relationship between women with body hair and the spaces they negotiate.

However, using the snowball sampling method, I found that almost all of the women on my "potential participants" list fell into the white, heterosexual, college-educated category. This is not to say that the stories told by the first five participants were uniform. In fact, their interviews yielded interesting and varied data. However, the more that I talked to people about my project, the more I got comments like, "So, are you going to interview as diverse a group of women as possible?" and, "Have you thought about interviewing *this* type of woman?"

On the one hand, I was getting really different and interesting results from a group of women that would, on paper, fall into many of the same social categories. And, since I was not making generalizations about women with body hair, it was not necessary that I try to represent every possible social category. On the other hand, I was beginning to become convinced that there was a lot to be gained by interviewing a more socially diverse set of participants, such as less subtle differences in data, regardless of how small my sample was.

After a group of participants has already been studied, it is not uncommon for the researcher to consciously vary the type of people interviewed until she feels that a diverse range of perspectives have been uncovered among the people in whom she is interested (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). I did not plan to make generalizations about social categories in the analysis of this research and I did not collect demographic data from participants in the interviews. In other words, I did not ask participants for information that might be asked for on a questionnaire, such as age, level of education, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc. Nonetheless, I subjectively sought out, via the second sampling method, a second group of participants who I hoped would be more socially diverse. And I think that ultimately, having two differently sampled groups of women made the data more interesting.

Shortly after making the decision to use a second nonprobability sampling technique in order to find a more diverse group of participants, I moved to San Francisco. This is where I looked for the second group of participants using judgement sampling. A good example of judgement sampling can be found in a study by Myslik (1991) in which he found gay, male research participants by posting advertisements in places that he judged to be "known gay spaces."

Similarly, I placed advertisements in places frequented by a diverse group of women, some of whom I presumed would not shave. A copy of this advertisement is in the Appendix. A variety of locations were chosen in San Francisco and Berkeley. I decided to post advertisements in Berkeley as well as San Francisco because I heard from a number of people in San Francisco that Berkeley was the place to find women with body hair. In addition, being a University town, I thought that women affiliated with the

campus might be more open to the idea of participating in a stranger's thesis research. Advertisements were placed in women's gyms, the YWCA, women's studies buildings, coffee shops, gay/lesbian bookstores, African-American community centers, and a women's Resource Center.

A voicemail as well as an email account were set up and the phone number and email address placed in the advertisement. Each message from potential participants was responded to in the form in which it was initiated (either by phone or email). At that time I explained the details of participating in the study to them and scheduled a time and place for an interview. In the end, I was able to find the last five participants through the process of posting ads. Two of these participants were African-American, three bisexual. Only one of the participants lives in San Francisco, the other four were located through the Berkeley campus.

Data Collection Methods

In this section I would like to turn to the subject of data collection methods. After reading Mona Domosh's 1997 article, "Geography and Gender: the Personal and the Political", I became interested in the idea of collecting data in the form of women's stories about experiences that they've had as a result of having body hair. In her article, Domosh describes seeing bell hooks speak at her university and afterward encountering much criticism of the 'anecdotal' nature of hooks' talk. But Domosh describes the anecdotes as the best part of the talk, capable of transforming complex issues and theories into real events "with real human consequences" (pg. 81).

Conversely, stories help us analyze our everyday lives and encounters at a more theoretical level. Domosh concludes that “feminist geography’s emphasis on understanding the politics of places through personal stories, and making sense of our embodied persons and spaces...seems key to a more ‘clear’ geography” (pg. 85).

Within the geographical literature, the idea of using storytelling and narratives in methodological design is not common. Garvin and Wilson (1999) address the issue of storytelling as method when they use picture-elicited narratives in their study on understanding women’s desires to tan. However, while storytelling has been examined as a mode of communication, and differences between men’s and women’s styles of communication illuminated to some extent, Garvin and Wilson find that “storytelling has yet to be problematized fully in terms of its use as a research tool” (pg. 301). Still, Domosh points out a number of instances in which “the strategy of weaving the personal and the political by incorporating personal stories into complex, theoretical arguments” has been apparent in recent work in feminist geography (pg. 81).

It has been argued that the strength of qualitative interviewing techniques is that they help us to understand how people “construct their realities—how they view, define, and experience the world” (Taylor and Bogdan, pg. 101). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) identify three major types of qualitative interviews: life histories (the most in-depth); in-depth, unstructured interviews; and structured interviews, used to study a relatively large number of people in a relatively short period of time, sacrificing depth for breadth. Truly “in-depth” interviews usually involve three or more interviews with each of the relatively small number of participants (Seidman, 1998).

I chose a level of interview structure somewhat in between the completely unstructured interview and the structured interview in order to maintain a certain level of richness of data, while still allowing some amount of diversity among participants and therefore experiences and data. Also, rather than asking participants to tell me their stories in a completely unstructured way, a bit more structure ensures that there will be data that is comparable between participants when it comes to analysis.

My choice of data collection method had a lot to do with my personal desire to collect data in the form of stories. In other words, I wanted to use a data collection technique that allowed participants to talk about their own experiences in their own words. However, choices about data collection methods must ultimately go back to the research questions, which focus on women's perceptions of different spaces and the regulation that occurs in these spaces.

I have brought up the importance of personal stories and anecdotes here because it has two implications for this thesis. In the process of data collection it is important that there be enough flexibility to allow participants to introduce themes to the study that have not been anticipated. So in the advertisement for participants and in the interview guide, for example, I have used the word "stories." During interviews I would ask participants if they had any stories related to x in an effort to maintain this flexibility.

The second implication is that, through the process of analysis, I will be moving away from participants' individual stories and piecing together a collective spatial story about the study's ten participants. In presenting the results of this study, I want to keep the participants' anecdotes intact as much as possible and will therefore be using many direct quotes in the presentation of results.

So while I am perhaps not using a methodology of storytelling in a strict sense, ultimately collecting qualitative data via semi-structured interviews is a process of collecting personal narratives, anecdotes, or stories. Ultimately it is the participants' perceptions of the relationship between their body hair and the spaces they negotiate that is presented here, and I will simply be analyzing and interpreting their words.

Interviews

Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Only one interview was conducted with each participant. On the day of the interview, each participant was asked to read and sign an Informed Consent Form. All interviews were tape recorded with full knowledge and consent of the participants.

By beginning any interview with structured or forced choice questions, "the researcher creates a mind-set in informants about the right or wrong things to say that can make it difficult if not impossible to get at how they really see things" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, pg. 102). The goal at the beginning of an interview is to direct the "conversation" towards certain themes, without imposing too much structure and without defining what the participants thinks they should say.

Interviews were structured according to an interview guide (see Appendix). The research guide was based on the research questions and was written with the intention of providing questions and topics to be covered with each participant, while allowing the actual phrasing and ordering of questions to be determined according to the flow of the interview.

Open-ended, descriptive questions were combined with more structured questions. Ultimately though, unlike quantitative data collection methods in which the success or failure of the study depends upon the integrity of the instrument used (e.g., questionnaire, test, measure), successful qualitative data collection depends entirely upon the skills of the researcher. In qualitative studies, the researcher *is* the instrument (Kane, 1996).

Data management

All interviews were transcribed verbatim as each interview was completed. All participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms which are the only identification used in the transcripts and the thesis.

Data Analysis Strategy

Fundamentally, qualitative analysis "is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, pg. 140). In deductive research, the categories of information are determined before any data is collected. As the researcher, you ignore material that does not fall into these categories. In inductive approaches to data analysis, the researcher does not ignore any data. Instead, patterns, themes and categories are allowed to emerge from the total collection of data. Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process that one continues as one interviews participants. Qualitative data analysis does not employ a particular method; there is no formula. Guidelines rather than rules are formulated to help researchers interpret their data (Peacher, 1995).

The following steps were used as a guide in analyzing participants' transcripts. The first stage of data analysis involves "reducing the data". This phase involves reading and rereading transcripts and notes; recording ideas and potential interpretations of the data; and looking for emerging patterns, themes, and categories of data (conversation topics, recurrent vocabulary, feelings, experiences). The final aspect of reducing the data involves developing concepts and theoretical propositions. Propositions are generalizations, the first steps toward interpretation and theory.

The second major stage of qualitative data analysis involves coding one's data. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggest conceptualizing a theoretical "story" for the final presentation of the research and coding around what you plan to write. In other words, a story line aids the researcher in determining which concepts and themes to convey in the final presentation of the research. In this way, data that will never be used are not coded, and when the writing process begins, one is not at a total loss as to how to make the pieces fit together. All major themes, classification schemes, concepts, and propositions are assigned an arbitrary symbol, then the data (in this case, the transcripts) are coded according to these categories. Categories are adjusted to fit the data, not the other way around. Data is coded according to all relevant categories (i.e., some data will fall under multiple categories). Finally, the data is sorted, allowing the researcher to analyze together all data that fall under a particular theme, concept, or proposition (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). This is where the researcher moves toward "a higher level of conceptualization" (pg. 156) and starts grounding the theory in supportive data.

The final activity in qualitative analysis involves "discounting findings". Data is not discarded. The researcher simply tries to interpret data in light of the context in which

it was collected. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggest doing the following in this last stage of data analysis. First, look at whether participant comments were solicited or unsolicited. Second, think about whether or not there were other people present during data collection that may have influenced what participants said. Finally, consider how the interviewer and the participant react to and influence one another during an interview. For example, how did the participant react to the researcher at different times during the interview process? The researcher must take this dynamic into account during the interview as well as during the analysis (Peacher, 1995).

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

The primary goal of this research was to describe how not conforming to the norm of female body hair removal affects women's perceptions of themselves and the spaces they negotiate, and the ways in which their behaviors promote and challenge this norm. My goal was to demonstrate through this study that female body hair is an out of place phenomenon in certain contexts and therefore subject to regulation.

In this chapter, the results of the interviews will be presented. The results meet the above goals in a number of ways, many of which are more complex than expected. Participants' interviews were transcribed and analyzed as outlined in Chapter 3. Moving away from individual participants' stories, transcripts were coded and data from the transcripts were rearranged according to theme. These themes were taken directly from the research questions posed in Chapter 2, which I will reiterate here:

- How does having body hair affect the way women perceive and experience different spaces and places? How do they define these spaces?
- What form does regulation take? How do these women's actions and reactions to regulation contribute to and disrupt gendered spaces?
- Does having body hair and experiencing regulation affect the ways in which women negotiate space?

In addition, a number of other themes in the data emerged on their own. I have tried in this chapter to tie all of these elements together to tell a larger story about the

collective experiences of the study's ten participants. I have also kept as much as possible the words and language of the participants intact. Since the data is in the form of the participants' perspectives of their own experiences, many quotes will be used. When necessary for clarity, I have included the questions that participants are responding to. My dialog in the text is preceded by my initial, 'K.' All participants' names are pseudonyms. Finally, a note about the text format: All quotes taken from the transcripts are single-spaced and have been delineated by a text box in order to keep them visually separate from the text of this chapter.

Challenging the Norm

All of the participants in this study removed leg and/or underarm at some point in their lives. Most started at a very young age, usually between the age of 11 and 13. Most of these women remove leg hair occasionally but irregularly, or shave their underarms on a regular basis, but not their leg hair. At the time of the interview, three of the participants removed leg and underarm hair on a regular basis, but told me about past experiences when they had not.

In this first section I would like to illustrate the reasons that participants give for initially discontinuing the practice of body hair removal. These reasons are important because they reflect participants' perceptions of how the norm affects their lives. These reasons are also important because they provided a necessary beginning to each of the participants' individual stories. Most of the participants had multiple reasons for deciding to keep their body hair, many of which are outside the boundaries of the quantitative categories (outlined in Chapter 1) that have been previously assigned to assess this. As a

result, it is difficult to categorize participants' responses. In sum, however, participants cited the following reasons for discontinuing the practice of hair removal:

- Gender inequity, women require more 'maintenance' than men
- It's oppressive, don't want to contribute to a norm that's oppressive
- It's unnecessary, I don't need to
- I don't have to
- Don't want to do it
- It's too much work, takes too much time and effort
- I'm too lazy to maintain the practice
- Shaving/shaved skin is uncomfortable
- It's a waste of time and money
- Men in my culture find leg hair attractive, so why should I remove it?
- Other women weren't shaving, so I stopped too and eventually lost the habit
- I wanted my legs to look "ugly"

Emily	I started really educating myself on a lot of things, animal rights, environmental justice issues, social justice...I felt like I was buying into this idea that women [shouldn't] have hairy armpits and hairy legs. I'm buying into this whole unequal gender role mentality.
Ruth	[Shaving] wasn't something I wanted to do. Men don't do it. And that was really the aspect I had stopped from. Why should I shave? We're both human.
Anita	I think I shaved my legs once, as a teenager, because it was 'a thing' to do. And then, I never did it again, because it was...work, you know, trying to keep up with it. And then it was like, well, why? I don't have to, I don't need to, I don't see it as being negative. I know a lot of people of a lighter complexion, or white women, think it looks gross because it's a contrasting color, you know...the lighter skin, and then the dark hair, depending on if

	your hair is dark, if it's blond and you're white, nobody sees it so what's the big deal? And because I'm of a dark complexion and my hair's dark, it really blends into my natural color, so it does not look in any way unattractive.
Lauren	I think what happened is like, actually to be completely truthful, I was probably just really lazy, because I've never been a big one for normal hygiene habits, so I just kind of stopped once I hit high school... I stopped really caring about that at all, you know? It's no big deal... I just really don't care. I could care less about what other people think of me. I care more about my own comfort. My own comfort means I don't shave.
Suzie	[In college] I ended up taking this...women's studies class and...you know, becoming an angry feminist overnight... And so I just did everything I could figure to do to, you know? ...One of the things that I saw as being part of my oppression...was body hair. And so I immediately stopped removing it, which was really a big crisis for me at the time... I was sure that...no one was ever going to think I was attractive again.
K	What makes you feel that removing body hair is oppressive?
Suzie	It's so integrated into who I am now that I don't think about it on a conscious level very much. I mean, I think absolutely, it takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of money and it's a ridiculous waste of time and money. And I think at the time, in particular, I felt very much like, how can I fight oppression when I'm spending all my time, you know, waxing my bikini line? But it's also painful, and I think that had something to do with it too. All of those things...I mean shaving is the least painful, but I would cut myself, you know, fairly regularly. And I think I felt like that was ridiculous, that I was hurting myself, for what? For a beauty thing which women have to do much more than men. I think it was mostly very wrapped up in the whole idea that men are judged on their intelligence and their accomplishments and women are judged on the way they look, and feeling like I didn't want to be a part of that anymore.

Recognizing the normative power of body hair removal and its relationship to female attractiveness, one participant used body hair in an attempt to purposefully make herself "unattractive."

Katie	I was anorexic when I was 14 and 15, and during that time...I
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	would just not allow any body hair at all... Until the summer I turned 19, when I decided that I was just going to stop shaving my legs for 3 months. And it was partly a body image thing, because I was having a lot of problems with bulimia and my weight was unstable and I thought, well, I won't worry about whether my legs look...too fat if I make them ugly by not shaving them.
K	So it was an attempt to...
Katie	To distance myself from body image. And after that, I sort of lost the habit...

Finally, three participants found that not shaving did not particularly challenge the norm given the contexts in which they discontinued the practice.

Tonya	When I was about 20, over the summer I went to Colorado and went to this conservation school for eight weeks. Basically we were living outside all the time and not really showering and just bathing in the water. They told you not to shave anyway because it was too dangerous to shave, if you nicked yourself you might get infected from the water. So I didn't shave and my leg hair grew out... Then it was just more normal not to shave and very easy not to shave. So when I went back to college I didn't shave for almost throughout the whole school year and I eventually shaved...before the next summer. ...Definitely, that summer when I was away, there was a much different emphasis on appearances...
Aimee	[Shaving] just took so long and I didn't like having to do it every other day. In high school I did it a little bit until I realized that men of my age group liked women with hairy legs, they thought it was sexy... And then I thought, and this is just at the stage where I'm starting to like boys, then I was like, well, if they like it, then why should I shave it off? So, both of those together... My mother used to tell me that African women don't shave their legs. When she saw that I was shaving my legs as a teenager she told me, 'There's no reason for you to shave your legs.'
Anita	I am Jamaican-American. I was brought up [in the United States], but very much a part of the Jamaican community in New York, and interacting with a lot of men from the Caribbean or the West Indian culture. And those men do find that the hair that...women have [is] attractive and it's sexy... Because I know, in the African tradition or the Caribbean tradition that wasn't a part of... Women in that culture now who <i>do</i> shave it adopted that practice because

of the socialization through the Western Culture.... So, hair for me has always been very affirming throughout my life, so I've never really dealt with having to shave it.

What most of the participants have in common is that they recognize that by discontinuing the practice, they were making a conscious decision to challenge a norm for the female gender. The following participants pointed out that, while there is no apparent "reason" for female body hair in our society, there is this idea that one must have a reason to challenge such a norm.

Emily	It's very much considered the natural thing to remove. And our society doesn't even seem to have a practical reason for removing body hair.
Katie	You don't need an active reason to shave your legs, you almost need an active reason not to. It's an active decision not to.
Lauren	People expect there to be some sort of political reason or sexual reason why I don't shave... They assume that if people do something to make themselves stand out, they must be doing it for some special, higher reason, like they're a lesbian, or they're a feminist, you know, it can't just be because they're lazy... You do have to take a special step, even if it's just because you're lazy, you do have to take the special step of, 'I'm not going to shave anymore, even though society says that if you're a woman you have to shave.'

Some participants seem to be ambivalent about not shaving. Keeping their body hair is not something that they do religiously, nor do they claim to do it for a purpose or to make a particular statement. Despite the perception that people will assume women with body hair are being "aggressively hairy" by publicly displaying body hair, most participants said that for the most part they are not making a statement by keeping their body hair.

Ruth	Now I know different things, I'm kind of coming from a different standpoint. I could just stop shaving tomorrow and I could just
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	keep not shaving. It's just not a priority.
Sarah	There was a time when I probably wouldn't have [shaved under any circumstance], like there was a time when I guess I was making a statement about it, where I was just always very resistant about shaving. But now it's just like more of a way of life... When I got older, it just didn't really seem like it was that much of an issue. Like I think maybe I started to feel more comfortable about myself and didn't really need to go through that whole rigamarole. I mean, now I don't make any active attempts to make myself look a certain way, I'm just kind of who I am. With not shaving, it was more of a resistance, where now it's just like, if I feel like shaving I'll shave, if I don't that's fine.
Aimee	I think as I got older, I just... At first it was an issue for me. I was really conscious when I went outside that my legs were hairy and that people would look at me. So I was just conscious everywhere I went. But as I got older it wasn't a big deal at all. I don't have a preference for hairy legs, it's just that I happen to have them, that I like them, but when I see women and they don't have hair on their legs, I'll still be like, she has nice legs. It's just it happens, this is what I have.
Katie	I don't define myself as a person who doesn't [shave] categorically, but I don't. ...I don't really see it as a big political issue...
Holly	I think that [displaying body hair] confers a higher degree of comfort over all with your body. Whether you choose to shave or not to shave, you just feel comfortable with...like, this is how I manage my body. I feel in control...that it's not out of my control. You know, I don't shave, but at any given time I could go to a store and buy a razor...it's an option you always have...

Body Hair in Different Spaces

In this section I would like to focus on the spatial dimensions of the phenomenon of women choosing to keep their body hair and to concentrate on those aspects of the interview that dealt with the research question: How does having body hair affect the way women perceive and experience different spaces and places? There are two issues that I

want to address here. The first is whether or not participants experienced spaces and places in different ways as a result of having body hair; second, how participants define these spaces.

I have divided this material into the following categories: acceptable spaces, spaces in which body hair is the norm, and unacceptable spaces. I have used the terms “acceptable” and “unacceptable,” but participants used a variety of words to describe how they experience different spaces. These perceptions change according to the context being discussed.

In some ways, this data cannot be taken at face value because it was difficult to ask participants questions about their experiences without using phrases like, “Were you more comfortable...?” I did my best to repeat the participants’ words to talk about experiences, rather than putting words into their mouths. However, this should be taken into consideration. The following statements are a collection of phrases participants used to describe how they experience certain situations as a result of their body hair.

Emily	...It was still this very self-conscious thing. I can recall the first year I went to college...[even though] it got plenty warm, I’d wear short skirts with leggings so that no one would see my leg hair.
Holly	It does make me feel uncomfortable...
[later]	I mean, I was slightly embarrassed....
Anita	I love my hair!
Lauren	My body hair...really made me feel self-conscious.
[later]	Even in Berkeley, armpit hair is a little bit more noticeable sometimes, especially when you wear a tank top and stretch, sometimes you get a few looks. And...I don’t know, sometimes it’s very gratifying to feel different. I could care less what other people think of me, so I just kind of like the attention...

Aimee	I was really conscious when I went outside that my legs were hairy...
[later]	My legs aren't shaved and I feel good about myself, and I like my legs...
Suzie	I feel like a freak show. I mean, people just stare and laugh and make comments. Also...I modeled for <i>Stormy Leather</i> this year, for their ads... I was really excited that they <i>wanted</i> to have someone in their ads that wasn't skinny. And I felt nervous about my body hair then.
Katie	Situations will be uncomfortable after the fact... And there have occasionally been times when I've felt a little bit out of place with those people.
K	Could you describe what you mean by 'out of place'?
Katie	It's not a sense that I should be elsewhere, it's a sense that I should know the rules if I'm going to be here. As if I were talking too loud or had food stuck between my teeth... Just a little bit clumsy...And uncivilized perhaps.

In the rest of this section I have categorized participants' experiences according to acceptable spaces and spaces in which body hair is "out of place." One of the most interesting things about the following material is the various ways in which participants defined these spaces. Sometimes participants describe their experiences in explicitly spatial terms. For example, some participants related their experiences to different cities, or pointed to particular streets or other locations. But most of the time, participants' experiences are described in "socio-spatial" terms. One participant, Katie, referred to the "locations" of her experiences as "social environments," places where "you're influenced by the people around you." The interesting thing will be to try putting a finger on what all of these variously defined spaces have to do with one another in terms of defining how body hair is out of place.

K	Do you associate 'being comfortable' with particular places?
Emily	I associate it with events, times, places in my life, but those places are varied... Like when I was hanging out with a radical, different group of people. ...I somehow felt [that not shaving] sent the message, or they told me I was a better or more respectable person, that I wasn't compromising my ideals or thoughts or beliefs. It was with this group of people. We were often outdoors, with environmentalists, activists... So I was hanging out with them and I didn't shave for at least 2 or 3 years.
Ruth	In Philadelphia [people will] tell you what they feel and literally walk up to you. Unless you're on South Street. There it's like, cool to not shave... South Street in Philadelphia has a lot of clubs and it's a very...stereotypically hippie street. People smoke pot on the side. No holds barred ... I don't feel right at home but... You're going to see a lot of people with piercings, a lot of [women with body] hair... No one would really take notice of body hair at all except someone who had never been there. It's very relaxed.
Holly	Here [in Knoxville], I think a couple of people may have raised eyebrows when they saw my hairy legs, but in Madison nobody cared. Madison is much more of a crunchy granola kind of community where [not shaving] is less of a departure from the norm.
Lauren	There's a lot of women in Berkeley who don't shave, so it's just a usual thing. And also in a city like Berkeley, where there's so much diversity, people are used to seeing all different kinds of people that they don't look twice. Like, facial piercings aren't noticed so much here in Berkeley because so many people have them. Whereas facial piercings in Idaho [where I grew up] are much more noticeable, or even in the town where [I went to high school] in the North Bay, facial piercings are definitely more noticeable. Not that it's like really looked down upon, but they stand out more, so it would be the same thing with hair. People will notice it so much more, hence all the comments.
Aimee	I've noticed that when I'm around black women, not all but some, that if I were to wear a short skirt for example, I don't wear skirts anymore but when I did, no one really looked at me strange, like, 'God, her legs are really hairy.' But if I were to come, maybe, here, to the University, and wear a short skirt with my legs as hairy

	as they are, I would expect a completely different view, just because, it's like a cultural thing, the way that I understood it... Most of the people that I hung around were already familiar with women with hairy legs so I didn't pay attention to it... I just know that...it doesn't seem like it's as common with white women or Asian women to not shave their legs...
K	What are some other places, other than the flea market where you think people look at your legs and think it's cool, or where you don't feel self-conscious?
Aimee	When I'm around my family. Where I work, I work at a dance studio, an African, ethnic dance studio. When I'm around my friends. Like, whole foods, someplace like that ...
Suzie	I've been living in San Francisco for so long where it's so easy to be who I am. It's hard to remember what it was like before.
K	What is it about Berkeley that makes it all right or acceptable?
Katie	...If you look around you, it's very hard to stand out here as an iconoclast, it's very hard to look eccentric... In general there's just a lot of pluralism aesthetically and people not interfering with other people.
[later]	[I was most comfortable around]...the friends that I had that weren't students...that I would see in the most different contexts physically, like different places in Boston that were quite lefty. I had a good friend that worked at a co-op and I was more comfortable around her friends and so forth than around more straight laced, professional people.

Spaces in which Body Hair is the Norm

Tonya	If everybody's doing it it's...it does feel more comfortable. ...I was with several other women and nobody shaved their legs...it wasn't a big deal to anybody.
Holly	I think there is a feeling of like, people do kind of identify with you more. I don't know if I really want to say bond. But it does somehow give you a kind of connection to other women who also don't shave because they're probably feminist or because...they share an attitude and body image about what women should be like. I have definitely talked to other women [who] have shared with me stories of being pressured to shave their legs. I mean, I've

	talked to women who are teachers and they've been told, 'You have to shave your legs if you want to teach.' I think women talk about that a lot anyway.
Lauren	If you're around other women that don't shave, it's more like a camaraderie thing. Sometimes it is really nice to be around women who don't shave and I think, I hate to say this but I think sometimes...if a woman doesn't shave, it's like this natural bond that exists between you and her. You have both taken this special step. Because you do have to take a special step, even if it's just because you're lazy, you do have to take the special step of, I'm not going to shave anymore, even though society says that if you're a woman you have to shave.
Aimee	It makes me happy though, to see [another woman with body hair]. Just cause I feel like we have a bond. That they chose not to shave their legs and they're making a statement by showing it. So I feel like we're connected in some kind of way.
Suzie	I...hang out with a lot of hairy ladies, so it makes it easier not to have to think about [how people will react].

Spaces in which Body Hair is "Out of Place"

Emily	I only shaved [once] during [the 2 or 3 years when I didn't shave] and that was for my sister's wedding. She begged me to shave, 'You're going to be wearing pantyhose and people will see.' There are some situations where I know I'm going to be around people I know it would offend and I'm like, oh, I really want to wear a sleeveless shirt so I'd better shave... that's sort of the thought process that I have. Like, if I know I'm going to a very nice restaurant...then I think I'd really better shave my armpits.
Ruth	Now my mom really hates it. <i>Really</i> hates it. And oh my God. No. I had to wear pants around her. She would flip out. Since I went to a Mennonite high school, a lot of my girl friends... Some of their moms were extremely conservative and I didn't want to offend them, and I knew it would do that. So I would put on pants. I was never out to be like, 'I'll show you.' But if you're out of your realm.... I shave now. Through the winter I don't. But I do shave. It's because, knowing someone's going to see my legs, to be honest. When I first started working, it

	was in a bunch of different places where there were a lot of really liberated women. No one even thought of it, which is the way it should be. But then when I started working in offices, it's a whole other world...
Sarah	I've gone back and forth with shaving, but I've always had a reason...other than beauty or image.
K	Like professional reasons?
Sarah	Yeah, generally speaking, but not so much...a professional reason that would actually require you to shave, like not like a professional reason like I'm going to walk into this board meeting and I don't want these guys to see me unshaven. But, like...when I was a stripper, you had to shave, your armpits and your legs. You had to do that. So I did it.
Lauren	With armpits [my parents were] always like, 'We're going over to somebody's house. Why don't you shave your armpits?' Or they'd tell me to put on a short sleeve T-shirt or something.
K	In what other kinds of places would your parents want you to cover up armpit hair?
Lauren	Church. Church and like, going out to dinner, and when we were socializing with their friends. That's pretty much it. Living in a place like Berkeley...things are much more accepted. Whereas I know that when you go outside of Berkeley, generally most of the women that you find shave, or it's still the generally accepted way to be, and I think maybe there's like, you know, not to stereotype, but there's the kind of people who get along with society and the kind of people that don't. And it's not like you can say it's a specific kind of people that get along with society, but sometimes you can kind of tell just by looking at them because they look the accepted way.
K	Were there particular places where you felt more or less self-conscious about your leg hair?
Aimee	I think the only time where it entered my mind for a minute is, like I said, when I come around places where there's more, I don't want to say just white people, but people that aren't familiar with my type of lifestyle and who may not understand, who may think that the hair on my legs is gross. So I will say maybe

	people...someone who's really conscious about, and meticulous about the way they appear to other people.
K	And where you were more self-conscious generally just had to do with the people that you were around?
Aimee	Right... For example, now, anytime I [cross my legs] I'm really conscious of the fact that [my pant leg is pulled up and my leg is showing]. And if I'm in a class where I'm the only black student in there, and I'm also older than most of my classmates, I'm really conscious that, if they see this, they'll think to themselves, 'She doesn't shave her legs.' Whereas if I was at the flea market and I did this and there was someone sitting next to me, I would think that they might say to themselves [in a positive way], 'Ooh, look at her legs!'
Suzie	I like roller coasters and when I've gone to Great America, I feel like a freak show. I mean, people just stare and laugh and make comments... I just remember this sense of standing in line for some roller coaster and noticing that a great number of the people in line were looking at my legs. And then looking up and down the line and realizing that every single other woman in the whole park, including the woman I was with, had shaved legs. I mean, you could see everybody's legs, cause it was a hot day and everybody was wearing shorts. And... in the world that these people were living in, I was a complete freak. And to me, I mean, I don't know, I don't think of women with leg hair as being <i>so</i> aberrant, but in this South Bay world, that's how they were looking at me... I just felt like a freak.
Katie	I think the last time I shaved my legs was probably 5 years ago when I had a boyfriend that I thought wanted me to... I will shave my armpits if I'm going to a fancy ball or something where I'm going to be wearing something sleeveless, or visit my grandparents, or relatives that I think would be offended... Situations will be uncomfortable after the fact, especially off campus...

Regulation of the Norm

A large portion of the interviews centered around finding out the extent to which participants experience reactions from others that are perceived to be a direct result of

having displayed body hair. These reactions varied, but for the most part reactions seem to indicate the regulation of a phenomenon that is out of place. Not all of the reactions to participants' body hair were regulatory, however. As can be seen in the following examples, two participants experienced a positive affirmation of their display of leg hair in particular.

K	How did you know that men found your legs sexy? How did they express that to you?
Aimee	They would say it, or make comments that, 'I love women with hairy legs!' or 'I love those legs!' Just little things like that. ...I've had men who really, really, really just loved my legs because of the hair on them. I mean, I've gone to the flea market with pants [on and had two inches of leg hair showing], and [this guy] was like, 'Oh, God, look at those leg!' I was like, 'I don't even have any legs showing, what do you see?'
K	So it was obviously the hair that he liked?
Aimee	Yeah. I don't know where that [reaction] comes from though. I really don't.
Anita	My husband thinks it's sexy... Lots of men have thought it was sexy. ...And then being affirmed at a very early age, you know [when] you go out for the summertime... I remember I had on this short, <i>short</i> hotpants. I mean really short... And I remember walking down the street and a group of men were just standing there like, ' <i>Damn</i> girl! With your fine legs!' you know what I mean? That type of thing, you know, I'll never forget that. I can remember the hotpants...it was one of my favorite hotpants, cause you know, those are the things you get noticed in.

Anita is the only participant to say that all the reactions she has ever received regarding her body hair were "good comments." Most of the other reactions to body hair described by participants can be considered regulatory in that they point out the non-normative

nature of female body hair. I have categorized them as follows: direct comments, indirect comments, 3rd person comments, and the gaze.

Direct Comments

Direct comments were spoken directly to the participant and are regarding her body hair.

Ruth	My brother [would say], 'Ruth, what if you're with a guy, getting intimate, and he sees that? That is the biggest turn off in the whole world.' So that's the kind of, like, putdowns... like, 'God, you have more hair on your legs than I do.'
K	From men?
Ruth	Yeah, it wasn't just from my brothers though... I don't know why men just felt the need to confront me. I mean, I've been walking through the mall with a girlfriend and had some guy come up [and say to my friend], 'God, you're such a <i>dyke</i> . Like I care about your hairy legs...' I mean, that is just so...because she doesn't <i>shave</i> ? It really disgusted me. I pulled up my pant leg and was like, 'Pal, it was breezy when I woke p this morning. That's why I have pants on.' He's like, 'That's disgusting. Women like <i>you</i> ...' That's the incident that stands out the most.
Sarah	My family will comment about it.
K	What will they say?
Sarah	My mom will [say], 'So you're still not shaving your armpit hair?' My grandmother will be like, 'Sarah, don't you care about what people think? I mean, that's just horrible!' My dad just tries to pretend that he can't hear them, so he just kind of tries to stay out of it.
Tonya	I definitely got reactions. Just people couldn't believe I didn't shave my legs. I mean, most people...I ran on the cross-country team, so it was mostly women on the cross-country team. I remember them clearly saying, I mean, nothing too bad, like, 'Oh, I don't think I could do that' or 'it looks strange.' I know my brothers were grossed out. They were like, 'Oh, that's disgusting!' I remember that really clearly.

Lauren	...People, just like, every once in a while, random people on the street will [ask], 'So why don't you shave your armpits?' You know, it's just really funny the way random people that you don't know just ask you questions like that... I'll get questions like, 'So, why don't you shave,' or 'Are you a lesbian?' or, 'Are you a feminist? Is there a reason why you don't shave?' I used to take ballet throughout high school. I was [at class] once...and I got stretching partners with this guy... And he like, didn't want to touch my legs, cause [women with] hairy legs really grossed him out. He was like, 'I don't want to touch your legs.' He kind of went off about it too. It was just kind of an issue that lasted for a while. After that one incident, it just kept getting brought up over and over again... And then...in my sophomore year in high school, I was in honors geometry class, and we had a lot of these weird jock people in that class. And so, they would tease me for having leg hair and say like, 'What, are you a feminist? Are you a femi-nazi?' The one thing that has bothered me is when people call me a feminist because I don't shave, you know. That's the only thing that really bothers me...
Aimee	Any type of comment, 'Look at that hair on your legs!' or 'Why don't you shave your legs?' would make me start thinking about, what's wrong with it?

Indirect Comments

These are comments about the participant, but are not spoken directly to her.

Holly	After I had been teaching for awhile...I just went to class wearing shorts and I think some of the people sitting in the front row did notice. And then, apparently kids in the class or the TA's talked and then it somehow got back to [a friend of mine] because her office mate was one of my teaching assistants. I just thought it was really funny in a way... I mean, I was slightly embarrassed but I was probably more amused that <i>my hairy legs</i> were the topic of conversation, like amongst my students and the teaching assistants in a class.
Suzie	Generally what happens with me is I don't see people looking at me...because adults are a little more subtle than that. But people I'm with will tell me, 'Someone is staring,' or, 'Someone said such-and-such.' Like, they'll say things where someone I'm with can hear them, where they'll point and people I'm with can see

	them pointing. Like, for some reason, all the censorship is on my eyes, [it's] not on people who are with me, [who are] obviously my friends. So, I often don't experience it, but my friends will experience it. And again, it's hard to know how much is about body hair and how much is other things.
Katie	I had one student and ...she would turn in these cartoons, her assignments would be...dialogues on these pictures of women with lots and lots and lots of body hair, these marvelous cartoons. And I was wondering is it because she's new to Berkeley, is she saying that she'd have an easier time concentrating on the material if I shaved, or what? It was very interesting.

3rd Person Comments

These include comments about other women with body hair, or about female body hair in general.

Emily	I've heard [people] say like, 'God, European women don't shave their armpits, Ooh!' Or seeing people making fun of women who have armpit hair hanging out, or whatever.
Tonya	I do remember clearly growing up, I had an uncle and his family that lived over in Europe for awhile because they were in the air force. And I remember him very clearly saying things about the women over there not shaving. And that stood out in my mind.
K	He was saying good things?
Tonya	No, bad things. Kind of like, 'Yeah, the people were nice but the women didn't shave,' that type of thing. And equating that with being uncivilized.
Suzie	You know, the stuff that sticks out for me is not the stuff that people have said to me but stuff that people have said about [body] hair. You know, like, when we first got [the magazine] <i>Hair To Stay</i> , the first issue we ever got, I was in the warehouse packing a transfer, and the shippers, who were mostly a group of butch women, some of whom I'd been sexual with, some of whom I wanted to be sexual with, some of them were very good friends of mine, like crowded around the magazine and went off about how gross it was. And it pissed me off and hurt my feelings.

K	How would you characterize the everyday reaction, like on the street?
Ruth	...Like, trying not to stare. Almost like a wheelchair... Almost as if you were missing a leg, like something's <i>wrong</i> . That's the look you get, like, what's wrong with this picture? There are some people who [think it's ok for a woman to have body hair] but even those people are taken aback because it's not <i>normal</i> . But I think for the majority it's a negative reaction.
K	Could you give me an example of a reaction to your body hair?
Sarah	Well sometimes you can just tell. It's really funny, like, sometimes I'll...do something that will raise up my arm, and you can tell that somebody just noticed that you have body hair, and you can like, see that moment in their faces. It's the most hilarious thing, and everybody, no matter who they are, always has the same reaction. It's just that they look at it for a minute, and then, they keep on going and try to act like they didn't, but...you caught that they were frozen on your armpit for just a minute, just long enough for you to realize that they just realized that you have armpit hair.
K	So it's sort of like a shocked reaction?
Sarah	You know how people look at handicapped people, when they realize that there's somebody handicapped in the room and they quickly try to act like that never happened? It's that kind of thing.
Lauren	It's just kind of like looks. People will notice... My friend has a lot more hair than I do, like under her arms, so it's a lot more noticeable if she lifts her arms up. And I've been in coffee shops with her before when people have...looked kind of disgustingly... And so she does kind of get these weird looks. You can kind of tell by the look on their face that they're thinking, 'Oh my God! That's a hell of a lot of hair!' or something like that.
Katie	Occasionally people will sort of look and look away.

Despite the variety of reactions from other people, which participants felt were a direct result of their body hair, participants were often reluctant to describe reactions to

their body hair as negative or regulatory. Only three participants felt that the feedback they had received from other people was particularly negative.

K	So, 9 times out of 10 you think the reactions to your body hair are good?
Sarah	Not that [other people] think it's a good thing, but that...they don't overtly judge it as being negative...
Tonya	I definitely got reactions... I mean, nothing too bad. [Things] like, 'Oh, I don't think I could do that,' or 'It looks strange.'
Holly	I don't think I've ever had any really wacked-out thing, like somebody who I don't know saying something really hostile.
Lauren	I've never had a really negative experience. ...When most people...tease me about leg hair, I look at it more as fun teasing... It's not like they're really doing it seriously to hurt me. Like, all the people who teased me for having leg hair, I kind of know, I'm kind of acquainted with, and it's more tongue in cheek, rather than mean-spirited.
Aimee	[The reactions from other people are] not that negative... Like...a guy that I was with for a couple of years...was like, 'You know, at first I didn't like that, but now I do.' That type of thing... Maybe my sisters, they'll make comments, 'Why don't you shave your legs?' And they weren't really mean comments, it was just, any type of comment, 'Look at that hair on your legs!' would make me start thinking about, what's wrong with it?

In addition, some of the participants justified the reactions that other people had to their body hair. There seems to be this idea that, whether or not the participant is trying to make an overt statement about female body hair, she feels that it will be interpreted as such. In the following quotes, participants describe how their hair is a "big deal" to others and how their body hair "offends" others.

Emily	Part of me says, well, maybe I shouldn't really like this person if something that stupid or small is that big a deal to them, but people have their sensibilities and if you like everything else about them, you forget the little things... It's not just like people are like, 'Oh
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	gross.' It really offends people.
Ruth	Technically it's not a big deal, but <i>yeah</i> it is. Because do it, don't shave, and walk around, and you're going to be surprised [at how people react].
Lauren	I mean, she really has a lot of hair under her arms, and that's really supposed to be a disgusting, repugnant kind of thing.

Furthermore, two participants used the words "in your face" to describe the interaction between themselves and other people when it comes to displaying their body hair. Again, there seems to be this idea that other people will interpret a show of hairy legs as somehow threatening or as an overt statement on the part of the participant.

Emily	I was in high school and I wanted a boyfriend and I wanted to be respected for who I was and how I felt. But at the same time I was still like, I want people to like me and I don't think they'll like me if they're getting big old hairy legs in their face every day.
Holly	You know, I did not want to [expose my leg hair] like on a daily basis to my students and sort of be in their face, like, 'Your ecology teacher has hairy legs' or whatever, because I actually did think that it might make some of the students uncomfortable. ... I mean, I do have very hairy legs so people notice.

The message here seems to be that because female body hair offends people they should be spared having to see female body hair. To shave or to cover the hair with clothing is a relatively "small thing" compared with dealing with the reactions of others. In many ways, these comments are aimed at justifying the reactions that people have to participants' body hair and, as such, they contribute to the naturalization of this gender norm².

Emily	Even though I often think I really shouldn't care what other people think, I do care what <i>some</i> other people think and why put myself in a position where it might truly offend somebody that I
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² More examples of this type of behavior on the part of participants can be found in the section on Negotiating Space, below.

	care about? Regardless of why they think that way, they do. If...I care about them, and I know it's going to bother them, then it would be more important for me to either cover it up or remove it.
Sarah	... I don't feel like I'm, you know, caving in to the establishment by shaving...it's just something that I'll do if it makes other people feel better...
Katie	...I don't really see it as a big political issue... I'm willing to compromise and shave in order not to offend people in some contexts.

Although participants were generally reluctant to characterize reactions to their body hair as negative, a few do point out that there are negative consequences when a woman does not remove her body hair. These consequences generally fall into two categories: discrimination and the loss of opportunity.

Ruth	Often times people tend to turn you off.
Suzie	I think mostly people are disgusted by [body hair] and will sort of write her off as... I think first impressions do things and one of the things is...it dismisses this person... Like, a hippie or a man-hater, or a freak. Or <i>dirty</i> , I mean I think it's associated with poor hygiene. If you had good hygiene you'd be shaving... I kind of want to be a high school teacher... [And] maybe it's just going to make it worse because, 'Oh, she's the fat, hairy dyke.' I hate being a stereotype, you know? I don't want to confirm people's opinions.
Emily	When you choose to do things that are socially unacceptable, you really do shut doors for yourself sometimes, regardless of whether or not you think you should.
K	Doors to what?
Emily	People, opportunities. There's really a difference between what sort of opportunities people will offer other folks based on the way they look. It's the way they look and what those looks stand for. The word comes to mind, 'polished,' she doesn't have any fuzzy edges, she's clean-cut, conservative. [The unpolished woman] is reacted to very differently.
Sarah	When I was a stripper, [I] had to shave... That's a situation where

the money is going to be directly proportional to what you look like, you know? I wasn't there to have fun, I was there to make money and put myself through school. ...The only time I would care [about people seeing my body hair] would be if I'm trying to get something from somebody and I'm afraid that they're going to have an image of me that will keep me from getting what I want, you know what I mean? ...Like a job. ...If it's a situation where what they think of me is directly proportional to how successful I am doing something that I want to do, then I would cover up [my body hair].

Holly

...It was just...like a passing thought... I thought, well, what will they think? They'll think that this person is probably a feminist or a lesbian and it's like, well, if they think that, I don't care. If this has some meaning to somebody else, the most likely meaning that it has doesn't bother me. And actually I do recognize though, that people are going to discriminate. If they think I'm a feminist or a lesbian, they might discriminate against me, you know, that's why I think it does make me feel uncomfortable, because it does have that meaning to somebody. ...[Or] that might mean that I'm not serious enough about my career.

Beyond Regulation

Some participants perceived themselves as somewhat beyond regulatory regimes. As was reported in the section *Body Hair in Different Spaces*, there are also multiple opportunities for women to be beyond regulation in their everyday lives when they enter spaces in which female body hair is acceptable. This will also become apparent in the next section, *Negotiating Spaces*. However, women with body hair sometimes perceive themselves as beyond regulation because they are already out of place, because regulation is ignored, or because their body hair is "invisible" to others.

There are a number of reasons why a woman with body hair might already be out of place and therefore beyond regulation. For example, this might be because of other stands she takes in life, or because of cultural background or sexual preference, i.e.,

African-American and lesbian women might already feel “out of place,” and thus feel that body hair does not matter so much. Women are also beyond regulatory regimes when their hair is not visible to others. This happens when hair and skin tone are similar and body hair is simply not very noticeable. However, this usually just applies to leg hair. Body hair is also “invisible” to others when it is covered by clothing. When it comes to regulation, body hair is for all practical purposes not there, when it is not visible to others.

Already Out of Place

Holly	When I moved [to Knoxville] and it got to be summer I thought, people will probably think I’m a weirdo because I don’t shave my legs. And I just thought, well, they probably already think I’m a weirdo for other reasons. Because, you know, I’m a botanist and I’m a big mouth and I’m a community activist, so if people don’t like me, it’s not going to come down to whether or not I shave my legs...
K	Do you ever feel out of place?
Suzie	Um... yeah, but for a lot more reasons than just body hair.

Anita and Aimee are not beyond regulation but are responding to different cultural norms. It is not the women themselves but differing cultural norms which are, as Aimee points out, out of place in some circumstances.

Anita	I was not brought up in a society where hair was considered in any way ugly or nasty or anything like that, so consequently I feel very comfortable about the hair on my body. I don’t feel that I need to shave it or discard it or hide it in any way. So consequently I do not shave my legs... I know in the African tradition or the Caribbean tradition [shaving] wasn’t a part of... Women in that culture, now, who <i>do</i> shave adopted that practice because of the socialization through the Western Culture... Shaving...was the womanly thing to do in our society, right? But that wasn’t really a
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	part of my culture, growing up... I think it is a cultural thing. I mean, it may be different if I was white.
Aimee	My mother used to tell me that...African women don't shave their legs. When she saw that I was shaving my legs as a teenager she told me, 'There's no reason for you to shave your legs.' And I've noticed that when I'm around black women, not all but some, that if I were to wear a short skirt for example...no one really looked at me strange... But if I were to come, maybe, here, to [UC Berkeley], and wear a short skirt with my legs as hairy as they are, I would expect a completely different view, just because, it's a cultural thing, the way that I understood it.

Regulation is Ignored

K	Can you think of any other situations in which you feel uncomfortable just going in and displaying body hair?
Sarah	You know...it's so rare for me to be in that situation and I can't think of any firm examples. 99.999% of the time I don't even think about that.
K	Do you think it's just because of the people you work with?
Sarah	No, I think that I just don't care. I really think that I just don't care what people think about that... I think really what it boils down to is that I really don't care.
Anita	...Yesterday I had on a sleeveless shirt and this much [underarm] hair was showing, and I went around, you know, and I really didn't care. I mean, if it's there, I really don't care if you see it or not. It's your problem, not mine. Don't have to look under there, that's how I see it.
Suzie	...I don't care. I offend people I don't know in so many ways that I just can't even care, I can't be concerned... [Around the age of 13,] something really shifted for me and I lost my desire to fit in... And at that time I spent a lot of time setting myself apart. And, you know, as soon as I looked different, then I really had to have a thick skin. You know, people were really mean and I just developed not caring...

Body Hair is "Invisible"

Tonya	I've never been really obsessive about [shaving]... When [the hair]
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	grows back in, it is lighter, it's not like black or anything.
Anita	Never had anybody mentioned it, said anything negative, noticed it in a negative way. Cause I think I'm so dark, I don't even think white folks recognize that I have it, or black... You know? It's there, but I don't even think people recognize it.
Lauren	...With legs I don't even think about covering [the hair] at all because nobody ever notices.

Negotiating Space

This final section deals with the ways in which participants negotiate space as a result of their body hair. One of the ways in which I tried to get at this idea with the participants was by asking them about the circumstances in which they have felt compelled to either remove their body hair, or cover it up so that is, in effect, not there. Removing or covering hair are two forms of self-regulation or self-policing in response to regulation from others or anticipated regulation.

Emily	I might even go to the extent of covering it up... Because you know it's not an acceptable thing to most people... I think it's human nature. Most people don't like to purposefully elicit negative reactions from other people and because often times people do react negatively, you are going to take measures to avoid them looking at you or them wanting to ask you questions... I think I was fine with <i>me</i> having leg hair, but I wasn't fine with the rest of the world, dealing with the rest of the world's reactions to that.
Ruth	I didn't want to offend them, and I knew it would do that. So I would put on pants.
Holly	When I went to my graduation for my Ph.D, I did actually shave my legs. I think maybe because I felt sort of guilty the morning I went to commencement, I like got up and I shaved my legs and I thought, oh my mom and dad will be so happy because...I managed to get something at the last minute really nice to wear <i>and</i> I would have shaved legs. And they did notice. They were like, 'Oh, you shaved your legs,' or, 'Are you shaving your legs

	now?' And I was like, 'Well, I just shaved my legs cause I was getting dressed up for commencement.'
Sarah	Actually, after I had gotten a tattoo, and [my mother] actually hadn't seen the tattoo yet, the first time that I went [home] and knew that she was going to see my tattoo, I think that that's when I shaved my armpits so that she wouldn't have to... Somehow I thought that would help.
Lauren	I've worn a short sleeve shirt before on purpose, just to hide it, like when I've gone and done things with my family, cause I don't want to deal with them discussing it behind my back.
Katie	The last time I shaved my pits was for my high school reunion. Because...I had a sense that I might feel uncomfortable.
K	So you just wanted to prevent that?
Katie	Right.

Only one participant responded to regulation by avoiding a particular place.

Suzie	[The reactions from other people] sort of put me off going [there], which is sad.
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While participants said that they were more comfortable "around" certain people or less self-conscious, there were no instances in which other participants talked about avoiding certain people or spaces. Two participants indicate that other people's perceptions of body hair would not affect how they negotiate space.

Anita	...Yesterday I had on a sleeveless shirt and this much [underarm] hair was showing, and I went around, you know, and I really didn't care. I mean, if it's there, I really don't care if you see it or not. It's your problem, not mine. Don't have to look under there, that's how I see it.
Aimee	[Feeling self-conscious] still wouldn't stop me [from wearing clothes that reveal body hair]. I wouldn't [say to myself] 'Oh God, I'm at UC Berkeley, I don't want anybody to see my legs.'

Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary and Interpretation

The results outlined in Chapter 4 demonstrated that female body hair is an out of place phenomenon and that regulation of women with body hair varies spatially. The results of participants' interviews will be summarized and discussed in this section, and general conclusions to the study's research questions will be drawn.

Because women who don't remove their body hair are virtually unstudied, there is little data to compare my results to beyond the reasons women give for not conforming to the norm of body hair removal. All of the reasons for not removing body hair that Basow provided in her questionnaires (1991) were also given by this study's participants, except for "it's stupid." Most of the participants' reasons for not removing body hair are variations on Basow's choices, except for "It's a waste of time and money," "Other women weren't shaving so I stopped too," and "I wanted my legs to look ugly."

The participants' stories indicate that female body hair removal is indeed a regulated gender norm. Participants described four types of regulation that they perceived were a direct result of having body hair. *Direct comments*, comments made directly to the participant, included remarks that female body hair is gross, unacceptable, or unattractive; questions about why the participant did not shave; or harassment for what was interpreted as non-heterosexual behavior.

Participants also described regulation in the form of *indirect comments*, which included talking about the participant's body hair behind her back. It is not clear whether or not the incident described by Katie, in which one of her students handed in

assignments with drawings of women with "lots and lots of body hair," was regulatory. The other forms of regulation described by participants are *third person comments*, negative comments about other women with body hair or female body hair in general, and *the gaze*, which included pointing, staring at the participant as though there were something "wrong" with her, and "trying not to stare."

In attempting to understand how having body hair affects the way women perceive and experience different spaces and places, it became clear that participants define the spaces of their experiences in multiple ways. Occasionally participants associated experiences with particular locations, noting that the extent to which their appearance was regulated differed in places like Philadelphia vs. Knoxville, Madison vs. Knoxville, San Francisco vs. the South Bay, Berkeley vs. Boston. Participants also identified specific places and kinds of places where female body hair is more acceptable. These included a flea market, UC Berkeley campus, South Street in Philadelphia, whole foods stores, an ethnic dance studio, and a food co-op.

For the most part, however, participants defined spaces according to social boundaries. Emily, for example, said that while she associated her experiences with places, those places varied. For her, what these places had in common was the presence of people that she defined as "radical," "different," "environmentalists," and "activists." While "hanging out with" these types of people, Emily was a "more respectable person" because she did not remove her body hair.

Participants used a number of terms to delimit the spaces in which body hair is not an out of place phenomenon. For example, these spaces are defined by friends and family, as well as people who are "crunchy granola," "lefty," and "already familiar with

women with hairy legs.” These spaces were also delimited culturally. For example, Aimee said that no one looked at her strangely when she was “around black women.” So this is not an example of less, but of differential regulation of gender norms.

On the one hand, one could say that less social regulation in general occurs in these spaces. These are places where there are “no holds barred,” “it’s very relaxed,” “there’s so much diversity,” “people are used to seeing all different kind so people,” “it’s easy to be who I am,” places where it’s “hard to stand out,” and “it’s very hard to look eccentric.”

On the other hand, one could say that a different form of social regulation occurs in these spaces, that these are simply spaces in which there are different or a wider spectrum of acceptable gender performances. Very often these spaces are defined by the presence of other women who don’t remove body hair, where having body hair is “less of a departure from the norm.” Three women used the word “bond” to describe being around other women with body hair. In some ways, women who display body hair redefine the spaces that they are in. Even if it is in a very small way, or only for a short time, they introduce another possible gender performance to the spaces they occupy. The more women with body hair that there are in a particular space, the more female body hair becomes legitimized.

Participants also made it clear that they were often out of place as a result of having body hair. The boundaries of these spaces are defined by the exclusion of other possible gender performances, which includes a woman with body hair. The hairless female body has become naturalized to the extent that body hair on a woman is not

“normal.” This “naturalness” is maintained by the exclusion or regulation of women with body hair.

A few places were identified by participants as locations in which female body hair is out of place. These included nice restaurants, the homes of Mennonite families, church, parents’ friends’ houses, and a sister’s wedding. For the most part, however, the spaces were defined according to social boundaries. Very often, participants encountered regulatory behaviors from family members, including parents, grandparents, and brothers, as well as from boyfriends.

Some participants’ responses indicate that women feel uncomfortable displaying body hair when they already feel “out of place.” For example, Emily described going away to college and not wanting to have to “deal with” her body hair because she already felt so insecure in a new place. Aimee described feeling “really conscious” of her leg hair when attending classes “where I’m the only black student...and I’m also older than most of my classmates.”

Body hair is out of place when a social boundary is crossed and the participant’s body hair suddenly becomes subject to regulation. When Suzie described feeling “like a freak,” it was not because she was at *Great America* specifically, but because she perceived herself in “this South Bay world” where female body hair is “so aberrant.” Similarly, Ruth said it was fine having body hair until she was “out of [her] realm.” Many participants also identified the “professional world” as an unacceptable place for female body hair.

Finally, female body hair appears to be an out of place phenomenon because it affects the ways in which women negotiate space. Participants described feeling

“uncomfortable,” “self-conscious,” “out of place,” and “like a freak” in spaces where they were subject to regulation.

Only one participant responded to regulation by avoiding a particular place. For the most part, participants negotiate space, not by avoiding certain spaces or places, but through self-regulation of their appearance. They do this in anticipation of regulation by others.

Unlike pregnant or disabled women, who geographers have identified as “bodies out of place,” women with body hair have the ability to change their appearance over the course of a day. They have the ability to shave their legs at any time, or to put on a pair of pants or a shirt with sleeves, just as lesbian women have the *ability* to perform a heterosexual gender role.

Choosing to keep one’s body hair, however, is completely voluntary. Lauren was right to point out that there is a “special step” that women must take when deciding to display body hair. They must consciously decide to not conform to a gender norm. Suzie, however, makes the following interesting point:

I get a certain amount of [response to my appearance] just because I’m pierced and have short hair or whatever, and I’m used to that, and it doesn’t bother me so much because I *choose* to pierce my face, and I choose to cut my hair. I mean, I guess I choose to grow my leg hair but I don’t choose how hairy my legs are, do you know what I mean? So [having someone comment on my leg hair] felt much more uncomfortable to me than somebody gawking at my piercings or asking me about my piercings.

I think it’s very interesting that two of the participants used the word “wheelchair” when describing the looks that people give them. It is not surprising that these participants said that people look at them as though there were something *wrong*. While the majority of women *grow* leg and underarm hair, hairless females have become

so naturalized in our society that women with body hair are perhaps reacted to in ways familiar to disabled persons. So women who negotiate space by disguising and removing body hair (and also, perhaps, by gravitating toward spaces in which body hair is not out of place) are not only responding to the regulation of an out of place phenomenon, but also the perception that a voluntary and therefore assertive deviation from a societal norm is more "offensive" or "in your face."

Some of the participants challenged this notion, particularly Aimee and Anita, who said that reactions to their body hair would not affect their willingness to display body hair. However, both women also indicated that, to some extent, they do not subscribe to "Western" or white gender norms.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are a couple of things that should be taken into consideration when looking at the data. For one thing, it was difficult to get at the ways in which participants defined the various spaces that they discussed and their emotional response to those spaces and the regulation that occurred there. It was often difficult to ask participants questions about their experiences without using phrases like, "Were you more comfortable here?" or "Were you less self-conscious there?" However, I did my best to repeat participants' vocabulary when asking questions, rather than putting words into their mouths. Also, because of my line of questioning, it is possible that there was a tendency for participants to push their experiences into the terms of "good" spaces (e.g., places where participants

don't have to think about their body hair, places where they're comfortable, not self-conscious showing body hair) and "bad" spaces.

While these results do not have a direct application, this data on body hair reasserts and provide a concrete example of the theory that has been put forth on bodies out of place. In terms of doing further research on the phenomenon of female body hair removal, there are still a number of questions that could be addressed, as were outlined in Chapter 1. These results provide a descriptive starting point for looking at the phenomenon of women who do not conform to the gender norm of body hair removal and an assertion that female body hair is an out of place phenomenon that is regulated spatially.

Conclusion

In many ways, the purpose of this study was to look at a phenomenon that had never before been isolated by giving a voice to a handful of women who choose not to remove their body hair despite the norm to do so. In researching this group of ten women with leg and/or underarm hair, I aimed to demonstrate that female body hair is an out of place phenomenon that is regulated spatially.

Using a descriptive approach, I have used participants' own words as much as possible to demonstrate their perceptions of gender regulation and the spaces in which this regulation occurs, as well as the ways in which these women's behaviors promote and challenge the norm of female body hair removal.

Participants defined the spaces in which regulation occurs in terms of social boundaries. Body hair is an out of place phenomenon when variously defined social

boundaries are crossed and a woman's body becomes subject to regulation. Women often respond to regulation by temporarily removing body hair or by covering it with clothing, thereby contributing to the norm of female body hair removal.

The results of this study demonstrate that normative geographies permeate our lives in ways that we may often take for granted. We all move through everyday spaces with varying degrees of legitimacy and power and these spaces are delimited by boundaries of acceptance and exclusion. Recognizing body hair as an out of place phenomenon is one step in denaturalizing gender norms and allowing for more diverse gender performances.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Hair Out of Place

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship between bodies and places by analyzing the idea that women who do not conform to gender norm of body hair removal are out of place in certain contexts.

INFORMATION

Your involvement in this research will be limited to one interview which should last about an hour. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time. The interview will be tape recorded with your consent. Your participation in this study will be completed at the end of the interview. It is expected that 10 women will be interviewed for this study.

RISKS

This project poses minimal risk to you. You may choose not to answer any questions over the course of the interview, for whatever reasons. All tapes and transcripts will be stored securely until the completion of this study, at which time such records will be destroyed.

BENEFITS

Benefits to you, if any, will most likely be incidental. Any other benefits achieved from this research would involve a contribution to the field of geography and an understanding of the relationship between bodies and places.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the researcher conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. Your identity will not be revealed over the course of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or your participation in this study, you may contact the researcher, Kimberly Stetson, at (415) 487-2616 or krstetson@hotmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

WOMEN WITH BODY HAIR NEEDED

Women who do not remove their leg and/or underarm hair needed to volunteer for thesis research.

Are you a woman who does not remove leg and/or underarm hair?

Are you also

- African-American?
- Latina?
- A recent immigrant to or temporary resident of the United States?
- Over 40?
- Bisexual or Lesbian?

If so, I would love to interview you (anonymously) for a study about the everyday lives of women with leg and underarm hair. I would like to hear your stories about living with body hair, others people's reactions to your body hair, and the places where you feel comfortable or uncomfortable letting leg or underarm hair show.

If you are interested in being interviewed, please leave a voicemail or e-mail message for Kimberly.

You can call toll-free: 1-888-xxx-xxxx, extension xxx-xxx-xxxx
or send e-mail to: bodyhair@xxx.com

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bodyhair@xxx.com

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Hair Out of Place: Interview Guide

1. Would you tell me about your history of removing body hair?
 - a. When did you start/stop shaving?
 - b. Why? Circumstances/context? Other people involved? Location? Age?
 - c. Do you currently remove leg and/or underarm hair?
2. Can you tell me about female body hair? What comes to mind when you think about female body hair?
3. How do you feel about having body hair? [note vocabulary]
4. Under what circumstance did/do you feel comfortable with/confident about (or words used by participants in #3) having leg and/or underarm hair?
5. Did/do you ever feel uncomfortable/insecure (or words used by participants in #3) about having leg and/or underarm hair? Under what circumstances? [How does participant interpret "circumstance", e.g., in terms of context, place, relationships with other people?]
6. If so, how do you respond to this?
7. Were/are there places in which you consciously cover leg and/or underarm hair so that other people won't see it?
8. If so, why?
9. Do you hide your leg and/or underarm hair when you know you're going to see certain people?
10. If so, why?
11. How do people react to your leg and/or underarm hair? [e.g., comments (direct or indirect), stares, looks, gender regulation] Are reactions positive or negative? How do you know it is because of your body hair?
12. Do people ever say anything to you about your body hair?
13. What are the pressures to shave?
14. Why do you currently shave or not shave?
15. How do you feel when you see other women with body hair? How would you describe them?
16. Describe a woman whom you would be surprised to find does not shave her legs or underarms.
17. How do you feel about wearing certain clothes that reveal hairy legs and/or underarms (e.g., dresses and skirts, feminine shoes)? Do you think body hair clashes with or contradicts femininity?
18. Are there any circumstances in which you think it's inappropriate for a woman to have (and expose) hairy legs or underarms?
19. Are there any occasions/situations for which you will shave your legs or underarms (or, under what circumstances would you stop shaving again if you currently do so)?
20. Does/did having body hair ever make you feel out of place? If so, describe this feeling.

VITA

Kimberly Stetson received her Bachelor of Arts degree in College Scholars from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in May 1996. She concentrated in environmental studies as well as violin performance. During the Fall of 1996, she went directly into the Master's program in the department of geography, also at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. During her three years in the Master's program, she worked as a research assistant at the Energy, Environment, and Resources Center, working on the Tennessee Solid Waste Education Project. The Master's degree was received in December, 1999.