

ABSTRACT

MARISSA SMITH MORGAN. "I Have Sacred Space Walking with Me:" Discursive Constructions of the Sacred in Healing Sites and Practices. (Under the direction of Dr. Robin Dodsworth.)

In an increasingly superdiverse, globalized society, notions of authenticity have come even moreso into the forefront, as well as the discursive practices by which authenticity is established. This is particularly true when it comes to healing services, whereby individuals and sites offer the possibility of physical, mental, and even spiritual benefit through varying healing modalities. A critical component of these healing services lies in the construction of spaces wherein healing is not only possible, but authentically experienced and understood as occurring. These spaces are not perceived as inherently conducive to healing practice—they are constructed as such through the deployment of certain discursive tools that serve to characterize these sites as sacred; as spaces different from the ordinary, where interaction with the forces that direct these healing energies is conceivable. This study is concerned with investigating *how* and *where* sacred space may be constructed, as well as what it means for a site to be perceived as having sanctity.

This study examines the construction sacred sites in two different communities: Reiki and energy work practitioners in the Triangle area of North Carolina, and God's Acre Healing Springs in Blackville, South Carolina. I posit that the construction of an authentically sacred space is paramount to the successful perception and reception of healing practices. If a space that is promoted as sacred wherein healing can take place is not authentically experienced as such, the perception of said healing services can be damaged. By applying the theoretical frames of sacred space categorization (Jackson & Henrie 1983), notions of 'enoughness' with regard to orientations to authentic identity constructions (Blommaert & Varis 2013), and the intersubjective feelings that inform conceptions of authenticity in tourist activities (Wang 1999), I explore the concept of sacred space and how its construction is essential to the success of healing practice. This paper shows how sacred space is not necessarily reliant on physical space, but can be constructed within the body; authenticity in this way is not objective or constructed, but experienced. Perceptions of sacred space are also reliant on circulating narratives of how healing has occurred there, which can be legitimized through discourses of power.