

The Purpose of a Coffee Shop: How Physical Characteristics, Gestures & Posture Play into Each

Customer's Experience

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Introduction

Where do you go to get work done? Possible answers could be the library, a personal space, or a public space such as coffee shops. Luna Cafe seems to be a place where all ages feel welcome to go about their purpose of visiting. When specifically observing age in Luna three groups can be recognized: retired persons, middle-aged workers, and college students. The physical characteristics of patron's at Luna determined/expressed their purposes for utilizing the environment, which consequently correlated with their interactions and movement in the coffee shop. Based on age and demographic of these three distinct groups common goals for each were observed as well as specific gestures and postures that correlated to each demographic group and their purpose of utilizing the coffee shop.

Physical Characteristics

Throughout the observation of its patrons for a total of six hours during early Monday mornings and Friday afternoon showed that there are trends of the customers. To begin, most of Luna's patrons are caucasian based on the observance of skin tone, the common visual associated with racial constructs. This could be the case for multiple different reasons, such as the location of Luna being in De Pere, WI, a predominantly white town with many predominantly white neighboring communities. However there are variations in the customers that frequent Luna, specifically during the time of observation, that can be split into three groups. There were retired persons, who used the space to socialize and be intellectually stimulated, those in their mid-thirties and forties who were working, and college students, who simultaneously did both work and socialize. What is intriguing about these three groups is that there seems to be a general trend to the purpose they have of utilizing the space of Luna and the place is able to fit all of their needs. Luna Cafe is able to balance the need to be domestic and

communal, provide a productive and gainful space, and allow for inclusivity and socializing (Oldenburg, p. 15). These different aspects of Luna Cafe give customers a sense of belonging and attachment to the space that they occupied, making many of the customers at the coffee shop likely to come back.

It is important to note that while behavior was observed, questions about people's purpose at Luna were not asked. However, the general purposes for different age groups using coffee shops has been noted by Dr. Lisa Waxman in her research of customers in different coffee shops and the specific environments they provide. Retired patrons have been found both through observations and Waxman's research to utilize the space of coffee shops, in this case Luna Cafe, as a replacement for their former routine of getting up and going to work (p. 638). Instead, retired patrons come to Luna to socialize and still keep a routine for their day.

What is most intriguing about this demographic age group is that it is mostly older caucasian males who partake in this behavior. It could possibly be tied to the generational difference where most men went to work while the women stayed home and had their own schedule.

Because of this past social norm, Luna Cafe in the early hours of Monday is typically dominated by elderly, white men, most of them regulars to shop. There is a trio of retired older men that frequent Luna early to grab a cup of coffee and engage in intellectual discussion. Another singular older patron tends to sit in his own area and observe the action of what is going on around him between pages of the newspaper or book he is reading that day. This not only shows the replacement of schedule happening, as there is a set routine, but also exemplifies the idea that the retired patrons of coffee shops will use it as a space to socialize and gain intellectual stimulation.

Those that frequent Luna Cafe between the ages of thirty and forty very clearly exemplify through their lack of interaction, conservative body language, and focus on the piece of technology in front of them that they are at Luna to get work done. The atmosphere of a local coffee shop such as Luna allows professors and other professionals to work on a singular task without distractions typically experienced at home or in the office (Waxman, p. 638). This was observed throughout both days as both men and women of this age group came into Luna with some form of technology, placed their order, then sat by themselves to work. They almost all expressed the same body posture that dis-encouraged people to come talk to them or interact, as they were hunched over their computers and rarely moved their eyes from the screen. All sat at a small table and marked the entire table, sometimes the other seats as well, with their things to set up their boundaries and territory.

College students also go to Luna to work but have a much different type of body language than those in the working, middle- age group. Though college students, especially those that camp out or stay for multiple hours, do see the coffee shop as an alternative library, they tend to be much more relaxed and open to interaction (Waxman, p. 368). These young patrons tend to enjoy the environment in comparison to that of a seemingly monotone library setting. At Luna, they have the opportunity to drink coffee, listen to music, people watch, engage in conversation as well as get work done. This variety allows for a more relaxed working experience than that of the middle-agers, though both groups are still attempting to accomplish some task or another. This is seen during observation when those in college do mark their own tables with their things to save their territory, but sit in a more relaxed open way, leaned back in their chairs, turning or looking when the door opens and expressing an interest in starting

conversation with their eye movement, such as making eye contact with others that they know or even waving them over and verbally acknowledging them.

Gestures/Posture

When observing the three established groups of customers, based on the physical characteristics of age—retired persons, middle-aged workers, and college students—there were correlations between their gestures and posture paired based on their purpose of using the environment of Luna. The purpose for utilizing the space impacted how each group held their posture for a majority of the time. However, over time there is bound to be some type of interaction between individuals within a specific context. When interactions occur our gestures inevitably become a part of the conversation. Based on age demographic there were specific ways each group allowed interactions to occur and how they used their gestures for the duration of each interaction.

The group of retired people, utilizing the space for socialization or to complete some task that allowed intellectual stimulation, all seemed to be open to interaction through view of their postures. Larry and Ellen are a great example of this portrayal. This was a couple who seemed to be in their 50's, which was observable by their graying hair and wrinkled skin. These two opted to sit at a two person, circular table, which allowed them to sit a short distance across from each other. Their postures for the entirety of the conversation were relaxed, with both of them leaning back in the chair, arms resting on table or holding a coffee mug. Their gestures complimented the conversation and their postures by also being equally relaxed with the few movements of the hand. Based on their purpose to socialize, Larry and Ellen's gestures and posture were relaxed and natural, which exemplifies the concept of environmentally coupled gestures. These gestures

are only understandable by taking into account the context individuals are a part of (Steier, Pierroux, & Krange, 2014). Larry and Ellen showed that the purpose of utilizing the environment carried into the way they interacted with each other.

Those in their mid-thirties and forties were the group most strict with both posture and gestures within the context. This group's main goal for entering Luna was to get work done. Emily is a good representation of individuals within this group. For the entirety of the one and a half hours I observed within the context her posture was hunched over with her eyes glued to her laptop screen. It was clear while she was working that she did not want to be interrupted. Emily's little use of gestures—besides the moving of the head indicating the change of task occurring on her laptop—mediated the understanding that she didn't want to be interrupted. According to Steier, Pierroux, and Krange, it is often gestures that can portray the most meaning within a context (2014). The mixture of Emily's posture and gestures indicated that she did not want to be interrupted, as her main goal was to get work done. Her goal is better achieved when working primarily through technology, which impacts her how she portrays her willingness to interact socially.

The last group, college students, was an interesting mix of individuals whose goals were to simultaneously get work done and socialize when the opportunity arose. Logan, who was identifiable as a college student through his clothing choice, accomplished the task of multitasking seamlessly. Although Logan had his laptop out and was typing away, he wasn't hunched over like Emily, which allowed him to portray a sense of openness to interaction. The choice of sitting close to me allowed me to infer that Logan wasn't anxious about the possibility of social interactions. His gestures weren't considerable until he interacted with another

customer, which were the simple movements of the arms and hands. Logan was interesting to observe as his gestures and posture didn't necessarily match both of his goals the way Larry and Ellen's and Emily's did. While one of Logan's goals was to get work done, he was also open to interaction. Again, the college student group's posture and gestures were up to the observer to decipher, as the simultaneousness of purpose of entering the context impacted how each individual behaved.

Conclusion

Through the observational analysis and the commonalities shown in other research, it is apparent that Luna Cafe caters to many different people and has the ability to provide a space that appeals to them all. Luna allows for retired persons to socialize and stay intellectually stimulated, middle-aged working professionals to get tasks accomplished, and for college students to both socialize and focus on school work. Not only did their physical demographic, specifically that of their age, provide insight into the purpose of their occupation of space in Luna, but also the gestures and postures exhibited while interacting with the other customers of the coffee shop. It was observed whether the people of each age group were willing to socialize, keep to themselves, or intermittently socialize. The postures and gestures observed re-enforced the trend seen in each specific age group coming to Luna for a different purpose.

References

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