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A bookstore-café: An exploration of the blurring of the public and private spheres

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A bookstore-café, where work and non-work activities are conducted, is examined herein. As a result of the blurring of public and private spheres, it is argued that encounters in this bookstore and its café have an identifiable structure, complete with specific features, resulting in five distinct findings. Both gaze and the use of belongings to create boundaries of personal space are employed by patrons to manage anxiety caused by being in public view. Data was obtained from thirteen ethnographic participant-observations, two hours each in length, conducted over a two-month period. This project contributes to existing research by showing how, in subtle ways, people behave in public spaces, thereby informing our understanding of the norms underlying social behavior in public settings.

A growing number of commercial spaces are accommodating people who use this space to perform work traditionally done in private (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). This increasingly common occurrence makes the investigation of interaction and the normalized activities conducted within these various commercial spaces, such as bookstores, cafés, and coffee shops, possible. This study examines the use of a particular commercial space, that of a bookstore-café, and the behavior of individuals that occupy it. Focus will be placed on stereotypic assumptions about activities that occur within this traditionally leisure space now being used for work.

In a bookstore-café, I witnessed types of stereotypic behaviors while performing ethnographic observations for this project. For example, people reading, socializing, consuming food and drink available for purchase, and, quite commonly, people working with various communication tools. The environment was constructed so that people can relax, comfortable enough to engage in these various activities in this public space. Within the last ten years, because many forms of work have become transportable, people can work as they sit in a leisurely environment (Kleinman, 2006). In other words, bookstore-café as multi-purpose spaces have become normalized.

The focus here is on patrons' use of public space to perform private activities, such as work. Social space refers to both public and private spaces, each of which contains various types. Public spaces include conduits, such as roadways, civic spaces, and commercial spaces. Private space, on the other hand, can be conceived as a continuum of visibility, whereby the individual experiences the illusion of being away from others' social gaze (Mokros, personal communication, 2007). Regarding the spheres of public and private,

my observations will provide support for the assertion that we are all sensitive to the shifting of these spheres, and have innate behavioral sanctioning-like practices for managing anxiety when private activities, such as some forms of work, are brought into the public sphere.

Two assumptions guide this study. First, work, one type of activity examined, encompasses both the professional and leisure, or non-work, domains. It is the multi-purpose nature of a bookstore-café that allows for both professional and leisure activities to co-exist. Secondly, in the public sphere, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between work and non-work tasks. The scrutiny while performing these tasks in the public sphere can create feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness. This may cause patrons to put forth positive face (Goffman, 1959), or present a positive impression of themselves to others. An aspect of Goffman's (1963a) notion of face is his emphasis on managing information in one's private life by taking into account bystanders and eavesdroppers when interacting with others. Goffman provided an in-depth perspective on how we try to control our appearance even as we unconsciously observe rules about how we should appear to others.

Bookstore-café's are most pertinent for this analysis, since the unique environment where the combination of mobile technologies and various types of stereotypic activities are accepted (including shopping, reading, and eating), provide a contemporary description of a bookstore-café as a work space. While bookstore-café's and coffeehouses are not the only locations offering Wi-Fi, (interestingly, I noticed a Laundromat just the other day that now offers this service), it seems that the more frequent combination involves that of coffee, Wi-Fi, and availability of work space, often for long periods of time.

A bookstore-café also serves as a timely context in which to analyze work flexibility, since Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) point out that "the workplace is no longer necessarily a discrete physical location" (p. 704). This allows for public spaces, such as a bookstore-café, that have in recent years become work spaces, to act as a site for further investigating the complexities of the intersection of space and work. Further, technology has provided changes to the ways in which people work with boundaryless organizations and virtual work spaces (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009).

A bookstore-café blends a traditionally leisure space with that of individuals conducting various forms of work, including work with communication-based tools and the emotional work of being in public view. First, I discuss face-work and emotional labor, both central concepts for this analysis, as the data is drawn from observations of others as they occupy space, work in public, and interact with others. Then, I provide background information regarding the specific context in which these observations were conducted, including the setting, the scene, and the layout of the setting. Lastly, I isolate and discuss, based upon observations, the following five

findings: social roles, technological tools, creating one's own space, home and work, and social acceptance. I conclude by offering a critical analysis of the argument.

Face-Work and Emotional Labor

Goffman's (1959) work focuses on the ways individuals adapt to their surroundings when strangers are present, namely through the use of social gaze and the use of belongings to indicate boundaries of personal space. Further, this study extends Goffman's conception of self (1959), by focusing on patrons' interactions as their roles are constantly shifting, ranging from father to patron to worker, and possibly a homeless man to patron, and, at times, one cannot be distinguished from the other. I also draw upon Barker's (1963) work involving behavior settings. Barker established that routinized patterns of interaction are found in physical arrangements. Providing support for Barker's perspective is one finding herein, that encounters in a public space, such as a bookstore-café, have an identifiable structure.

Regarding the conceptualization of work, I draw upon Hochschild's (2003) examination of "emotional labor," which "requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7). Drawing upon Goffman's (1959) work to support her analysis, Hochschild's (2003) research focuses on the emotional private system of individuals (p. 76), as it gets thrust into commercial settings for profit (e.g, flight attendants). Hochschild's conceptualization of emotional labor as work in order to adjust emotions for the benefit of saving face in daily life is central, as the focus is on patrons as they "work," in both professional and non-work domains, to manage perceptions of themselves when in the public sphere.

Setting

Patrons of a well-known book and music store were observed in both the café area and other sections of the store. Data were obtained through thirteen ethnographic participant-observations, conducted over a two-month period of time, during August and September 2007, with sessions each roughly two hours in length. Seven of these observations were conducted on weekday afternoons, one on a weekday morning, one on a weekday evening, and four on weekend afternoons. The specific location was a Borders Books, Music, and Café, located in central New Jersey within a middle-upper class county. The store abuts the lowest income town in the surrounding county.

Regarding the layout of the bookstore's café, the seating area has sixteen square tables, each with four wooden chairs. Café seating is located perpendicular to the café counter, where coffee and food can be purchased. Situated around the perimeter of the café are six large brown, comfortable armchairs, almost always occupied. Two pieces of new age artwork hang on the far wall, while two company signs adorn the left wall. Jazz music plays

continuously in the background. In the book section of the store, eight large brown armchairs are positioned in a large circle. This seating area is just to the right of the music section. After the observations were completed, I analyzed field notes for themes relating to interaction within the bookstore and its café. In all field notes cited below, observations regarding work are underlined, while speculation is italicized.

The Scene

The bookstore-café environment is comfortable, providing a feeling of a home away from home, without pressure to purchase food or drink. At times during my observations, I would buy a cup of coffee just so that I felt my presence in the space was more legitimate. Other times, if I simply did not feel like purchasing something, I felt more anxious in this environment. Perhaps because in some way my presence felt less justified, I felt more self-conscious and less entitled to such mundane tasks like using the public restroom. To prevent this feeling, eleven of my thirteen observations included my purchasing something from the establishment. More often than not, however, I noted patrons who stopped in to browse the aisles or sit down and read without buying anything at all. The next two observations include two patrons who used the public space without purchasing anything. My first example involves a man from my sixth observation who stopped in to read, without purchasing anything:

An African-American man sits down in the leather chair across the aisle from me, and begins reading and taking notes on his legal pad. *How to get rich quick* is the book.

I then realize how often people may come to a place like this, read the books and magazines, buy nothing, and leave! Maybe customers will buy a cup of coffee, but not always. They are able to work, read, listen to music, and not even spend a dime! This behavior is accepted in this atmosphere.

When reflecting back on my field notes from my fourth observation, I noted a man who, in his late forties or so, entered the bookstore and, appearing almost rushed; he immediately found a seat in the circle of chairs arranged in the center area of the store. I am assuming at the time of my observation he did not stand out to me, as I have very little written in my field notes about this occurrence. However, I remember seeing him sit for about five minutes, warming up from the unseasonably cold weather outside, removing his scarf and placing it on his chair to mark his spot as he walked over, quickly looking around at others, and picked up a book. Since he did not seem to inspect the book closely, or even read the front or back cover prior to picking it up, he created the impression that any book would fulfill his need to act as though he were reading in a bookstore. He immediately returned to his seat and began paging through the book. He stayed for about two hours, during which he

read, stared off in the distance, used the restroom, and napped. His length of stay, reading only some of the time, and his unkempt appearance made me question if perhaps this was a place for him to warm up and occupy his time. In other words, perhaps he is a homeless man acting as a bookstore patron. Both his behavior and appearance created the impression that the bookstore-café was a temporary haven for no specific purpose. As subsequent field notes indicated, he continued to use the bookstore for the same purposes during future observations, and he even became familiar to the staff. It was not until I revisited my field notes that I realized this man's marking of space with personal belongings and gazing at others was repeatedly noted in my observations.

Layout of Setting

The store's layout had an impact on social interactions. The café is just to the left of the central book area of the store, located to the left as patrons enter the bookstore. This structure creates a "flow" of traffic that pours out into the café area upon entering, which in turn provides regular interaction between patrons. It seems as though in public spaces where shared presence occurs, people use subtle behavioral adjustments to maintain a comfort level. Goffman (1963b) discussed "civil inattention" as a way of accomplishing this. It occurs, for example, when a person recognizes the presence of another individual with a brief glance, and then looks away to show either unconcern with the other person, or respect for the individual's privacy. Following Goffman, the following observation below indicates that patrons respond in such ways when involved in brief encounters with others. Further, these responses are not random, but rather serve a purpose in promoting successful encounters in a public space. Similar to the observation above involving the man who quickly looked around at others as he carelessly picked up a book, the lessening of privacy when in the public sphere is also found in my third observation:

I decided to sit at the table where the "flow" empties out into the café area. Upon arriving in the café, people look surprised. They look at me and quickly look away. Some want to be in the café area, and they quickly walk towards the café counter. Others look away, almost embarrassed they are, to their surprise, at the café. I count, and fifteen people enter, one after another, look quickly at me, and look away. The majority walk towards the café.

Social Roles

In a sense, the patrons, myself included, take on roles and follow practices indicative of social norms for interacting with strangers in a public place. Much of the participant activity in this routinized encounter is spontaneous and unreflective. However, glancing quickly at others, as the patrons above

did, works as a social norm for interacting in a public place. One possible interpretation of this is that the patrons feel under surveillance, or a loss of privacy, when socializing or working in public.

Inextricably tied to acknowledging others in public is the establishment of private space when conducting work in a public space. During my fifth observation, I noted my own behavioral sanctioning practices when occupying public space for private work while I sat in the café, as both a student and researcher acting as a bookstore patron:

I note that I like to sit in very specific places in the café, so that I can see the café area as much as possible. I also like to spread out, not so much because I need all of the space I claim with my belongings, but more so because I do not want anyone sitting too close or asking me about my work. Territorial, I openly admit, but it seems to be the constant here. People seem to want to work independently and quietly, able to spread out with all of their belongings. I quickly look around, moreso to survey the area, secretly not wanting to interact with anyone in anyway really, so I can get down to work.

Technological Tools

Relatedly, certain communication-based tools become normalized when used in this multi-purpose space. For example, the commonly used devices of communication technology are acceptable since the space is constructed to provide comfort while patrons socialize or work. These tools of communication are ubiquitous in our society, but this analysis confirms that the use of these tools in a bookstore-café is accepted since the space is designed to be tool friendly. For example, it is the using of these communication-based technological tools (to check email, use their cell phone, and occupy space for a long period of time) that is promoted, if not expected, by the bookstore.

These activities are promoted by the bookstore-café since Wi-Fi is provided. Individuals can now use widely available bookstores-café to work using various forms of mobile technology (lap top, cell phone), while enjoying hot meals served throughout the day. For instance, Borders Books, Music, and Café recently announced, as a result of an agreement with Verizon, that they offer free Wi-Fi access in over 500 existing locations (Nelson, 2009). This comes after Borders' largest competitor, Barnes and Noble, announced in late July that they had begun offering the same service.

Further, the nature of these communication-based tools (i.e., laptops, palm pilots, cell phones), allows for work to be accomplished in settings that accommodate various types of activities, such as a multi-purpose bookstore-café. The space was not conducive, as my observations indicated, to work which involved anything other than commonly used communication tools

(i.e., laptops, cell phones, palm pilots, and the internet, with books and highlighters acting as the exception). No work was observed that was outside of that with communication-based technological tools, which therefore normalized symbolic analytic work and involves processes of thought and communication (See Reich, 1991 for an extended discussion).

Creating One's Own Space

The space, therefore, determined what tools could and could not be used in this environment: relatively small, quiet, and not disruptive to the space and activity of others. Also normalized in this environment, and much to my surprise, was patrons' use of headphones to listen to music. I often witnessed teenagers and people in their early to mid-twenties who entered the store with their headphones on and who appeared to be in their own world, as they found a magazine to read and sat down either alone or with friends. More often than not, the headphones were not removed throughout the entire interaction with a friend, with just a head nod acknowledging their presence. No staff members or fellow patrons attempted to interact with these individuals. While this occurrence surprised me to a certain degree, I assume the normalization of being able to "check out" while occupying public space makes the environment appealing.

An assumption of this study is that the physical environment is an essential component of the encounter between individuals. Geiryn (2000) asserts that "place" provides a meaningful connection between a physical setting and socialized experiences. In turn, this provides a structure to interaction. This conceptualization of "place" is different from that of "space," since "space is what place becomes when a unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are removed. Space is place filled by people, practices, objects, and representatives" (p. 3). Places, then, are made through human action, but simultaneously act as an influence on what people do in that space. The examination of a public space that is also commercial in nature, such as a bookstore-café, provides insight into human practices that foster "place" within a public "space."

The "sense of place" found in environmental features contributes to the structure of the encounter (Duncan, Fiske, Denny, Kanki & Mokros, 1985). Central to the perspective for this project is Barker's (1963) work involving "behavior settings." Barker established that routinized patterns of interaction are found in physical arrangements. Rapoport (1982) examined the built environment, defining it as "A setting with a specific set of characteristics and cues" (p. 120), and that it is comprised of space, time, communication, and meaning. Rapoport contends that "The social situation influences people's behavior, but it is the physical environment that provides the cues" (p. 57).

It follows, then, that typically people act in alignment with their reading of the cues produced in an environment. Once an individual notices and understands a cue, the expectation that they will act as expected within that

environment is brought to the forefront. If this is not followed, the person is considered a social deviant (Goffman, 1959).

During my sixth observation, I reflect on the combination of these two behaviors, a patron's glancing at me while he works, and his use of space, involving a large black couch, located in the back of the book area by the restrooms:

A man in his mid-thirties is using a large black couch to do his work. He has his laptop on his lap, papers to his left and right, and his cellphone beneath the papers on his right. Black coffee sits in a ceramic coffee cup with a saucer. He only quickly glances at me while he systematically, almost robotically, enters data into his laptop from his stack of papers on his right side. I was most taken with his use of space. He did not have a problem taking up the entire couch! I guess he figured he got here first, and the space was his to do with what he wants. Papers, laptop, cellphone.

Additionally, while the man was occupying a large amount of space on the couch, he not only used his communication tools to work, but one tool also took on an additional function. His cell phone propped up his papers so that he could read and enter his information more easily into this laptop, acting as a make-shift paper holder. This analysis points out that possibly by his use of space, he takes ownership of this public space. He also indicates his private space by using his occupational tools as symbolic markers of his territory.

Home and Work

In addition, these tasks occur within the range of public scrutiny, which can possibly create feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness. This can perhaps lead patrons to put forth positive face when in public view, which I also noted in the following observation. A man, acting as both father and bookstore patron, attempted to conduct work through the use of communication-based tools, including a cell phone, lap top, and folders with papers, while meeting the demands of his family. While observing this, I noted:

A man, late thirties or so, comes in with two bags, one on each arm, and three kids. He proceeded to tell two of his kids to go and pick out one book each while he got set up at a large table. He seemed stressed as his cell phone started ringing. He looked at the number and put his phone down on the table. "We have got to get you settled in," he said as he lifted up his youngest, about two. The other two kids returned with books in hand, and the man tells them to sit down and read quietly. He then picks up his phone and listens to his message as he sets up his lap top and

takes folders out of his bag, occupying the majority of a large table with his belongings. He then takes a toy, one belonging to the boy and one belonging to the girl, and places each toy by their chairs, respectively. Before you know it, almost the entire table is covered in paperwork, and the kids want snacks. He leaves his belongings behind and takes all three kids up to the counter.

It is possible that in this instance the father was stressed, as he attempted to integrate the demands of his work and non-work existence. This interaction of personal activity in public space possibly created feelings of being under surveillance on the part of the father. It could be argued that in an effort to create positive face, the father attempted to get his children to behave, sit still, and be quiet, and assigned his children a task that was accepted in this environment. One interpretation is that the father “worked” to restrain his children’s behavior, use of space, and use of items found in the store, so that their behavior remained “acceptable,” and so that perhaps he was not embarrassed in public. In order to facilitate this, the father used his children’s personal belongings as tools, functioning as markers of their private space within public space.

It follows, then, that the children’s belongings, used as tools, were similar in nature to the tools previously described as acceptable in this space, in that they were relatively small, quiet, and not disruptive to the activity of others. Further, the children’s behavior conformed to the expectations of this public space, allowing the father to conduct private work, in this instance professional in nature, in a public space. This is, of course, one possible interpretation put forth by observable contextual factors. I do wonder, however, if the father possibly cared little about how he looked to others if his children misbehaved. While it seemed to be a motivation to keep his children occupied and fed, maybe he would behave the same in private as he did in public.

Social Acceptance

Similarly, in this multi-purpose bookstore-café, patrons are able to occupy space for periods of time, sometimes upwards of three hours, and work while answering their cell phones and tending to personal matters, such as speaking to their children, and scheduling car repairs and dentist appointments. Both the occupying of space for a long period of time and tending to personal matters is accepted and normalized in this environment. For example, one weekday morning I observed three people performing these mundane personal tasks while acting as patrons:

A man seated on my left, thirties, appearing very relaxed, as he reviewed documents and carefully moved them from a pile on his right to a pile on his left. Directly in front of me, an Asian woman sits entering information

into her palm pilot from a piece of paper in front of her. To my right is an older man, sixties, sipping his coffee and reviewing his day timer. All take up one table each. The Asian woman's cell phone rings, and she briefly speaks to what sounds like her child. The first man then calls his mechanic, and says, he "can drive right over." The second man calls his dentist and says 'I feel the pain only when I bite down, but the sooner he can see me the better.'

In the above observation, the patrons are all performing personal tasks, but these individuals seemed aware they were in a public setting, and spoke on the phone in a whisper-like talk. Most notably, the second man seemed most self-conscious, looking around at others as he described his toothache to the individual on the other end of the phone. Conducting these private matters in the public sphere did not seem like it was something with which the patrons were very comfortable, as they displayed notable feelings of self-consciousness, namely the use of whisper-like talk regarding issues personal in nature.

Also found in these observations are those who try to control their reactions to frustrating experiences, such as the instance below, which involves a man attempting to work while acting as a patron during my second observation:

The man to my right says, 'Excuse me, but I am unable to get on-line. Are you?' *I deduce that since he sees me typing he thinks I must be on-line.* 'No, you can only get on-line here if you are a T-Mobile customer,' I respond. 'Well,' an African-American woman sitting behind me says looking up from her laptop, 'If you sit closer to the outer tables over here you usually can pick up the signal from the pizza place next door. That is why I always sit over here. It works, as long as the pizza place is open.' 'Agh,' the man says. He stands up, notices an open table, and rushes over to it. With that his phone rings, and he clicks on his earpiece and answers it. 'Hey John...oh, good, nope, I am ready. Hi, Sam. How are you? Nice to meet you as well.'

The man's frustration and stress were evident in his movement and body language, as those seated around him gazed towards him, and a few even shifted in their chairs. One possible interpretation is that while patrons seem to appreciate the flexibility and tolerance of the bookstore-café as a work space (as indicated by patrons' using this space for this purpose), patrons also feel constrained, since they cannot fully express their emotions (i.e., whisper-like talk discussed earlier or the suppression of frustration above) since both work and non-work activities are conducted in a public sphere.

The patron in the following observation seemed to embrace being in a public space a bit more than others. For example, the man entered the café area, looked around, and then placed his belongings on an available table. He then asked me to “watch his belongings,” which consisted of communication-based tools, including a laptop and a portfolio of papers, while he purchased food from the café. While noting that this is a bit of a risky practice, I obliged since I felt compelled and feared judgment from others by refusing to assist him. He came back about five minutes later, thanking me for my help since he has had a “frustrating day.” He then tells me about his job, and what brought him into the bookstore:

‘I usually work from home, but my internet connection is down and has been for two days, so I had to think creatively about how to get work done.’ ‘Ah,’ I said. ‘And this place allows you to get done what you need to, then?’ ‘In a pinch, yup. I would rather be at home doing my work, but this is better than falling way behind. I need to stay up to date so I can see my son’s soccer practice after school tomorrow. I am sure you can relate.’ I know what he means, but only nod in agreement. I then ask, ‘What is it you do for a living?’, if you do not mind my asking.’ ‘No, not at all. I do freelance copyediting for a website. Ya know, post and edit new stories daily. It is a political website, so I need to change the stories daily, and really keep up on the goings on. If I fall behind, it is all over.’

His phone rang, and I excused myself from the conversation. Relieved that my duties were over, I felt the pressure of being in the public eye during this experience. Since I was not certain of the socially acceptable response to his request to watch his belongings, I obliged, since I did not want to draw negative attention to myself, a face-saving practice. Had this occurred with fewer people around, I am not so sure that I would have acted so agreeably. I also noted a more subtle point of this interaction. While the man’s employment experiences were personal in nature, his telling me about them made it a public experience. I would argue that my presence influenced his telling, turning a personal account into a publicly shared experience.

Due to the observation and interaction discussed above, I felt like perhaps I was starting to understand the different motivations people have for working in this location. It prompted me to consider conducting interviews with individuals who routinely work in these locations as a way of further understanding the inherent tensions involved in working in a virtual work space.

During my last two observations, the unkempt man, whom I mentioned at the start, reappeared. In the second to last observation, he entered the store just in front of me, and made a beeline to the circle of brown leather armchairs in the center of the store. A worker stationed behind the center kiosk said

hello to him only, as we both walked past. I took this to be an indication of this staff member's knowing, or at least recognizing, him as he hurried past. I then compared in my fieldnotes what I jotted down about this man during this observation to my first previously mentioned entry, noting the striking similarity between them:

A man entered the bookstore today right in front of me. While he appeared unkempt and a bit off balance mentally, nothing was particularly noteworthy about him. However, as he and I passed the kiosk, a staff member acknowledged him, and only him. I wanted to know how they knew each other, but saw or heard no signs of how during my observation. He sat in a large brown armchair, removing his scarf for which it was too warm outside to need, and placed it on his chair to mark his spot as he walked over, quickly looked around at others, and picked up a book. He immediately returned to his seat and began paging through the book. He stayed for about two hours, during which he filled his time by reading, staring off into space, using the restroom, and napping.

During my last observation, the man followed the exact same routine once inside the bookstore, except this time he left before I did. This was telling.

Upon leaving, the man wrapped his scarf around his neck and buttoned up his coat, both of which were not needed since it was an uncharacteristically warm fall day. He then walked to the back of the store and used the restroom. On his way out, he walked past the kiosk, where a different staff member said 'Goodbye. See you tomorrow.' He only glanced in her direction quickly, and hurriedly exited the store.

Here is a man who repeatedly uses the bookstore and its café to read, nap, spend time, and use the restroom, all without buying a single item. His behavior appears to be routine, and accepted by the staff. He almost never spoke to anyone, just glanced to show acknowledgment, and marked his chair with his scarf each time he entered the store. While he certainly was not bothering anyone, the normalization of this man's routine made me question how frequently this occurs in bookstores. As noted previously, this type of environment allows for patrons to socialize, read, work, eat, or just hang out. When these types of behaviors are accepted, it only makes sense that people such as this man are attracted to this environment. He is able to warm up, spend time, and use the restroom, all while "working" to keep a low profile so that his presence is accepted in this space.

Discussion

It appears that this multi-purpose environment is supportive of various types of activities, ranging from socializing and reading to working with communication-based tools. Three general conclusions are that the bookstore-

café provides an environment that normalizes three components: the use of space, the kind of work involving particular communication-based tools, and time on the part of the patrons. This analysis provides insight into how patrons behave, or “work” to manage perception of themselves when in the public sphere.

These general observations regarding social gaze and public space in a bookstore and its café have produced five distinct findings. The first finding, previously discussed, is consistent with Barker’s (1963) work involving routinized patterns of interaction. Two additional findings are consistent with Goffman’s (1963b) work, and relatedly, Hochschild’s (2003) work. First, it demonstrates that certain features, such as gazing as a form of civil inattention, and secondly, that the marking of personal space, are both present when strangers interact in a public space, and also by demonstrating how conducting private work in a public space changes the dynamic of the experience for the patrons, as they manage the tensions of encounters with others.

When examining gaze and use of public space together, the patron who was describing his toothache pain in a whisper, indicative of the fact that he was aware others could hear his conversation, or the father who “worked” to get his children to behave for fear of possible public embarrassment, are examples of patrons attempting to manage anxiety caused by the reduction in privacy and the shifting of roles in the public sphere. Specifically, the patrons glancing at me while entering the café, and my glancing at others while working, is evidence of how strangers acknowledge one another in a public place such as a bookstore. This acknowledgement, or form of civil inattention, while remaining in one’s own world, is normalized in this environment. A fourth finding, regarding space, is the social acceptance of people using a full table to work. This was found not only in my own use of space while working in the café, but also with the patrons observed. That is to say, those occupying space were able to use their belongings as tools to mark their space. This marking of private space within public space is common and accepted in this environment, and was found in the father’s use of belongings to mark his children’s seats at a table they occupied.

A fifth finding is that the multi-purpose bookstore-café allows for a set of specific activities, ranging from socializing to working with communication-based tools. This includes both professional and non-work. In other words, patrons are able to occupy space and conduct work of both a professional and leisure nature, just as the man did who could not “fall behind, or it was all over,” as he needed to attend his son’s soccer practice. In this atmosphere, patrons are both able to interact with others, as this man did, or to refrain from doing so, as the possibly homeless man did. These five findings, grounded in both prior research as well as original observations, indicate that the balance between the public and private spheres is a precarious one, increasingly challenged by encounters with others when in the public view.

Critical Analysis

Multiple moments in the observations discussed bring to the forefront the notion of researcher reflexivity when in the field. As a researcher who both witnessed and was involved in events as they occurred in this bookstore-café, it is possible that my being familiar with this space caused me to bring certain expectations to the observational moments I assessed.

For instance, when reviewing my fieldnotes, I notice multiple notations about how I felt that day while conducting observations. At the time, I believe my intent was to note how I felt so that it did not contaminate the data reported. While I think I did this effectively as a researcher, I noted that on the left side of my notebook (where I would document these self-observations), numerous notes include: bought coffee to justify using restroom, jittery from too much coffee, broke today...must I buy something to sit here for hours?, and lastly, anxious in field today.

I notice that the last entry, anxious in the field today, while recorded to assist me in not contaminating the observed data, provided valuable insight into the previously mentioned observation regarding the man in his late thirties who entered the bookstore-café with his three kids. I noted that the father seemed stressed as he attempted to integrate his work and non-work existence, with specific notes about his gestures and facial expressions. While I do still feel that he struggled with managing the situation, and communicated this by displaying nonverbal indications of his frustration, perhaps my own feelings of anxiety while in the field for this observation made me more aware of his feelings of anxiety. This is not to say that what I wrote is not supported with observable data, but more so to acknowledge the inherent tension we, as qualitative researchers face: not affecting that which we observe, yet wanting to immerse ourselves in what we are studying in order to fully understand it. While nothing reported is falsified, I see my contribution in these observations as a combination of physical features, actual events, and interpretation. The interplay of these components creates an ongoing challenge for researchers of ethnography.

Conclusion

Due to increased work flexibility, people are more frequently using commercial spaces, such as a bookstore-café, as work spaces (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). This study contributes to the integrationist perspective that captures the moments when “work,” “non-work,” and “home” are intersecting in interaction. First, work, one type of activity examined, is demonstrated as encompassing both the professional and leisure, or non-work, domains. It is the multi-purpose nature of a bookstore-café that allows for both to co-exist. Secondly, as demonstrated in this study, in the public sphere it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish when individuals are performing work or non-work tasks.

This study examined the activities performed, the environment, and the interaction of those present, thereby contributing to our understanding of stereotypic behaviors in a commercial space, such as a bookstore-café, functioning as one type of a virtual work space.

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