

The Coffee Shop: Social and Physical Factors Influencing Place Attachment

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the characteristics that encourage gathering behavior and contribute to place attachment in selected coffee shops in the context of literature suggesting social gathering places contribute to social capital. These gathering places, with the potential to enhance community in this manner, have been called third places. The study was qualitative in nature and included the research techniques of visual documentation, observation and behavioral mapping, interview, and survey. A transactional approach to this study was chosen to better understand the meaning of the person-environment relationship. Each coffee shop was observed for twenty-five hours for a total of seventy-five hours. Eighteen interviews were conducted and surveys were collected from 94 patrons to reveal patron attitudes toward the physical and social aspects of the coffee shop as well as their feelings regarding the community in which they live.

The key findings regarding the physical characteristics showed the top five design considerations included: cleanliness, appealing aroma, adequate lighting, comfortable furniture, and a view to the outside. A number of themes emerged related to people, their activities, and their feelings and attitudes regarding the coffee shop. Each coffee shop was found to have a unique social climate and culture related to sense of belonging, territoriality and ownership, productivity and personal growth, opportunity for socialization, support and networking, and sense of community. Regarding feelings of community, survey findings from coffee shops patrons showed a positive correlation between length of patronage and their sense of attachment to their community.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers Unger and Wandersman (1985) discussed the importance of the community to the human social, emotional, and cognitive experiences. Rivlin (1987) explained that the connections to community create a bond between people and place in which people and place are molded into a whole. Although the value of place and community seems clear, there has been much social commentary regarding the decreasing ability of people to connect with their communities and the people who live among them (Fleming and Von Tscharnier, 1987; Lippard, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Stumpf, 1998). In *Bowling Alone*, which addressed the collapse and revival of American community, Putnam (2000) discussed the increasing disconnect from family, friends, neighbors, and social structure. He reviewed the concept of social capital, which he defined as “the connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”

(p. 19). Putnam expressed concern that the decrease in community activity and community sharing results in the shrinking of social capital which threatens our civic and personal health.

In *The Great Good Place*, author Ray Oldenburg (1999) emphasized the importance of neighborhood gathering places in enhancing the lives of people. Oldenburg defined these gathering places as third places, and further explained that these places are not home or work, but the places that help get people through the day. Oldenburg describes the third place as “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (p. 16). Third places provide a place to connect with the people in communities as well as a place to exchange ideas and news. However, Oldenburg expressed concern that many third places are disappearing, and

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that in the United States, the third place has become a distant third. He raised the question of how this decrease in the availability of community gathering places impacts the lives of people. What are the consequences when communities lack places to gather with neighbors, friends, and to mingle with the familiar strangers who hold the potential for new friendships, relationships, and ultimately the growth of the social capital in a community?

Oldenburg (1999) explained that most third places draw their identity from the beverages they serve. Historically, coffee houses have provided places for social intercourse and conversation, as well as political debate (Pendergrast, 1999). They have also served as places where people could gather, speak freely, and mingle with others from their communities (Oldenburg, 1999). For many people, the coffee shop serves as a third place, a place to regularly interact with fellow community members. In the United States, from 2000 to 2004, fast food chains grew at a rate of 2% per year, while coffee shop chains grew more than 10% annually (Holmes, 2004). In 2004, forty-two percent of adults in the United States aged 18-34 purchased their coffee at a coffee shop with 48% consuming the beverage on the premises. These numbers seem to indicate that the coffee shop is about more than just coffee; perhaps the place in which it is consumed has significance in itself.

Scholars studying place attachment report that attachment to place comes about through a set of related phenomenon rather than a singular phenomenon (Low & Altman, 1992). In addition, a number of scholars have viewed the concept of place attachment in a transactional framework involving psychological, social, and temporal experiences (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Brown and Perkins, 1992; Altman & Rogoff, 1987). A definition by Brown and Perkins (1992) states, "Place attachment involves positively experienced bonds, sometimes occurring without awareness, that are developed over time from the behavioral, affective, and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their sociophysical environment" (p. 284).

This research on place and place attachment points to the value of place in the lives of people. This paper will expand on this research by exploring the variables that contribute to gathering behavior and place attachment in third places, specifically coffee shops. The sites chosen for study included three selected coffee shops in a mid-size city in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this study was to see what qualities, both physical and social, encourage people to gather in those coffee shops and develop an attachment to those places.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the availability of literature on the social/psychological studies of place, and a lack of literature on the design of social gathering places, this review of literature will focus primarily on studies of place and place attachment.

The experience of place is unique to each individual and is directly related to his or her lived experiences. Attachment to place is a set of feelings that emotionally binds people to a particular place. "Places root us—to the earth, to our own history and memories, to our families and larger community" (Cooper-Marcus & Frances, 1998, p. xi). Understanding the concept of place provides an important framework for understanding the way people form relationships with places.

When relationships develop between people and places, the result is often a feeling of place attachment. Low (1992) stated, "Place attachment is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and group's understanding of and relation to the environment" (p. 165). Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983) described place attachment as involving the interplay of emotions, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors in reference to a place.

Place attachment refers to the idea that people develop special bonds with certain settings that hold deep meaning to the individual (Low & Altman, 1992). The word

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“attachment” refers to affect while the word “place” refers to the “environmental settings to which people are emotionally and culturally attached” (Low & Altman, 1992, p. 5). Affect, emotion, and feeling are central to the concept of place attachment and appear consistently in studies on this topic. Relph (1976) believed that to be inside a place is to belong and identify with it. Tuan (1980) suggested the existence of a state of rootedness in which one’s personality merges with one’s place. He wrote that the primary function of place is to engender a sense of belonging and attachment.

Traditional definitions of place attachment view it as an outcome, as feeling of being attached (Tuan, 1974). However, Harris, Brown, and Werner (1996) emphasized place attachment as both the feeling of being attached and the process of becoming attached, which include reasons for the attachment. Attachment to place involves the assessment of the current setting, as well as the assessment of the relative quality of alternative settings (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). Higher quality environmental settings are those that support the goals and activities of the person (Stokols and Shumaker, (1982). Stokols and Shumaker’s (1982) model of place attachment lists neighborhood, physical amenities, individual and household characteristics, and social networks as important components of place attachment. They explain that these components may relate to place attachment by influencing need, or how the environments meets needs, such as neighborhood networks that fulfill a need for social support.

Place attachment can be looked at in a transactional perspective where place attachment is not composed of separate or independent parts, components, dimensions, or factors. The people and place interact together to form the experience. It is important to remember that groups, families, community members, and even entire cultures often collectively share attachment to various places (Lawrence, 1992; Hummon, 1992). Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992) suggested that life experiences have an emotional quality that produce a bond with the places in which these experiences occur. Shumaker and

Taylor (1983) propose a person-environment congruence model of place attachment. This model suggests that place attachment involves “expectations of stability, feelings of positive affect, greater knowledge of the locale, and behaviors that serve to maintain or enhance the location” (p. 237). This model includes the person’s social networks as a contributor to place attachment.

The importance of social relationships that occur in places must not be overlooked and may enhance the activity of people-place bonding (Chawla, 1992). The social involvement of family, friends, community, and culture may be equally, or more important, than the place alone (Cooper-Marcus, 1992). Altman and Low (1992) emphasized the importance of people in interpersonal, community, cultural, and social relationships that are essential to place experiences. Crumpacker (1993) studied an elementary school that, after having served several generations, was to be torn down and replaced. The purpose of her research was to better understand what made the school successful for so long. She found that the school provided much more than an education to students. It provided a place to share folklore, establish relationships, provide support, and served as a repository of memories for the community. Students and teachers reported a sense of belonging, of being known to others, and of ownership.

Place attachment serves a number of functions for people and their culture. Place attachment has the potential to offer predictability in a daily routine, a place to relax from the more formal roles of life, and the opportunity for control in various areas of life (Low & Altman, 1992). It also provides the opportunity to link with friends and community in a visible and concrete way. The connection to history and to culture may occur through place or through symbols that are associated with places. Place then becomes part of the lived experience, an interwoven component of life experiences, and is inseparable from them. (Low & Altman, 1992).

To successfully design spaces that serve as third places and community gathering places, designers should un-

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derstand the social and physical characteristics of place that enhance the patron's experience. By better understanding those components that contribute to positive place experiences, designers can create spaces that promote comfort, a sense of belonging, and a bond between people and place.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore the physical and social qualities that encouraged people to gather in third places, specifically coffee shops, and develop an attachment to those places. Several supporting research questions were asked including:

1. *What characteristics and design features attract people and cause them to feel attachment to the coffee shops?*
2. *What social interactions or human contacts attract people and cause them to feel attachment to the coffee shops?*
3. *Is there a relationship between coffee shop patronage and feelings of attachment to community?*

OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

The mixed-design methodology selected for this research included the techniques of visual documentation, observation, interview, and survey. The focus on the transactional nature of the person-environmental connection required descriptions of the flow and dynamics of events. It was important to note what people were doing, thinking, behaving, and feeling as well as the static and fixed conditions (Dewey and Bentley (1949). The goal was to discover the meaning of the space to the participants (Eisner, 1998; Altman & Rogoff, 1987). The study took place in three coffee shops located in the Southeastern United States. Coffee shops were chosen for two reasons. First the coffee shops met many of the criteria of third places as defined by Oldenburg (1999), thereby allowing gathering and lingering behavior to be studied. In addition, the increase in the number of coffee shops opening in communities in the United States in the last ten years made this phe-

nomenon of additional interest (Rivas, 2004; Holmes, 2004)). The characteristics of the three coffee shops varied and included a large national chain, a locally owned shop frequented by a variety of community members, and another locally owned coffee shop located near a university campus.

VISUAL INSTRUMENTATION

The study began with the collection of information on the physical characteristics of the coffee shops including the location of the coffee shop, and the architectural and design attributes of each coffee shop. The Architectural Features Checklist served as the instrument to frame the collection of these details. This checklist was modeled after the Physical and Architectural Features Checklist developed by Moos and Lemke (1984). The architectural features of the coffee shop exterior were noted, as well as the location relative to major roads, the ability to walk from surrounding neighborhoods, access to nearby shops, parking availability, along with any other exterior or site considerations that were notable. The interior architecture, ceiling height, colors, finish materials, furniture type, access to natural lighting, type of artificial lighting, location of electrical outlets, views to the outside, views of spaces inside, availability of outside seating, ability to move furniture, availability of speakers for music or announcements, and any other notable characteristics were recorded as well. Photographs of the exterior and the interior of each space were also taken and used as visual documentation.

OBSERVATION SESSIONS

Observation sessions assisted in the understanding of how the coffee shops were used and how the design related to the activities that took place in the space. Prior to the observation sessions, floor plans were drawn and copied for each coffee shop denoting walls, windows, doors, furniture placement, service areas, and any other important permanent or semi-permanent design features for use in accurately recording the people and activities that took place in the space. Each of the three coffee shops was observed for 25 hours each, for a total for 75 hours with care taken to observe on a variety of

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days and times. The researcher conducted all of the observation sessions, therefore inter-rater reliability was not an issue. The behavior of the patrons was documented with 862 patrons observed during the sessions. During each observation session, a copy of a floor plan was used to denote occupied seats. Detailed field notes outlining the activities of the patrons were also recorded. Each patron was assigned a letter on the floor plan which corresponded with the same letter noted in the field notes. This allowed the floor plans and field notes to be further studied at a later date and the activities in the coffee shop reconstructed. All observation notes were typed for use in coding the data with the corresponding floor plans attached for later use.

SURVEY

To better understand the preferences of the patrons, surveys were distributed in each of the coffee shops. Ninety-four surveys were completed, 31 in two coffee shops and 32 in another. The sample of survey respondents can be considered a nonrandom purposive sample. Care was taken to gather data at a variety of times during the day. In each of the three coffee shops, approximately 10 survey participants were chosen in the morning, 10 during the middle of the day, and 10 in the evening. It was considered important to survey patrons from various times of day due to the varied social climate in the coffee shops during these different timeframes. Every person who entered the coffee shop during the designated time frame was asked to participate in the survey. The researcher had the full cooperation of the management of each coffee shop. Of the 96 people asked to participate in the survey, only two declined to participate.

The survey had two parts and included both close-ended and open-ended questions. The first part of the survey asked each patron to evaluate the characteristics of the coffee shop they patronized while the second part asked what characteristics they would like to see in their ideal coffee shop. Questions were asked about characteristics of their ideal coffee shop, so the researcher could identify those attributes that were highly valued, and may even be missing from the coffee shop they frequent.

The survey included questions regarding the location of the coffee shop, how they got to the coffee shop, their preferred seat location, various acoustic, lighting, and ambient conditions, their socialization habits in the coffee shop, as well as questions on the design and décor found in the coffee shops. Finally, there were several open-ended questions addressing participants' feelings about the coffee shop and level of satisfaction with the community in which they live.

INTERVIEW SESSIONS

To further understand the coffee shop environment and the meaning these coffee shops held for patrons, interviews were conducted. To get a variety of perspectives, 18 interviews took place including 12 patron interviews, three employee interviews, and three interviews with the owner or manager of each coffee shop. These interviews were divided evenly among the three coffee shops. The interviews took place in the coffee shops, lasted approximately 45 minutes and were recorded with notes transcribed for later use in the coding of the data.

ANALYSIS

The data derived from the observations and interviews was analyzed qualitatively using coding techniques outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Microanalysis, open coding, axial coding, selective coding methods were used to examine the data. The coding began with microanalysis, sometimes referred to as line-by line analysis with lines, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs analyzed. All of the field notes from the observation sessions, open-ended survey questions, and interview transcripts were examined line by line in search of unique events involving the physical and social use of the coffee shops. This phase was followed by open coding, in which the data were broken down into discrete parts and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Physical and social events found to be similar in nature or related in meaning were grouped were grouped in categories. Many entries received more than one label because they fell into several categories. For example, the group of older men, who arrived at the coffee shop every morning, and pulled

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chairs together to talk would fall into coding categories related to their age, the way they modify the physical space, the fact that they socialized at length while drinking coffee, and were regular patrons. Notes from the interviews would also reveal that these men were retired and still enjoyed getting up early and “having to be somewhere.” While categories were assembled in the open coding process, axial coding also took place (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Open and axial coding are not sequential events, but proceed naturally together. This phase allows the researcher to look for answers to questions such as why, where, when, how, and with what results (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The last stage of coding is referred to as selective coding. This stage is the process of integrating and refining categories to form a larger theoretical scheme that eventually results in theory. From this process, four categories of findings emerged. These included findings related to the physical characteristics of the spaces, the social characteristics of the spaces, the people who patronized the spaces, and the feelings and attitudes of the patrons regarding the coffee shop and their community.

In addition to the qualitative analysis previously men-

tioned, the survey data was analyzed separately using Statistical Package for Social Sciences software. This survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequencies, and correlation analysis. The survey data revealed the highest rated design and ambient characteristics of each coffee shop, as well as those preferred in an ideal coffee shop. Correlational analysis was used to look at relationships between frequency of patronage, frequency of socialization, and satisfaction with life in the community.

FINDINGS

The findings will be broken down into the following categories: Characteristics of the coffee shops, characteristics of the patrons, and then each of the four research questions will be addressed and discussed.

Characteristics of the Coffee Shops: Coffee Shop 1

Coffee Shop 1 is a locally owned coffee shop near a major university and frequented primarily by students. This coffee shop is housed in what was once an old auto repair garage. The original brick walls and garage door contribute to the character of the space. Half of the coffee shop is at ground level while the other half is raised



Figure 1. Exterior View of Coffee Shop 1



Figure 1. Interior View of Coffee Shop 1

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Correlational analysis was used to look at relationships between frequency of patronage, frequency of socialization, and satisfaction with life in the community.

up three feet. Seating is located on both levels and includes tall tables with bar stools, smaller round tables with wooden chairs, one square table that seats four to six. The coffee shop also has one old upholstered chair that is very popular with patrons and is moved about as needed. The flooring is concrete, the walls are brick, and the lighting is primarily old refurbished chandeliers and track lighting. A long study bench that seats 10 people runs along the top level. Natural light comes in through three windows and two doors and primarily located on the north, northeast, and northwest ends of the building. The dominant colors are those of the brick walls, wooden furniture, and acid washed concrete flooring. The view outside includes a parking lot and major highway.

Coffee Shop 2

Coffee Shop 2 is a locally owned coffee shop located in a mid-town neighborhood and frequented by local residents who walk to the coffee shop, but also by a variety of community members who drive to the coffee shop. This coffee shop is housed in the back of the American Legion hall in what was once a storeroom. Seating is located throughout the coffee shop and at the service

bar and includes an eclectic mix of two-person tables, a futon sofa, and a few small upholstered chairs all purchased at second-hand stores. The floors are wood and carpet. The space is home to a museum that serves the American Legion Hall with photos of war planes and veterans. A piano sits near the entry and is often played by patrons during the evening. Colors are predominantly warm with wood floors, brown carpet, and brown wooden and plastic chairs. Canvas coffee bags adorn the coffee service area. Christmas lights that were hung years ago still adorn the service bar area. Local artists display work and the coffee shop holds art openings for the artists as well. A bulletin board overflows with announcements of local activities. Natural light comes in through the south facing windows, but the entire coffee shop is sheltered by two large live oak trees. In addition, this coffee shop overlooks a small lake popular with walkers and joggers.

Coffee Shop 3

Coffee Shop 3, a large national chain coffee shop with a bookstore attached, is located on a busy intersection. This is the only one of the three to be designed specifically as a coffee shop. Many college students patronize

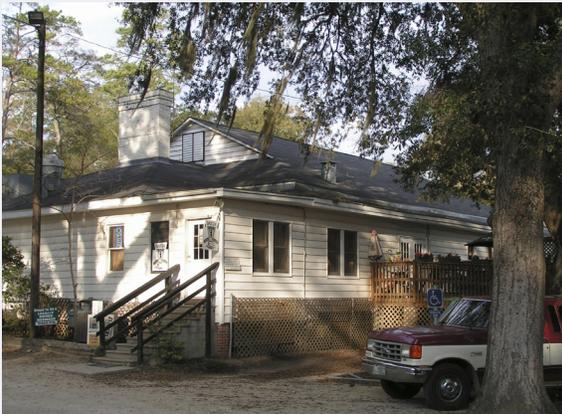


Figure 3. Exterior View of Coffee Shop 2



Figure 4. Interior View of Coffee Shop 2

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The top five characteristics of the ideal coffee shop included cleanliness, aroma, adequate lighting, comfortable furniture, and a view to the outside.

this shop, but there are also patrons from a variety of age groups. The seating in this space is uniform with the majority of the rectangular tables seating two people. The tables are wooden with laminate tops while the chairs are wooden with vinyl seat covers. A leather sofa, two large leather chairs, and a large round table are also available. Flooring is ceramic tile. Colors are predominately warm with yellow walls, wood surrounding the coffee service area, and wooden tables and chairs. Local art is hung on several walls. Natural light pours in from the south and west facing windows. The view includes a parking lot, a view of the drug store next door, and a major highway.

Characteristics of the Patrons

Table 1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the 862 coffee shop patrons observed in this study. The mean age of the coffee shop patrons was 30. It is interesting to note that two of the three coffee shops had a greater percentage of male patrons, with Coffee Shop 1, the former auto repair garage, having 59% male patrons. Another characteristic of note is the larger number of minority patrons (25%) in Coffee Shop 3, the large national chain coffee shop. The educational level

fell between some college and a bachelor's degree, which was not surprising in a college town (See Table 1).

FINDINGS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: *What physical characteristics and design features attract people and cause them to feel attachment to the coffee shop.*

Physical Design Characteristic Ratings

The survey included questions on the preferred design and ambient characteristics of the coffee shop respondents currently patronized. In addition, patrons were asked what design and ambient characteristics they would value most in their ideal coffee shop (see Table 2). They were asked about their ideal coffee shop because interviews and casual discussions revealed most patrons had suggestions on how their current coffee shop could be improved. Therefore the survey asked patrons to rate those characteristics they felt were most important and would like to see included in their ideal coffee shop.

The top five characteristics of the ideal coffee shop included cleanliness, aroma, adequate lighting, comfort-



Figure 5. Exterior View of Coffee Shop 3



Figure 6. Interior View of Coffee Shop 3

able furniture, and a view to the outside.

Cleanliness. Cleanliness was listed as the most important factor in the design of the ideal coffee shop. Although cleanliness is typically thought of as the responsibility of the management and cleaning staff, designers can influence cleanliness to an extent through the finish materials that are specified for floors, walls, and furniture, as well as the fabrics selected for upholstery. Materials that are easy to clean or camouflage soiling well are most appropriate in a high-traffic coffee shop environment.

Aroma. Respondents listed the aroma of the coffee shop as the second highest rated physical factor in the ideal coffee shop. As would be expected, the aroma in the three coffee shops came primarily from coffee and baked goods. Designers can use this knowledge and take advantage of aroma as a positive influence on the perception of coffee shop patrons. Ventilating systems in coffee shops could be designed to keep desirable smells in the space rather than venting them out. Robson (1999) discussed the technique of venting the oven to the front of the house to attract patrons and increase sales. Taking advantage of aroma is one tool to creating pleasant café experiences.

Adequate Lighting. Adequate lighting was listed as the third most desirable factor in the ideal coffee shop. Since many people read or study in the coffee shops, this is not a surprising finding. Preferred lighting levels are influenced by a number of factors including the availability of natural lighting, the color and reflective qualities of the finish materials, the type of artificial lighting illuminating the space, and the age of the patrons. Dur-

Coffee Shop	Mean Age	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other Minority
Coffee Shop 1 n=228	28	59%	41%	82%	9%	3%	4%	1%
Coffee Shop 2 n=228	32	54%	46%	91%	6%	1%	1%	1%
Coffee Shop 3 n=406	30	49%	51%	75%	16%	1%	5%	3%
Coffee Shops Combined n=862	30	53%	47%	81%	12%	2%	3%	2%

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Coffee Shop Patrons

Ideal Coffee Shop	n	Mean*	S.D.
Cleanliness	94	3.49	.635
Appealing Aroma	94	3.26	.717
Adequate Lighting	94	3.23	.725
Comfortable Furniture	94	3.14	.697
View to Outside	94	3.10	.868
Appealing Acoustics	94	2.96	.621
Appealing Music	94	2.96	.775
Access to Natural Light	94	2.95	.739
Appealing Decor	94	2.71	.757
Appealing Colors	93	2.63	.818
Visually Appealing	94	2.41	.822

*(1= Lowest Rating; 4= Highest Rating)

Table 2. Top Rated Design and Ambient Characteristics of the Ideal Coffee Shop

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As people age, their eyes need more light to see and this was clearly reflected in the seating preferences and comments from the over-forty patrons.

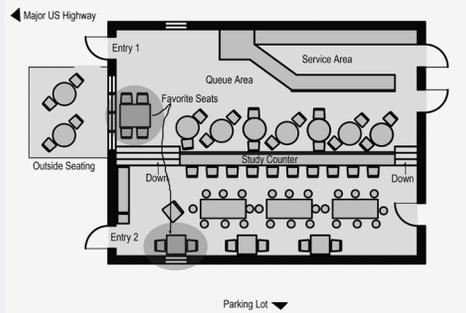


Figure 7. Floor Plan Indicating Favorite Seats in Coffee Shop 1

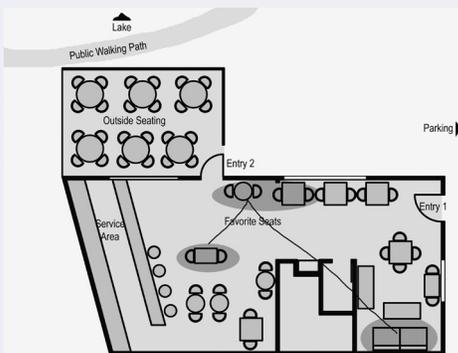


Figure 8. Floor Plan Indicating Favorite Seats in Coffee Shop 2

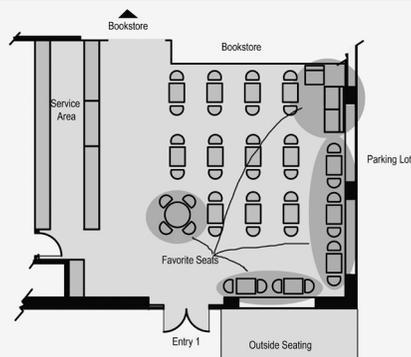


Figure 9. Floor Plan Indicating Favorite Seats in Coffee Shop 3

ing interviews with patrons, a number of patrons over forty emphasized the need for adequate lighting to read. As people age, their eyes need more light to see and this was clearly reflected in the seating preferences and comments from the over-forty patrons.

Comfortable Furniture. The fourth highest rated factor in the design of the ideal coffee shops was comfortable furniture. Although patrons clearly indicated a desire for comfortable furniture in their ideal coffee shop, they did not find it in the coffee shops they regularly patronized. Interviews revealed numerous complaints about the furniture in coffee shops 1 and 3. Observations showed patrons preferred the few upholstered pieces available in the coffee shops. In Coffee Shop 1, there was only one upholstered chair, which was an old, dirty mustard-colored chair that was constantly occupied. Patrons stated that it was the only comfortable seat in the shop. Sofas were also often used in Coffee Shops 2 and 3. When designing a coffee shop, owners and designers would be advised to find the optimum level of comfort to keep patrons coming in, but allow adequate table turnover at the same time. If the goal of the coffee shop management is to encourage lingering, comfortable seating helps to achieve that goal. However, if the coffee shop is concerned about seating availability and turnover, then less comfortable seats would achieve that goal. Robson (1999) explained that successful restaurants want seats that are comfortable, but not too comfortable. All of the three coffee shops experienced a high number of campers, those people who come to the coffee shop and stay for hours. This high number of campers was a problem for all of the coffee shops at some point in the day. Although patrons may prefer comfortable furniture, these campers would be more likely to linger if the furniture is comfortable, thereby contributing to the camping problem.

Views. The fifth-ranked design characteristic was access to a view. All of the three coffee shops provided views to the outside from some part of the space. The views to the outside offered access to nature, natural light, and the activity outside the coffee shop. The need

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Patrons were clearly drawn to sheltered seats, those with architectural elements that offered a physical structure on at least one side.

for a view and access to nature is not new as there is much evidence that access to nature is helpful to well-being (Pitt & Zube, 1987). Studies on environmental preferences show that preferences are based in part on the inferences regarding potential experiences within a setting (Scott, 1989). Scott found highly rated factors included the presence of interior windows and settings with natural contents in the form of plants and natural light. Dale (1982) found that people had stronger preferences for interior sitting areas that were partially enclosed and afforded a view to the adjacent areas or to the outdoors.

Layout and Seat Selection

The layout of any coffee shop is influenced by a number of things, including the original purpose of the building, size and shape of the space, architectural features, level changes, availability and location of windows, availability of views, the available seating, and the location of the coffee bar and service areas. The first layout issue to be discussed is how the interior space and the arrangement of furniture related to the seating preferences of the patrons. During observation sessions, the seating preferences of patrons were noted and the seats that filled first and those that were repeatedly occupied were considered the most desirable. In Coffee Shop 1, the favorite seats were sheltered somewhat due to their placement along walls, or next to the edge of the second floor level, which essentially created a partial wall (see Figure 7). The only preferred seat not sheltered by some architectural feature was the lone upholstered chair, reported to be the only comfortable chair in the coffee shop. This upholstered chair was moved frequently by patrons to accommodate their preferences. In Coffee Shop 2, all the favorite seats except one were also sheltered against walls or the counter (see Figure 8). In Coffee Shop 3, the seats along the walls were chosen first, with corner seats being the most preferred (see Figure 9).

The data showed that seats near windows, walls, and partial walls were most frequently selected. Patrons were clearly drawn to sheltered seats, those with architectural elements that offered a physical structure on at

least one side (See Figures 7-9). These sheltered seats were placed up against walls, windows, or level changes that provided a partial wall of sorts. Seats in a corner with shelter on two sides were most frequently selected in the two of the three coffee shops. Interviews with patrons revealed that they felt an element of protection when sitting against a wall or other fixed architectural element. In addition, they enjoyed the opportunity to watch other people come and go; therefore seats near a window, protected on at least one side but with a view to much of the interior, particularly the entry and exit doors, were viewed as more desirable.

There were also practical aspects of seat selection. For many patrons with specific tasks to perform, seats were selected that helped them accomplish those tasks. Seats near power outlets for plugging in laptops or adequate lighting for reading were often chosen by those with work to get done. In addition, for groups, the size of the table and the ability to pull two tables together also influenced seat selection.

Question 2: *What social interactions or human contacts attract people and cause them to feel attachment to the coffee shops?*

The second research question addressed the social interactions or human contacts that attract people and cause them to feel attachment to the coffee shops. In addition to the physical characteristics of the coffee shop, each shop had a social climate and culture as well. The physical characteristics of the space, the philosophy of the management, the attitude of the staff, and the characteristics of the patrons all influenced the social climate.

Frequency of Social Interaction

To begin the discussion on the social interaction occurring in the coffee shops, findings related to the social interaction patterns of each coffee shop will be discussed. Survey data showed the rate at which the coffee shop patrons reported interacting with the staff and/or patrons at the coffee shop (see Table 3). Patrons from

In addition to the pride and sense of ownership, patrons also exhibited territorial feelings toward various areas within the coffee shop, such as a favorite seat or place at the bar.

Coffee Shop 2 reported the highest number of people interacting with the staff and patrons. It was interesting to note that several patrons reported in interviews that they chose Coffee Shop 2 when they felt like socializing, but chose another coffee shop if they did not feel social or if they had to get a task done. Coffee Shop 2 also had the highest level of social interaction and more people sitting in groups than the other two coffee shops. It should be noted that the owner of Coffee Shop 2 believed strongly that the coffee shop should be a place for social interaction, hired and trained staff who felt the same way, and really pushed that agenda. To that end, she resisted providing outlets for laptops or wireless Internet to discourage solitary computer work and encourage conversation.

ASPECTS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Results from the coding and analysis of the interviews, survey data, and observations resulted in the emergence of six categories regarding the social aspect of the coffee shop. These themes include the opportunity to linger; ownership and territoriality; trust, respect and anonymity; productivity and personal growth; social beings and familiar strangers; and support. These themes are discussed in detail below.

Opportunity to Linger. One obvious, but key element in the social atmosphere of the coffee shop is the opportunity to linger. Unlike a restaurant where a bill is presented at the end of a meal, once a beverage has been purchased in a coffee shop, the patrons are typically welcome to stay as long as they like. The regulars who come in daily, and linger, influence much of the social climate of the coffee shop. Oldenburg (1999) said, "It is the regulars who give the place its character and who assume that on any given visit some of the gang will be there" (p. 33).

Coffee Shop	Frequency of Socializing with Staff			Frequency of Socializing with Patrons		
	n	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Coffee Shop 1	31	2.52	.724	2.48	.724	
Coffee Shop 2	32	3.10	.831	2.91	.963	
Coffee Shop 3	31	2.52	.890	2.45	.925	
Coffee Shops Combined	94	2.71	.854	2.62	.893	

(1= Never; 2=Rarely; 3= Usually; 4=Always)

Table 3. Frequency of Patrons Interacting with Staff and Other Patrons

Although much of the impetus for lingering may be influenced by the attitude of the management, friendliness of the staff and patrons, and other social characteristics, there are physical characteristics that contribute to lingering behavior. Comfortable seating, seating that can easily be moved to accommodate conversations or groups, adequate lighting to read and communicate with others, and pleasant ambient conditions including acoustics, music, aroma, and views all contribute to lingering and length of time spent in the coffee shop.

Ownership and Territoriality. Patrons who participated in this study felt a sense of ownership, sometimes even to the point of entitlement, in the coffee shops they frequented. They had strong preferences for their chosen shop, opinions on how the shop should be run, and some even walked behind the counter to serve themselves. Patrons were sometimes vocal regarding the perceived superiority of their coffee shop over others.

In addition to the pride and sense of ownership, patrons also exhibited territorial feelings toward various areas within the coffee shop, such as a favorite seat or place at the bar. One definition of territoriality is "the relationship between an individual or group and a particular setting, that is characterized by a feeling of possessiveness, and by attempts to control the appearance and use of space" (Bower, 1980, p. 180). During interviews, patrons were asked if they had a favorite seat or area of the coffee shop and over 90% responded positively. To secure these favorite seats, territorial behavior was exhibited in all of the coffee shop through the use of

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The coffee shop allows people to start anew or to portray themselves as someone other than who they currently are.

body language as well as the placement of belongings. Patrons marked their territories with books, backpacks, and other personal items to let others know they had claimed the seat.

Another interesting phenomenon that illustrated feelings of territoriality and ownership was the presence of campers, a term given by coffee shop staff to patrons who often sit and stay for hours. Campers are often students who use the coffee shop as an alternative to the library. Since this study took place in a college town, the number of campers in all of the coffee shops typically represented slightly over half of the patrons during the day and, in Coffee Shops 1 and 3, most of the patrons at night. Although they often bought food and beverages, their extended stays sometimes kept other patrons from being able to sit, which resulted in complaints to the management. The manager of Coffee Shop 3 described the problem when she explained, "I get complaints ... from regular working folks who want to come in and sit and enjoy the café, but they can't because they [often have nowhere to sit]." This was especially problematic in the late afternoon and evening. Coffee Shop 3, the large national chain, ran out of seats for patrons on a regular basis. In an effort to lessen the problem they printed signs that read, "As a courtesy, we request that you take into consideration that other café customers may need cafe seating for brief periods of time. This is especially important during periods of high volume." These signs appeared to have very little effect on the problem. These campers and their lengthy stays can not be overlooked when designing a coffee shop. Several months after this study was concluded, Coffee Shop 3 purchased small, round tables, to discourage lengthy stays. These small round tables had been successful in shortening stays at other coffee shops in the same national chain. However, at the time of this writing, the addition of smaller round tables appeared to have little impact on the camping problem in Coffee Shop 3.

Trust, Respect, and Anonymity. "It's all about trust; you have to know that they care about you and that it's a safe place," stated a patron who wanted to make it

clear what he felt was the most important aspect of the coffee shop. He felt that when a climate of trust is established, people feel welcome and able to be themselves. That was his primary motive for selecting his regular coffee shop and patronizing it on a daily basis.

Another intriguing aspect of the coffee shop was the opportunity for anonymity. The coffee shop is not home or the office, where roles and relationships are clearly established. The coffee shop allows people to start anew or to portray themselves as someone other than who they currently are. During one observation session, a twenty-something man was selling his belongings in a mini garage sale in Coffee Shop 2. He carried on a loud, boisterous discussion with a number of woman at the bar regarding his future as an actor. Regardless of what his future would bring, it seemed at that point in time, the coffee shop allowed him to be anyone he wanted to be.

Productivity and Personal Growth. Many patrons responded that the coffee shop is a place they went if they wanted to feel productive. For many students, particularly the campers, the coffee shop is an alternative to the library. During interviews, many students expressed a strong preference for the coffee shop over the library, stating the ability to drink coffee, people-watch, take a break and have a conversation, listen to music, and just avoid what they perceived as a sterile library atmosphere. For retired patrons, the coffee shop provided a place that could be part of maintaining a productive daily routine. Each of the coffee shops had groups of retired patrons who came to the coffee shop every morning to either drink coffee and read the paper, or drink coffee and chat with other patrons. Some were very social while others preferred watch the action. The majority of these retired patrons were men. Interviews revealed this daily routine seemed to replace their former routine of getting up and going to work. For professors and other professionals, the coffee shop was a place to meet or to get a particular task accomplished. Interviews revealed that working in the coffee shop often allowed these professionals to focus on a specific project without the distractions that would be found at

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Designers should remember that there are patrons who love the company of familiar strangers and would rather watch the action from a sheltered seat with a good view of the coffee shop.

home or the office. The coffee shops were also popular with teens doing homework or talking with friends. Causal conversations with the teens revealed they enjoy drinking coffee because it made them feel grown up, and gave them the opportunity to go somewhere other than a home to get together. They are out of the sight of parents and feel a greater sense of autonomy.

Social Beings and Familiar Strangers. The underlying concept behind this section is that a person's presence in the coffee shop somehow validates or confirms their existence as a social member of the community. Many patrons came to the coffee shops in groups, to meet friends, or spend lengthy time interacting with the staff. For them, the social atmosphere of the coffee shops was very important and they sought out conversation and interaction. For others, there was value in a daily routine that has a social component.

Many designers feel responsible, when designing restaurants, bars, or coffee shops, for creating spaces that facilitate social interaction. However, although designing for sociability is important, designers should also note that findings from this study indicated that not all patrons in the three coffee shops chose to interact, yet many received the benefits that one would expect from a social experience. For these patrons, the outing to the coffee shop was more about being in the presence of familiar strangers. In each coffee shop, there was a large percentage of patrons who enjoyed the atmosphere of the coffee shops, enjoyed seeing the same people every day, but who opted to watch rather than interact with other patrons. In fact, 38% of the patrons who came into the coffee shops in this study sat alone. A number of interviewees said they preferred sitting alone, but enjoyed seeing familiar faces even if they never talked with these patrons. They felt they had gotten out of the house, felt somewhat social, and their existence as a member of the community was confirmed. A quote from a patron explains this concept well. He said, "It's the whole idea that I've left my apartment and come to a new place that refreshes me." Another patron said, "I usually come alone; I will visit with the staff for a little

while, so I don't really feel alone once I get here". Regarding the value of watching other people, one patron said, "When I'm not in a hurry I'm people watching; I love to observe. I like to watch what is going on around me and that is a big part of the coffee shops; to see what people are doing." Designers should remember that there are patrons who love the company of familiar strangers and would rather watch the action from a sheltered seat with a good view of the coffee shop. For this group, there was perceived social value in their visit to the coffee shop.

Support. For many people, the coffee shop provides a place with a supportive group of acquaintances that enhances their overall well-being. Part of the social climate of the coffee shop is the support provided by the staff to other staff, the staff to the patrons, and the patrons to each other. Whether it is the opportunity for friendship formation and conversation, the ability to converse with someone in a similar situation or with a similar interest, or the opportunity to be alone in the company of others, the coffee shop can fill various needs for people. Staff provided support to patrons in that they were in the coffee shop every day and became part of the social fabric of the patron's lives. However, staff members were found to provided other tangible types of support to patrons including offering rides, assistance with car repairs, lending an ear during difficult times, or checking up on them when they were sick. Interestingly, interviews revealed patrons with long-established ties to the community, including family, friends, co-workers, and community groups, placed less value on their relationship with the coffee shop staff. It seems the newcomers and more transient patrons were more dependent on the support of the staff.

Although interviews focused on the patron benefits, there were many employees who expressed their appreciation with patrons as well. The owner of Coffee Shop 2 expressed her feelings for the support offered by patrons. She said, "I can tell you what it means to me. For me it is a lot of my social life; I have a small child, so I don't go out at night much. These are my friends, my

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The social factors listed in the model include the opportunity to linger, feelings of ownership, ability to territorialize, trust and respect, anonymity, productivity, opportunity to socialize, and support.

	Socialize with Patrons	Socialize with Staff	Happy In Community	Feel Part of Community	Length of Patronage	Frequency of Patronage
Socialize with Patrons						
Socialize with Staff	.750**					
Happy In Tallahassee	-.052	-.090				
Feel Part of Community	.200	.254*	.638**			
Length of Patronage	.252*	.308**	.164	.273**		
Frequency of Patronage	.479**	.492**	-.001	.158	.560**	

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); n= 94

Table 4. *Correlations Between Socialization, Length and Frequency of Patronage and Feelings Regarding Community*

support system. When we were closed for a week, I had a lot of people tell me how much they missed it. For me, it was a week without my support system.”

Question 3. *Is there a relationship between coffee shop patronage and feelings of attachment to community?*

One of the objectives of this study was to see if and how the coffee shop contributed to a sense of community for patrons. To examine the relationship between the coffee shop and feelings of attachment to the community, correlations were explored between several survey variables (see Table 4). Findings showed a significant correlation between the length of coffee shop patronage and feeling part of the community. In addition, a positive correlation existed between feeling part of the community and happiness with living in the community.

A MODEL OF PLACE ATTACHMENT IN THE COFFEE SHOP

Based on the findings of this research, a model illustrating factors involved in place attachment in the coffee

shop can be developed. This model includes both physical and social factors that this study indicates contribute to place attachment in the coffee shop (see Figure 10). The social factors listed in the model include the opportunity to linger, feelings of ownership, ability to territorialize, trust and respect, anonymity, productivity, opportunity to socialize, and support. The physical factors included cleanliness, pleasant aroma, adequate lighting, comfortable furniture, access to a view, pleasant acoustics and music conducive to conversation or reading, access to natural light, and appealing décor.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although this study sheds light on three coffee shops as potential third places or community gathering places, it raises new questions as well. For example, it would be interesting to better understand the differences between people who come to the coffee shop to interact and those who come to quietly sit and watch. What different needs do they have in the space and how can their needs be accommodated.

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Patrons were attached to their particular coffee shops for a variety of reasons, with each being unique to the person and reflecting his or her lived experiences, current life situation, and motivation for visiting the place.

Another unanswered question surrounds the financial aspects of running a coffee shop. This study did not set out to understand what it takes to keep a coffee shop running. However, further studies could shed light on what it takes to make a coffee shop financially solvent. How fast do the tables need to turn over? Is there an ideal square footage or number of tables, depending on the traffic and volume? What are the implications when campers sit and stay for hours and other patrons can't get a seat?

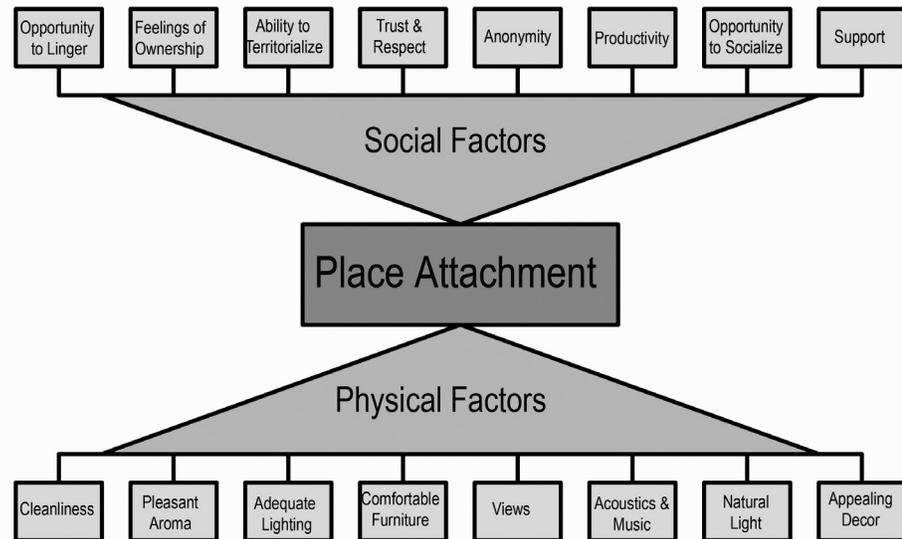


Figure 10. Place Attachment Model for the Coffee Shop

Many patrons mentioned their desire for cozy spaces. However, more study is needed on color and texture preferences in this type of setting.

Further study could also investigate more fully Oldenburg's (1999) criteria for third places to see how well they hold up in different situations. One of the fascinating aspects of this study included the number of people who were content to sit alone yet, despite the lack of verbal interaction, felt they had had a social outing. This raises questions about Oldenburg's criteria that conversation is a big part of the third place experience. Perhaps listening to the conversation of others or people watching does the same thing for some as actively participating does for others.

Another interesting study could involve general trends in third places. What other types of third places are becoming an integral part of the life in the twenty-first century? What other types of gathering places are relevant in today's society? It is important for designers of built environments to understand the value of place

and its integral connection of community building and social capital.

CONCLUSION

Lippard (1997) said, "The search for homeplace is the mythical search for the axis mundi, for a center, for someplace to stand, for something to hang on to." This quote emphasizes the importance of place and the value of place in the lives of people. The coffee shops represented in this study provided different things to different patrons. Patrons were attached to their particular coffee shops for a variety of reasons, with each being unique to the person and reflecting his or her lived experiences, current life situation, and motivation for visiting the place. Survey results reveal the top five characteristics in the ideal coffee shop are cleanliness, appealing aroma, adequate lighting, comfortable furniture, and a view to the outside. All of these characteristics can be directly influenced by good careful design planning. The layout of the coffee shop was also important with patrons preferring seats that sheltered them on at least one side. Preferred seats were next to a wall or fixed parti-

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Designers should consider the value that the built environment holds for creating community-gathering places that enhance the ability of people to connect with their community.

tion, ideally with a view to the outside. Outside seating was popular with smoker, patrons with pets, and those wishing to enjoy the out of doors.

Through surveys, interviews, and observation sessions, the study revealed a number of social benefits to patrons. Some of the social benefits included the opportunity for people to linger, to feel a sense of ownership and establish a territoriality. Feelings of trust, respect, and anonymity, the opportunity for productivity and personal growth, the choice to be social or to enjoy familiar strangers, and enjoy a support systems of patrons and staff were also important social aspects. For some patrons, it was just nice to know that the coffee shop was there and they could stop in if they wanted to. For this group, the coffee shop was just one small part of their social life, and the absence of the coffee shop would only create a small void. However, for others, particularly those with limited ties to the community, the coffee shop served as a very important part of their social life. These people might be new to the community, students without long-established social ties, or others, who for one reason or another did not have a strong social network. For this group, the ability to come into the coffee shops alone and linger was a huge benefit.

Overall, regular coffee shops patrons felt a strong at-

tachment to their chosen coffee shop as well as the community in which they resided. There was a positive correlation between length of patronage and feelings of attachment to the community. Designers should consider the value that the built environment holds for creating community-gathering places that enhance the ability of people to connect with their community.

Putnam's (2000) concern with the decreasing social capital and attachment to community in the United States must be addressed on a number of levels. There is no one simple solution. Putnam challenges Americans to strive for the following goal, "Let us act to ensure that by 2010 Americans will spend less time traveling and more time connecting with our neighbors than we do today, that we will live in more integrated and pedestrian-friendly areas, and that the design of our communities and the availability of public space will encourage more casual socializing with friends and neighbors" (p. 408). Many of Putnam's goals are the responsibility of designers. Whether these designers are urban and regional planners, engineers, architects, or interior designer, all have a role to play in creating spaces that meet human needs and enhance well-being. Part of that thoughtful design must include places and opportunities for connecting with fellow citizens to create a stronger attachment of place and community.

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