IMAGINING HOME AWAY FROM HOME:
WI-FI USE IN SUBURBAN COFFEHOUSES

Tracy L. Elledge
Arizona State University

K. Hazel Kwon
Arizona State University

Introduction

Along with exponential advances in mobile computing technologies, mobile device-based Internet use in Western countries has skyrocketed, often referred to as the mainstreaming of "next generation users" (NGUs) (Blank & Dutton, 2012), or as the "mobile revolution" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). One of the more remarkable aspects of the mobile revolution is the societal shift from group-bound networks to dispersed connectivity, a gradual change that has been in motion since the mid-20th century (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). As wireless Internet connectivity continues to gain popularity, (semi-) public spaces have started to reemerge as irreplaceable spheres wherein private-ness and public-ness can coexist. While some scholars have expressed concerns about privatizing public spaces, and the subsequent risk of losing community culture (Hampton & Gupta, 2008), others have highlighted the potential of public Wi-Fi in collocating individuals who might have otherwise decided to avoid public spaces (Hampton, Livio, & Goulet, 2010).

The current study is in line with existing scholarly endeavors to understand public realm practices within contemporary socio-digital environments. Previous research has focused on downtown urban settings where exposure to the public realm is a natural part of a citizen's everyday life (Hampton & Gupta, 2008; Hampton et al., 2010). This paper extends prior discussions by exploring *suburban* areas where residents' lives have been said to be particularly isolated from a sense of community and have also been said to experience a loss of social capital because of it (Putnam, 2001).

Considering that coffeehouses have become one of the most common realizations of networked semi-public spaces, we conducted participatory observations and interviews at multiple coffee shops located across various suburbs of a major metropolitan area in the Southwest. The goal of this study is two-fold: First, our study attempts to enrich the ongoing discussions about the use of Wi-Fi in semi-public spaces (i.e., coffeehouses) by categorizing different types of visitors. In doing so, we integrate the cultural discourse

of home (Oldenburg, 1989; Wise, 2000) into the literature of networked individualism (Wellman, Quan-Haase, Boase, Chen, Hampton, Diaz, & Miyata, 2003). Second, through a participatory study, we attempt to draw some insights on the role of Wi-Fi coffee shops in transforming the culture of public space in general, and of coffeehouses in particular. We also drew insights about redefining community life in suburban areas. Before discussing the field observations and interviews, the paper begins by examining the evolving nature of home, community, and public spaces in suburban life, and how the progress of these places is much indebted to the evolution of communication technologies.

Literature Background

Home Anywhere
"The first place is the home—the most important place of all" (Oldenburg, 1989, 16). Not long after Oldenburg made this statement about the first place, a large part of what it meant to be at home was to enjoy the advantages each new wave of equipment brought to domestic life – such as refrigerators, dishwashers, dryers, and microwaves. Although initially skeptical, families moved away from always pickling and salt-curing to utilize the fridge and microwave, moved away from trying to line-dry indoors during a storm to throwing wet clothes in the dryer. Following this logic, Lee (1999) asserts that continuous use of technologies creates a routine that incorporates those technologies into everyday experience of 'being at home'. Communication technologies are no exception - the more accustomed users are to relying on technology as part of their daily communications routine, the more technological products are marketed as person-centered devices and services. This shift toward individuation generated a deeper move that drove device use specifically to the private realm (home) (Graham & Marvin, 1996), partially because the ability to operate technology at home was once predicated on the basic rule that all connections were wired. Thus, consumers had to stay "physically rooted to fixed personal computers and Internet connections at home, work, school, or public places" (Wellman, et al., 2003, Netville section, para. 6).

While the original conceptualization of home was defined by physical fixation or bound location, a societal shift of dispersed connectivity has loosened the place-based notion of home. According to Wise (2000), home is *not* a static location: "We mark out places in many ways to establish places of *comfort*" (p. 297) – for example, a way of indicating a space is temporarily claimed is throwing a coat over a chair to save a seat. Conceptualizing home based on a feeling of comfort, as opposed to location, means the notion of home is applicable to any place a person feels comfortable (Wise, 2000).

The traditional idea of home is built on the separation of public and private life. While the widespread use of the Internet via the personal computer has long been associated with the private home rather than a public space, many researchers have challenged the home-centric assumption when attempting to understand users' Internet experiences (Hampton, Lee, & Her, 2011). Being exposed to various environs while engaging in online activities, individuals experience messaging that is "ideologically divergent or absent from the intimate networks of the private realm" (Hampton et al., 2010, 703). Distinguished from private home use, connecting to the Internet in a public space involves the interaction of three different realms – private, public, and global – at

the moment of user engagement: online activity is an isolated act from collocated others, which is understood as an extension of the private realm; at the same time, the online activities are enacted with some degree of awareness of others' presence, understood as an extension of the public realm; finally, online activities could embrace a variety of social networking and information consumption easily expanded to a global scale, which is understood as an extension of global realm (Graham & Marvin, 1996). As more individual users connect to online networks on an increasingly global scale, the line between public, private, and global blurs even more, which enhances the concept of "home anywhere."

Since ties to a place no longer hamper connections made, technology allows for "shifting of work and community ties from linking people-in-places to linking people at any place" (Wellman, et al., 2003, Rise of Networked Individualism section, para. 4). Rainie and Wellman (2012) characterize "networked work" to be work culture in which productivity is assumed even though the employee is away from the office. Indeed, it should come as no surprise that telework at home saw an upswing in the 1990s (Graham & Marvin, 1996), after the original division between work and home that the suburbs helped facilitate in the 1940s started to come together. While Oldenburg (1989) stated that the first place is home and the second place is work, the line has been greatly blurred concurrent with the rise of "bit" workers and networked work culture (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Suburbs
As technological advancements made it more profitable and effortless to work from home, the suburbs started to lose the distinct separation for which they were specifically created (Henderson, 1986). Suburbia is a space that researchers find difficult to define, but regardless of the different ways in which social scientists approach the issue, popular culture representations generally do not paint the 'burbs' in a positive light. In fact, suburbia has been called a "nightmare of isolation" (St. Antoine, 2007, 128), "sterile, monotonous, illiberal, consumerist, bourgeois" and "villainous in every way"(Jack, 2008, 37), "defined negatively as being neither urban nor rural" (Vaughan, Griffiths, Haklay, & Jones, 2009, 482), and a space that "led to a breakdown in community and the evisceration of the public space" (St. Antoine, 2007, 128). There was even a television show called 'Suburgatory' that implied suburban areas are a form of punishment or limbo for those souls unfortunate enough to end up there. The tagline for the show was "Escape is not an option" (Kapnek, 2011). Foster (2012) commented on pop culture and the 'burbs by stating that most forms of entertainment (film, stage, TV, etc.) constantly critique the suburban lifestyle.

Thankfully, although it may have been perceived negatively, the collective mind of the 'suburban area' continues to treat its ignoble history with a certain amount of self-deprecation. Thus, the suburbs manage to thrive, especially because of associations with creative high-tech industries in locations like Silicon Valley, California (Vaughan, et al., 2009) and because of the fact that "the most ordinary of suburbs of most cities now act as hubs in the growing electronic cacophony of global image and media flows and the ongoing participation of people in virtual communities" (Graham & Marvin, 1996, 380).

The suburb of even ten years ago is radically different than the suburb of today. Flew, Gibson, Collis, and Felton (2012) state that today's suburbs are centers of work, and that researchers have started to move away from the widely agreed upon notion that the suburban lifestyle is one of consumption. They assert that suburbs have become their own entities that do not require the big city, because the people living outside of the city are increasingly likely to also work outside of the city – whether in the suburb of their residence, or simply another suburb nearby. The old idea that the suburbs are breeding grounds for "desperate housewives" or a culture of consumption is turned on its head as, "…many suburbs are themselves centres of work and industry" (Flew et al., 2012, 200). If the suburbs are becoming self-contained extensions of an earlier existing city, then they are more than work or home (or a combination of the two) as they contain certain elements of lifestyle choice and leisure pursuits. In the context of changing suburban culture in the recent decade, the presence of networked public spaces may play its own unique role in enriching the aspect of community in suburb culture beyond the dichotomized realm of the first (home) or second (work) place.

Networked Third Place
At the time Oldenburg published *The Great Good Place*, it was true that individuals spent the greatest portion of their time at home, followed by work, and whatever leftover time to be had was spent in a third place. "The third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals…" (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 16). Oldenburg (1989) also stated that the third place was "…the people's own remedy for stress, loneliness, and alienation…" (p. 20). While work could be considered a gathering of individuals and a remedy for loneliness, and home can be considered a remedy to stress, neither of them can provide the opportunity to combine the private and the public in a way that does not upset societal norms. Moreover, many researchers suggest that exposing oneself to many different opinions and perspectives beyond one's comfort zone is beneficial to sustain democracy and political tolerance (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2006). While technology and Internet use are generally "associated with higher levels of participation in traditional settings that support the formation of diverse networks" (Hampton, et al., 2011, 1035), it remains to be seen to what extent Internet use in the third place contributes to exposure to different groups of others.

Oldenburg (1989) cites the coffeehouse as one of the more dynamic and transformative third places, and the background of this place supports a long history of sociability mixed with learning opportunities. For example, the rise of the Internet used to result in cyber café phenomenon, which has been described as a resurrection of "the original notion of the coffee-house where people gathered to read newspapers, gossip and generally do what is now called networking'" (John Naughton, as quoted in Lee, 1999, 336). Combining the support of a virtual network with the atmosphere of the coffeehouse is a modern way of finding a balance between life outside of the first and second place while maintaining the comfort of first place life and the mental engagement of the second. Lee (1999) simplified the concept by stating, "The café environment makes internet use more of a social activity than a 'gadget' to indulge in at home" (p. 344). And, Oldenburg (1989) rationalized merging the second and third places by commenting that, "Many people keep regular hours at the coffeehouse and conduct a variety of business transactions on its premises" (p. 197).

Coffeehouse ambiance does not simply enhance social activities; it also allows visitors to use the Wi-Fi for leisure or telecommuting, thus enabling them to treat the shop as an extension of home. Increased online activities at coffee shops may reflect scholarly concerns that Wi-Fi networks deteriorate public space culture through privatization and the loss of the Habermasian "public sphere" (Hampton et al., 2011). Similarly, other concerns may arise regarding the disappearance of the serendipitous encounters that help society experience the world through varied perspectives, and open channels for novel opportunities (Hampton et al., 2010), as was mentioned with regard to users spending too much time online in isolation.

Coffeehouses and Community
When discussing the coffeehouse as the quintessential third place, especially when the coffeehouse is in the suburbs, it is imperative to consider its function as a buttress to the community. "In order for the city and its neighborhoods to offer the rich and varied association that is their promise and their potential, there must be *neutral ground* upon which people may gather" (Oldenburg, 1989, 22). Oldenburg was speaking of the third place, and was also speaking to the generally agreed-upon notion that it is important to have a life outside of the home and the workplace. Even though the home can act as a gathering place, someone always has to be in charge. Often, the host is managing their own stress even as they strive to enjoy the atmosphere of their gathering. Since work is supposed to be focused on the bottom line and accomplishing tasks, even though people may gather there, a hierarchy exists that would not allow for a feeling of complete ease.

Wellman et al. (2003) said that a community consists partly of people who know each other who choose to interact socially. The full definition of what they term a 'neighborhood community' is a "bounded geographical area in which many of the residents know each other" (Rethinking Sociability section, para. 1). Third places offer the ideal space to maintain and expand community. Hampton et al. (2011) uphold that notion by agreeing "public spaces are where existing social ties are maintained, but occasionally they are also a source of serendipity—chance encounters with acquaintances or potential new friends" (Hampton, et al., 2011, 1034).

Interestingly enough, Mesch and Levanon (2003) argue that utilizing "a local geographically-based computer-supported network" will more likely create ties than "a geographically-dispersed virtual community" (p. 337). While coffee shops in neighborhood may be an integrated part of the community in the same way a favorite bar may create a feeling of neighborliness among the regulars, they also provide a space for efficient, brief encounters that can be imperative for fostering community interactions. Given their potential role as a part of vibrant community life, thriving coffeehouses are an important element for sustaining a lively suburb society. As Oldenburg (1989) pointed out, one way to ensure coffeehouse prosperity is to keep them current to the times. In the contemporary networked environment, the vogue is technological, and offering free Wi-Fi is an essential part of keeping the place up-to-date. As Hampton et al. (2010) suggest, free Wi-Fi access "may reshape the public realm. Because of its location, it may revitalize, repopulate, and improve safety of public spaces. Because of the electronic connectivity it offers, it may reduce social inequalities

and increase the use of public spaces" (Hampton, et al., 2010, 701-2). In other words, the more time people spend out in the public arena – due in part to free Wi-Fi – the more opportunities exist for imagining a community among the visitors. It is a unique space where visitors are allowed and often encouraged to form new connections with strangers (e.g. baristas or regulars), while at the same time networking with strangers in the virtual realm accessed via Wi-Fi (Antoci, Sabatini, & Sodini, 2014).

In summary, despite becoming highly commercialized and causing some concerns about privatization, coffee places may be reimagined as an additional source of community life. The homey atmosphere developed through interior design, musical arrangement, *and* mobile connectivity makes co-presence among strangers more relaxing and comfortable. Coffeehouses offer a particularly singular space for efficient and brief gatherings, which are often facilitated by free Wi-Fi. The attractive combination of home, workplace, public place, and global reach is a unique characteristic of contemporary coffeehouses as a third place, which could re-invite suburban residents, once lamented to be isolated from each other, back to networked community life.

Research Design

This study attempts to expand the aforementioned literature about networked community, cultural notion of home, and the role of Wi-Fi in third place, by specifically highlighting the role of coffeehouses in suburban communities. Our field study was intended to respond to the research questions: (1) How does Wi-Fi motivate and construct patrons' social activity patterns in suburban coffeehouses? (2) What kind of cultural properties are emergent from patrons' activities in suburban coffeehouses?

The observations were conducted in 20 different Starbucks coffeehouses located in the various suburbs around a large city in the Southwest. The sites were selected because of their suburban locations, and because Starbucks shops provide a measure of uniformity and proliferation. In February and March 2015, four different main observers and two researchers conducted 63 separate visits for a total of 132 hours of observation. The main foci of observation: (1) visitors using mobile devices; (2) social interaction patterns; and (3) visitors' behavioral patterns and seating. The first 54 hours of visits – made by researchers and observers – only required field notes about the patrons' movements and device use. After the observations at 20 different shops, we narrowed the focus to four sites representative of different suburbs of the larger metropolitan area. At the start of each of the subsequent 78 hours, the observer would draw a map of the location, noting the location of each patron, whether they were using a mobile device, and whether they were alone or with others.

Main observers also conducted 20 separate recorded field interviews, each lasting between 15-20 minutes, during their visits. The interviewees were asked a series of questions about their personal experiences of device use in coffee shops, their general routine, their opinions about free Wi-Fi, and how they would construct their own ideal coffee shop. They were rewarded with a $10 Starbucks card. Observers also kept a field diary for each hourly session to record experiences, thoughts and insights, as well as their personal opinions of the people they interviewed. On a weekly basis, a one-to-

two hour meeting was held among the observers and researchers to discuss their findings and thoughts, relate interesting incidents, and listen to the interviews together.

Results

Notes on Observed Interaction Patterns

To make sure to cover different times and days, we initially spread out the observation time slots. In total, 54 hours of observation were made during morning hours (between 5am and noon), 40 hours during afternoon hours (between noon and 5pm), and 38 hours during evening/night (from 5pm before 10:30 pm). Table 1 presents the time distribution.

TABLE 1. Observation Times (Total hours = 132)

Time	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
5:00 AM		1	1	4			
6:00 AM		1	2	4			
7:00 AM		2	2	4		1	
8:00 AM		1	2	1		2	1
9:00 AM		2	3	2	1	2	2
10:00 AM			2	2		2	2
11:00 AM			1	2		1	1
12:00 PM			2	1		1	
1:00 PM		1	1	1	1	2	
2:00 PM		1	1	2	1	2	
3:00 PM		1	1	1	2	2	
4:00 PM			11	2	1	2	
5:00 PM	2		2	2			
6:00 PM	2	1	2	1			2
7:00 PM	3	2	1	2		1	3
8:00 PM	4	1					3
9:00 PM	1	1					1
10:00 PM		1					
Total Hours	12	16	34	31	6	18	15

In addition to recording time slots, we also mapped user interactions and seating patterns for 78 hours. Not surprisingly, the most frequently observed seating and activity pattern was a single user using at least one mobile device (N = 354). However, dyadic interactions were as commonly observed as a single user sitting at a café (N = 376 in 188 pairs). There were 168 visitors observed interacting in a triad or bigger interaction form (45 groups). The least frequently observed pattern was a single person sitting without using any mobile device (N =56). This last pattern was mostly found to include an elderly person reading a book or a newspaper. Figure 1 presents different interaction patters we have observed in coffeehouses.

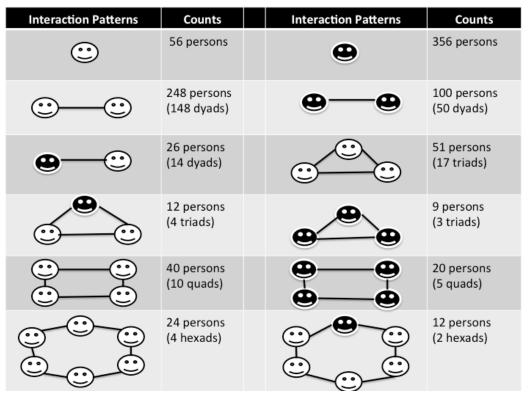| Interaction Patterns	Counts		Interaction Patterns	Counts
	56 persons			356 persons
	248 persons (148 dyads)			100 persons (50 dyads)
	26 persons (14 dyads)			51 persons (17 triads)
	12 persons (4 triads)			9 persons (3 triads)
	40 persons (10 quads)			20 persons (5 quads)
	24 persons (4 hexads)			12 persons (2 hexads)

Figure 1. Interaction Patterns Observed for 78 Hours in Coffeehouses: light face = non-mobile users at the moment of observation; dark face = mobile users at the moment of observation.

Visitor Typology

From the observations, interviews, and discussions, we drew five categories of visitor that stood out in the end: motivated users, motivated non-users, passive visitors (also referred to as "bubble people"), spectators/bystanders, and obnoxious overusers. The labels are not mutually exclusive, although certain categories cannot be paired with others – for example, it is impossible to be passive and obnoxious at the same time.

Motivated User

The motivated user was labeled as such because they came to the coffeehouse for a specific purpose (other than coffee), and knew they would be using a device while they were there. The motivated user has a meeting that requires device use, is meeting in a study group with online components, is working on a device by alone for more than an hour, and may potentially use more than one device. This was the second most common type of coffeehouse visitor. These people were students, business people, or highly connected people not using the free Wi-Fi for work or school – and the Internet was more to them than just a distraction to kill time.

One observer stated that these people often seemed to be in an "invisible cubicle" either in the style of an office, or a study carrel in the library. The watchword of the motivated user is "productivity." Interviewees who commented on this type of use (or were this type of user) often said that trying to work at home is "too distracting" and that being at the coffee shop is "energizing" because there are people working all around you, and the invigorating smell of coffee helps with focus and "makes studying more efficient."

The coffee shop also helps the user feel more comfortable meeting in a group to get work done because noise is not a factor, and no one has to feel uncomfortable hosting everyone else at a private home. Informal, quick interviews revealed that many visitors fell into this category because the coffeehouse is "a place to come and relax and use Wi-Fi away from home."

Motivated Non-User
A motivated non-user is someone who has a reason for being at the coffee shop (e.g. a meeting, caffeine addiction), but does not use a mobile device while they are there. That is not to say that do not have other distractions, such as a book or newspaper, but they do not get on a device. Many motivated users are at the Starbucks to get together with a friend, or attend a meeting. Older people were mentioned most often in regard to this category, as many go there as a part of their daily routine – read the paper, catch up with friends, even meet for Bible study. Younger people are the least likely demographic to end up in this category, but do occasionally if they are meeting someone and do not check their phone. The motivated non-users seemed to gravitate to the "comfy chairs" as proximity to a plug was not a concern. A single motivated non-user does not have to rely on a device, as one observer witnessed a woman dumping out her purse and sorting the mail from the trash. The woman then brought out a calculator and proceeded to pay her bills, effectively blurring the line between the private and the public.

Passive Visitor (Bubble Person)
Passive visitors were the most common type of patron, and could be users or non-users. The moniker "bubble person" comes from Hampton et al. (2010), "Mobile bubbles of private and parochial interaction within the public realm erase or significantly curtail the potential for interaction between strangers and mobile users" (p. 705). This is probably why many observers characterized passive users as being "in the zone" or "shut off from any interaction." Passive users also use their device as a shield so they do not have to interact with others, such as when a person pulls out their phone and looks to be texting while they're waiting in line or to pick up their drink.

Passive non-users will use some other form of device shield such as a newspaper. Device "shields, behind which individuals can safely do the kind of things that ordinarily result in negative sanctions" (Goffman, 1963, 39), come into play when people would rather not interact with those around them. Lee (2005) asserts that "People compensate for being alone and feeling vulnerable in these situations by using self-defense mechanisms to justify their singular presence in public spaces" (Lee, 2005, 813).

One observer was the second visitor to arrive at the coffeehouse one morning, and the only other person in the place did not acknowledge that anything had changed, "I don't even think he realized I walked in and sat." Observers also noted that people tended to choose seats that were a table apart from others (if such seats were free), and would spread themselves out over the table to claim the space as their temporary home. An interviewee commented that the free Wi-Fi would cause more isolation, but that if a person wanted to talk, they'd talk and if they didn't, they wouldn't.

Spectator/Bystander
Spectator/Bystanders did not have a reason to go in to the coffee shop – maybe a parent or a friend wanted a coffee, or maybe they're just waiting to meet a friend out front. The biggest part of this category is that these people do not feel the need to use a mobile device as a shield against the public at large. These visitors are content to people-watch and generally don't want to get involved.

Obnoxious Overuser
Both the interviewees and the observers had a lot to say about this type of visitor. This is the person with no regard or respect for others, and treats the whole world like their private home. They can be loud, apathetic, and completely inconsiderate. "It's the worst when you're sitting down with someone and they're glued to their phone." One interviewee lamented, "Kids today….gets me in a tizzy!" She's referring to when people are in a twosome or group, but one or more of them is constantly checking their phone. One observer saw a man conduct a videoconference over Skype with flagrant disregard for the other visitors – he treated the shop like his own closed-door office.

Many times, obnoxious overusers irritate others by using their phone. One observer reported that a woman was on her phone (with no consideration for volume), and almost as soon as the call ended, she would be on the phone with someone else, and "she didn't seem to mind that she was being rude to the people around her." Another problem that came up more than once was when someone would stay on their phone while they were ordering. Observers reported that both baristas and other visitors were visibly annoyed when these people came through the line.

Volume is not the only problem with obnoxious observers, as many of them suffer from chronic distraction as well. For example, people would be so focused on their phone or device on their way into the shop they would run into people in line. One last example of an obnoxious overuser stood out above all others. A woman had her device, her phone, and a *portable printer*. She was not overly loud, but she was certainly distracting.

Emergent Properties of Shared Place
Wi-Fi as an Inherent Element of the Coffeehouse Experience
"In the era of its reign, which some set at two hundred years, or from 1650 to 1850, the coffeehouse was often referred to as the Penny University" (Oldenburg, 1989, 185). For a long time, traditional English coffeehouses were places of enlightenment where rank did not matter, and everyone was free to learn and debate and speak freely. Laborers and dockworkers could learn how to read, and everyone was interested in the latest edition of the local news. It seems as though coffee shops like Starbucks are attempting to recapture that feeling of learning, albeit in a much more modern way. The observers saw people come in to the stop for the sole purpose of using the free Wi-Fi, and among these people, most of them were students. The norm of the traditional educational coffeehouse lives on in current shops.

When attempting to identify norms in the modern coffeehouse, the observer must view things with the understanding that the visitors will come into the situation with an ideal version of the shop in their head. When asked to describe their own idea of a perfect coffee shop, almost all interviewees' first answer was free Wi-Fi. And, most of them

were of the same opinion as Schmidt and Townsend (2003): "…providing wireless connectivity is so inexpensive that charging for access is as counterintuitive as installing a pay phone in your kitchen" (The Impact of the Free Wireless Movement section, para. 1).

Emergent Norms as an Amalgam of First, Second and Third Place
Outside of Wi-Fi, the coffeehouse is an amalgam of the first, second and third place. During an observer's early morning visits, it was noted that people were bringing their own breakfasts from home to enjoy with their coffee. "In a way the coffee shop acts like a kitchen table; it is a place to eat breakfast, yet it doubles as a workstation." This observer brought up the very valid point that many people eat their breakfasts at their desks at work, making this statement a perfect example of the merging of the different types of places. A secondary observer struck up a conversation with another patron and ended up making a networking connection with a line on a potential job after graduation. This situation ties an original purpose of the coffeehouse – networking – to the idea of the coffee shop as a second place.

Time of day brought another round of norms into the discussion, as it was more natural for older patrons to frequent the shop in the morning, and younger visitors to come later in the day. Volume also depended on time of day, as observers reported loud music sometimes and "library silence" in others.

Another norm is built upon layout and seating. Many observers noted that people tended to spread out as much as the space allowed, trying to sit at least a table away from other visitors – "The tables the visitors sat at may as well have been islands in the middle of the ocean." The one exception to this was when motivated non-users, spectators/bystanders, or bubble people would come in. Often, they would select the more comfortable seating grouped into conversation arrangements.

Trust in Place
"…Users of new technologies alter customary social distances among citizens. To manage the anxieties that result from these shifts, they must invent new conventions of social trust appropriate to these new technologies" (Lee, 2005, 811). Many of the interviewees, as well as the observers, made the comparison of urban vs. suburban coffeehouses. One observer remarked that if they were in a different location (an urban location), they would not be able to trust the patrons at the same level they do in the suburbs. All of the observers noticed patrons leaving high-end devices unattended while they stepped out to the restroom or their car. Occasionally, they would ask a fellow visitor to watch their things, but either way, they had to trust that their things would be there when they got back. Observers and interviewees agreed that the trust they felt in the suburban coffeehouses would not translate to an urban setting.

Revitalizing a Sense of Neighborliness
The most important role the coffeehouse can play in today's world seems to be that of community-builder. The suburbs have a long history of being looked down upon even as they become more self-sufficient communities that are less reliant on the "big city." Throughout the data-collecting phase, the observers noted example after example of people coming together in serendipitous ways. An observer noticed an older couple

struggling to perform a function on one of their phones. The observer stepped in and showed the couple how to accomplish a few simple tasks, and spent a few minutes getting to know the couple. Another observer wrote of an older man that made it a point to say hello to everyone in the shop, with a few personalized phrases to the regulars he recognized. As one interviewee said, coffee shops seem to play a unique role in community life: "honestly, I can't think of any (public gathering place similar to coffeehouses)".

In another example, a customer was heard asking the baristas their opinion on what college her son should attend. The observer stated that the customer seemed "like an aunt figure to the young baristas." The lady also said that she was proud of the baristas and told them to "keep up the good work." The last example of community building through suburban coffeehouses speaks to the chance encounters one might miss if they don't leave their first or second place. One of the observers spoke with a group of people they assumed worked together because they were all in business attire, and seemed to know one another really well. It turns out, they had all been visiting the Starbucks at the same time and finally decided to introduce themselves. Now, they make it a point to meet up and discuss their lives, ask advice about work, and enjoy one another's company for a while. The use of mobile device actually facilitated their socializing activities. All of these examples establish a positive relationship between the suburb and the coffeehouse.

Conclusion

Although the project began as a seemingly simple observation-based piece of research, it ended up as a glimpse into a cross-section of life in the suburbs, and a deeper study of the nature of community and connectivity. The coffeehouse has become one of the only places where people can feel the comfort of home, the productive atmosphere of work, and the social opportunities of the third place.

Wi-Fi was a unifying component – no matter which suburb the observer was in, no interviewees would make do without free Wi-Fi, and most spoke of Wi-Fi as an absolute – there is no feasible reason for shops to *not* offer a connection. Thus far, things seem to be holding at equilibrium despite researchers' fears that community culture would be lost, or that public spaces would become even more privatized. Coffeehouses have evolved into hubs that are so much more than local watering holes. Far from creating a community of isolation, coffee shops are getting people out of the house and into the real world.

References

Antoci, A., Sabatini, F., & Sodini, M. (2014). Bowling alone but tweeting together: The evolution of human interaction in the social networking era. *Quality & Quantity*, 48(4), 1911-1927.

Blank, G., & Dutton, W. H. (2012). Age and trust in the Internet: the centrality of experience and attitudes toward technology in Britain. *Social Science Computer Review*, *30*(2), 135-151.

Eveland, W. P., & Hively, M. H. (2009). Political discussion frequency, network size, and "heterogeneity" of discussion as predictors of political knowledge and participation. *Journal of Communication*, *59*(2), 205-224.

Flew, T., Gibson, M., Collis, C., & Felton, E. (2012). Creative suburbia: Cultural research and suburban geographies. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(3), 199-203.

Foster, D.W. (2012). Erma Bombeck: The Phoenix suburban underbelly. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(1), 27-40.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in public places: Notes on the social organization of gatherings*. New York: Free Press.

Graham, S., & Marvin, S. (1996). *Telecommunications and the city: Electronic spaces, urban places*. New York: Routledge.

Hampton, K.N., & Gupta, N. (2008). Community and social interaction in the wireless city: Wi-Fi use in public and semi-public spaces. *New Media & Society*, 10(6), 831-850.

Hampton, K.N., Lee, C., & Her, E.J. (2011). How new media affords network diversity: Direct and mediated access to social capital through participation in local social settings. *New Media & Society*, 13(7), 1031-1049.

Hampton, K.N., Livio, O., & Goulet, L.S. (2010). The social life of wireless urban spaces: Internet use, social networks, and the public realm. *Journal of Communication*, 60, 701-722.

Henderson, K. (1986, May 4). Tracing the genesis of suburbia. *Los Angeles Times*, 20.

Humphreys, L. (2005). Cellphones in public: Social interactions in a wireless era. *New Media & Society*, 7(6), 810-833.

Jack, I. (2008, December 20). We are all suburban now: In popular culture the suburbs are always somewhere we long to escape from. Not true. *The Guardian*, 37.

Kapnek, E. (Creator). (2011). *Suburgatory* [Television series]. Burbank, CA: American Broadcasting Company.

Lee, S. (1999). Private uses in public spaces: A study of an internet café. *New Media & Society*, 1(3), 331-350.

Mesch, G.S., & Levanon, Y. (2003). Community Networking and Locally-Based Social Ties in Two Suburban Localities. *City & Community*, 2(4), 335-351.

Mutz, D. C. (2006). *Hearing the other side: Deliberative versus participatory democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The great good place*. New York: Paragon House.

Putnam, R.D. (2001). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rainie, H., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: The new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: Mit Press.

Schmidt, T., & Townsend, A. (2003). Why Wi-Fi wants to be free. *Communications of the ACM*, 46(5), 47-52.

St. Antoine, T.J. (2007). Making heaven out of hell: New urbanism and the refutation of suburban spaces. *Southern Communication Journal*, 72(2), 127-144.

Vaughan, L., Griffiths, S., Haklay, M., & Jones, C.E. (2009). Do the suburbs exist? Discovering complexity and specificity in suburban built form. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34, 475-488.

Wellman, B., Quan-Haase, A., Boase, J., Chen, W., Hampton, K., Diaz, I., & Miyata, K. (2003). The social affordances of the internet for networked individualism. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 8(3).

Wise, J.M. (2000). Home: territory and identity. *Cultural Studies*, 14(2), 295-310.