Beyond the Physical Realm: A proposed theory regarding a consumer's place experience

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By Mark Rosenbaum, Ph.D.

Abstract

Marketers view place as a marketing mix tool that denotes activities associated with the distribution of products and services. Thus, the discipline believes that places are alienated from consumers' lives and experiences. This article looks at the place concept anew and offers an original theory of consumers' experience in place.

Introduction

The concept of place is well engrained in the marketing discipline as a basic marketing mix tool that refers to distributional and to organizational activities associated with making products and services available to targeted consumers (Kotler 2000, p. 87). As a result of this conceptualization, it is not surprising that marketers perceive that places are isolated from consumers' personal lives and experiences. Indeed, pundits often chastise contemporary retailers for creating an urban marketplace that represents a rendition of human alienation and that is replete with impersonal, cold relationships between buyers and sellers. This perception of place, as a mere subdivision of physical space (Sherry 2000), is especially prevalent among marketing researchers who adhere to the regional school of thought (Sheth and Garrett 1986; Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988). Researchers, in this school, consider marketing as a form of economic activity that bridges the geographic gap, or spatial gaps, between buyers and sellers (see Grether 1983). Consequently, these researchers are guided by a philosophy of consumption which espouses that general laws exist for predicting spatial regularities between consumers' residential location and their selected shopping areas. Although regional researchers have been developing models since the 1930's, no encompassing marketing theory has yet emerged from their endeavors (Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988).

Marketing's conceptualization of place has been unwavering since

its inception in the early 1960's (McCarthy 1960); however, as the discipline entered the new millennium, Sherry (2000) suggested that all is not sanguine with it. Sherry's (1998, 2000) point of contention with the place concept is that marketers deem consumption settings, or servicescapes (Bitner 1992; Sherry 1998), as being comprised of physical elements (Turley and Milliman 2000). Thus, he believes that marketers fail to consider that places may also be comprised of intangible, symbolic realms, which may be integral to consumers' personal worlds and experiences.

Rather than consider that consumers view places as points-of-exchange where they satisfy essential consumption needs, Sherry posits that places have different dimensions of meaning for consumers, based upon their personal experiences in them. In addition, he speculates that the impact of these meanings, on consumer behavior, ranges on a continuum from the subtle to the profound.   However, like Trickster, Sherry (1998, 2000) stops conjecturing mid-stream; leaving future researchers with the challenge of generating a theory of consumer's being-in-place.

The goal of this article is to heed Sherry's (2000) challenge by conceiving a theory that (1) illustrates why and how consumers experience places in their lives, (2) uncovers major antecedents that impact consumers' place experience, (3) links place experience to patronizing behavior, and (4) is parsimonious, relevant, and modifiable.
The theory serves as a milestone for marketing as it addresses a chasm in the marketing mix. Namely, that marketing mix, along with its consideration of place as distribution, is not entirely complete, is somewhat inconsiderate of consumers' needs, and focuses on investigating unidimensional relationships between stimuli and responses, rather than on the much richer concept of exchange relationships (van Waterschoot 2000; van Waterchoot and Van den Bulte 1992). To date, the majority of place studies in marketing have attempted to discern stimulus-response regularities between specific environmental conditions (e.g., music, crowding, scent) and consumer behavior (Bone and Ellen 1999; Chebat and Dube 2000; Chebat and Michon 2003; Harrell, Huff, and Anderson 1980; Hightower, Brady and Baker 2002; Milliman 1982; 1986). Although this research is insightful, a limitation of this methodological philosophy is that marketers construe that consumers simply react to environmental stimuli. Thus, marketers have essentially failed to consider that consumers may seek out and patronize places as

a response to internal, unfulfilled needs. Consequently, marketers are estranged from fully comprehending the interconnectedness that often exists between consumers and places.

For too long, marketers have been content with permitting sociologists to explore the evocative relationships that consumers in consumption settings such as taverns, taxi cabs, department stores, second-hand stores, and coffeehouses (Lofland 1998 for review) often form with other customers and employees. Because sociologists have conducted their studies primarily via participant observation, their research is rich in description, yet it lacks theoretical conceptualization. Hence, sociologists have failed to offer research propositions that explain the preponderance of behavior regarding how and why consumers transform consumption settings into significant centers of personal experiences. Thus, the proposed theory represents a first attempt to unravel and to describe the experiential nature of place, from the consumer perspective, and in doing so, it offers an explanation as to why and how places become meaningful for some consumers.

The plan for this article adheres to Cunningham and Sheth's (1982) suggestions for writing a theory development piece, as well as to established grounded theory methodological procedures (Glaser 1998; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 2001; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The article commences with a historical review of environmental, and place, research in marketing. The review is used to expose a shortcoming in the discipline's current stance towards place and to buttress Sherry's (2000) request for its reassessment. Next, I present the proposed theoretical framework that emerged from the data and provide a brief explanation of its conceptual categories. Then, I turn our attention to developing and to defining each conceptual category, one "block" at a time (Cunningham and Sheth 1982). I conclude the article with a discussion of possible future research endeavors and of research limitations.

The Study Of Place In Marketing

Marketing's pursuit of place originates with the 1931 publication of William J. Reilly's, *Law of Retail Gravitation* (Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988; Sheth and Garrett 1986). Reilly's objective was to develop models that espoused rational and economic regularities concerning consumers' spatial movements into the marketplace. Since then, other researchers, primarily those in the regional

school, have continued to pursue the development of general laws regarding consumers' movements into shopping areas (Craig, Ghosh, and McLafferty 1984; Grether 1983 for reviews). Because regional researchers believe that consumers initiate movement into the marketplace solely as a response to unfulfilled consumption needs, and that these spatial movements are perceived as costly endeavors, they assume that consumers formulate rational and economic decisions regarding their decision to patronize specific shopping areas (e.g., patronizing closest stores to residence). Although this assumption is typically sound, it is highly susceptible to a fundamental weakness that limits its theoretical generalizablity. However, to expose the weakness in the place concept, we must turn to ecological theory.

Ecology refers to "the study of the interrelations between organisms and their environment" (Stokols 1977, p. 7; Bonnes and Secchiaroli 1995). Encouraged by Darwin's research, biologists began developing ecological theory in the early 1900's by investigating how organisms collectively respond to objective stimuli that are present within a spatially-bounded area. By the 1930's, ecological theory entered other fields, such as sociology, geography, economics, and marketing, as researchers searched for general laws to explain individuals' collective movement into spatially-bounded areas. These beliefs gained further entrée into marketing as gravitationalists (Converse 1949) and behaviorists (Huff 1964) sought to discover logical relationships between consumers' residential locations and their decision to select specific shopping destinations.

Ecological perspectives also entered marketing via environmental psychology, most notably with the work of Barker and the publication of *Ecological Psychology: Concepts and Methods for Studying the Environment of Human Behavior* (Barker 1968). Barker applied traditional psychological stimulus-organism-response thinking to environmental studies by assuming that individuals respond to observable stimuli (e.g., noise, and temperature) that are present within a specific environment, or "behavior setting." For example, Baker stated, "To laymen they (behavior settings) are as objective as rivers and forests - they are parts of the objective environment that are experienced directly as rain and sandy beaches are experienced" (Barker 1968, p. 11). Barker's research, and methodological philosophy, influenced the work of other environmental psychologists, including Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and Russell and Ward (1982), who influenced the work of marketing researchers,

including Kotler (1973/1974), Belk (1975), Lutz and Kakkar (1975), Donovan and Rossiter (1982) and Bitner (1992).

Kotler (1973/1974) was one of the first researchers to explore the impact of objective environmental stimuli on consumers' behavior. He coined the term, atmospherics, to denote stimuli present in the "air" that all customers, in a specific consumption setting, respond to via their senses. In a similar fashion, Belk (1975) and Lutz and Kakkar (1975) sought to uncover situational variables, such as store location and appearance, which influence all customers in a specific consumption setting, at a specific point in time. In contrast to isolating specific time and place stimuli, Donovan and Rossiter (1982) found that consumer approach/avoidance behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of a broad range of objective properties contained in a consumption setting. Bitner (1992) expanded upon Donovan and Rossiter (1982) by conceptualizing the properties inherent in a consumption setting's built environment, or servicescape, which evoke behavioral and social responses from customers and employees.

By drawing upon theories and disciplines that all share a common lineage to ecology, it is understandable as to why marketers conceptualize places as being comprised of physical, objective elements that work in harmony to evoke consumer approach and avoidance responses. Accordingly, this is not to say that the present conceptualization of place is entirely awry; however, it is not entirely complete.

The Place Concept's Theoretical Weakness Exposed

In a classic essay, Firey (1944) puts forward that ecological theory is based upon two premises. The first premise postulates that individuals regard spatial movements (e.g., making a trip to the mall), as being costly and impeditive to their daily routines. The second premise assumes that individuals are economizing, "fiscal" agents. On the basis of these two premises, individuals are said to formulate rational, cost-minimizing decisions regarding their movements into specific spatially-bounded areas. Although ecological premises are by and large solid, Firey (1944) points out that they are susceptible to a major shortcoming. Namely, ecological premises, along with its theoretical offshoots, which espouse that individuals formulate rational and economic spatial decisions, fall by the wayside when individuals imbue a specific place with sentiment due to the nature

of their social relationships held with others in the place. Therefore, if consumers instill a commercial establishment with emotion due to the nature of social relationships that they sustain with others in the place, then marketing frameworks designed to predict approach/ avoidance behaviors, such as servicescape and atmospherics, may no longer be entirely valid.

Although it is odd to fathom that some consumers sustain meaningful social relationships with others in commercial establishments, consider the regulars who routinely gathered at Cheers, the fictionalized Boston-bar "where everybody knows your name," or with Homer Simpson at Moe's. Furthermore, the psychosocial literature is replete with studies that illustrate that some consumers, typically older-aged adults, form emotionally-laden relationships with customers and employees (Cheang 2002; Day 2000; Lofland 1998 for review).   Thus, places must exist, in the marketplace, which serve as prime forums for hosting meaningful social relationships— *meet the third place*.

The Third Place

Third places denote places outside of home and work (which represent the first and second place, respectively) where people gather to enjoy each other's company (Oldenburg 1999, 2001; Oldenburg and Brissett 1982). Third places are typically eating or drinking establishments, such as simple, or even run-down, neighborhood pubs, diners, or coffee shops where a group of customers, referred to as a regulars, routinely gather (see Tuan 1974 for "fields of care"). Even though the physical surroundings of third places are often unadorned, the internal atmosphere of these establishments is vivacious as the regulars come together in these establishments to engage in sociability and lively banter. This is not to say that every neighborhood diner or tavern represents a third place. Third places are viewed from a customer's perspective. Thus, although a group of regulars may consider a place such as a neighborhood McDonald's a third place, other customers may consider the same establishment as a straightforward, point of exchange.

For nearly a century, marketing researchers have considered the impact of place on behavior from an ecological perspective. Therefore, the discipline has generated a plethora of macro-level research regarding the impact of observable environmental stimuli

on consumer behavior and has generally accepted the philosophy that place is alienated from consumers' personal lives.   Yet, this predominant methodology of consumption, which espouses the unearthing of environmental stimulus-response regularities, has constrained marketing researchers from looking beyond a place's physical realm and into its intangible realm. In fact, researchers have not fully explored the psychological and social significance of a place, and, are unable to fully understand the particularity of place as a consumer's lived experience (Sherry 2000)--until now.

Theoretical Framework

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FIGURE 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

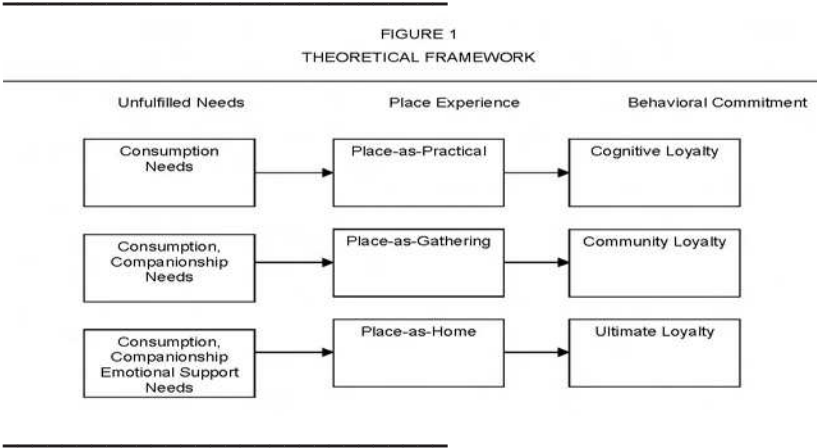| Unfulfilled Needs	Place Experience	Behavioral Commitment
Consumption Needs	Place-as-Practical	Cognitive Loyalty
Consumption, Companionship Needs	Place-as-Gathering	Community Loyalty
Consumption, Companionship Emotional Support Needs	Place-as-Home	Ultimate Loyalty

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Figure 1 illustrates the proposed theoretical framework that emerged from adhering to grounded theory methodological procedures (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001; Strauss 2001; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The framework breaks the traditionally held perception that consumers simply experience places in order to satiate utilitarian, consumption needs (Bagozzi 1975) and that they only respond to objective environmental stimuli present within a consumption setting. Indeed, the framework illustrates conditions under which consumers may be encouraged to actively seek out and to patronize places and how consumption settings may become associated with widely-shared social meanings and personal, psychologically-oriented meanings.

The framework is centered upon the proposition that consumers instigate marketplace movement in order to successfully resolve

consumption-oriented needs, socially-oriented companionship needs, and psychologically-oriented emotional supportive needs. As such, the proposed model brings the place concept into the consumers' perspective. Rather than suggest that place is conceived as activities that organizations "do" to consumers (van Waterschoot 2000), the model proposes that consumers determine the purpose of entering specific consumption settings by opting to experience them as either place-as-practical, place-as-gathering, or place-as-home. Place-as-practical is conceptualized as a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy a consumption need. Place-as-gathering refers to a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy both consumption and companionship needs. Lastly, place-as-home is conceptualized as a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy consumption, companionship, emotional supportive needs.

Therefore, the model supports Sherry's (2000) claim that place is more than subdivision of space that is separated from consumers' personal lives. In actuality, feelings of unity and interrelationships may emerge between consumers and places as they deem certain commercial establishments as not only forums in which they satisfy consumption needs, but also forums in which they exchange feelings of human togetherness with others. In essence, the proposed framework brings the concept of place into the relationship paradigm by putting forward that consumers transfer their warm-hearted feelings for people in a specific place to the place itself. Therefore, marketers do not need to refute their current conceptualization of place; as a place is a physical locale where buyers and sellers come together to engage in utilitarian exchange activity. Yet, our goal is to expand the place concept and to posit that beyond the physical realm, places can also be conceptualized as repositories and contexts within which interpersonal relationships among customers and employees occur (Low and Altman 1992), and it is to those social relationships, not just place qua place, to which consumers become loyal to.

In the following sections, I first discuss the methodology that was utilized in this study and then we turn attention to defining and to developing each of the framework's conceptual categories.

Methodology

Purpose of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an appropriate methodology when the focus of the investigation is on theory generation versus theory verification. Grounded theory is a general methodology that yields the generation of substantive theory from data that is systematically obtained and analyzed. The term, general methodology, is utilized because while it is true that grounded theory is inductive methodology, meaning a theory is induced after data collection begins, it also contains a deductive element. Namely, grounded theorists use deduction to derive, from induced patterns of collected data, which groups, or subgroups, to sample next during the data collection process in order to generate a reliable, broad-based, substantive theory (Glaser 1978; Strauss 2001). This technique, which is unique to grounded theory, is referred to as theoretical sampling. The key difference between grounded theory methodology and traditional deductive methodology is that researchers do not deduce research propositions from pre-existing frameworks; but rather, from emerging relationships between conceptual categories.

More specifically, theory emerges when researchers generate patterns, denoted by categories, and their related properties, from collected qualitative, or quantitative, data. A property refers to an aspect of a category, while a category encompasses a set of related properties. Conceptual categories represent the components that comprise a theoretical framework and the relationships between the categories represent propositions that can be empirically verified in future studies. The propositions can be put forward in either a "discussional" format or a "frozen" statement.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) established the basic rules of grounded theory methodology; however, they separated in later years, each continuing to refine the methodology. A point of contention between the researchers is that Glaser posits that free-forming theoretical structures should be permitted to emerge from data, while Strauss (2001), later joined by Corbin (Strauss and Corbin 1998), espouse that data *could* also be exposed to pre-established theoretical structures, such as those produced by axial coding, in order to assist with forming a core category (Strauss 2001; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Glaser 1992). Although this difference in methodological ontology has generated debate, the value of the debate is actually quite minimal (Strauss 2001) as the methodological foundation of

grounded theory has always remained germane to both Glaser and Strauss. Regardless of which school of thought grounded theorists utilize, key grounded theory methodological aspects, such as the core category, open coding, selective coding and theoretical sampling, should appear in each and every grounded theory study (Strauss 2001).

Interestingly, although many marketing researchers have employed grounded theory methodology (Flint, Woodruff, and Gardial 2002; Manning, Bearden and Rose 1998; Mick and Founier 1998; Noble and Mokwa 1999), many researchers have become lax in there adherence to fundamental grounded theory methodological requirements. Therefore, an objective of this article is to clarify the process of theory creation, via grounded theory methodology. In doing so, this article illustrates how researchers can successfully field original theories that encapsulate the consumers' perspectives, rather than opt to borrow theories from disciplines far removed from marketplace realities.

Methodological Overview

The first task of a grounded theorist is to analyze collected data in order to develop and to define the core category. The core category represents the main concern of the participants in the study. All of the other conceptual categories in the theoretical framework relate to the core category. The core category emerges during the initial stage of theoretical analysis, referred to as the open coding process. The mandate of open coding is that a researcher analyzes data patterns without having preconceived notions regarding the categories that will comprise the core.

It is worth noting here that one can argue that researchers cannot possibly enter the field without possessing preconceived notions, and hence, the methodological rigor of grounded theory is often questioned. However, this argument can be countered by the fact that a key reason why researchers employ grounded theory is that an insufficient amount of extant theory exists regarding the phenomenon in question. Additionally, if researchers decide to employ grounded theory in order to reconsider a topic that appears to be theoretically exhausted, or if they possess a significant knowledge of related literature, then they must engage in "stepping back" (Strauss 2001). Strauss coined this term to refer to a researcher's ability to momentarily set aside his or her knowledge

of the extant literature in order to develop the core category without having conceptual biases. The bottom line is that grounded theory is designed to provide researchers with autonomy to freely conceptualize categories, to determine possible relationships among the categories, and to assume ownership of original theoretical ideas. If researchers collect data that simply supports the existence of known concepts, then emergent theories will be trite and unlikely to be published in quality, peer-reviewed journals.

During open coding, a researcher reads collected data, which may be quantitative or qualitative, in an attempt to identify incidents. An incident refers to a phrase or a few sentences that are indicative of a categorical property. Researchers conceptualize theoretical categories by grouping similar properties together.   Open coding terminates when the core category emerges.

Once the core category is conceptualized, a grounded theorist employs selective coding. Selective coding refers to a process by which a researcher delimits coding to only those variables that relate to the core category in sufficiently significant ways that generate relevant and parsimonious theory. During this process, a researcher may search collected data, or obtain new data, in order to discover conditions, consequences, and so forth that relate to the core and that complete the theory. To acquire an understanding as to the types of questions that may require probing, researchers may turn to literature for guidance, often in unfamiliar fields, as relevant literature emerges in conjunction with theory emergence. After all of the theoretical categories have been developed, researchers turn to theoretical coding, which refers to offering the relationships between categories as propositions that can be empirically verified using traditional survey or experimental techniques.

Generating Theory by Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling refers to a means by which a researcher decides which groups or subgroups one turns to next in the data collection process and for what theoretical purpose.   The purpose of theoretical sampling is to generate a relevant theory by assessing whether the conceptual categories that comprise the emerging framework are supported by other data from different samples or whether the data supports the conceptualization of additional conceptual categories. Hence, in order to maximize theoretical relevancy, Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser 1978) urge researchers

to collect and to constantly compare data from groups that are "apparently non-comparable" due to demographic differences such as location, age, religion, or ethnicity. Thus, theoretical sampling, along with the comparative analysis of data from different groups, or subgroups of individuals, helps to ensure that the emergent theory is expanded and refined by constantly considering collected data with data collected from comparison groups. Although researchers may theoretically sample indefinitely, it ceases at theoretical saturation. At theoretical saturation, the researcher is confident that the emergent framework is relevant, parsimonious, and modifiable for future research.

Sampling Plan

Fifty-six depth interviews with customers (44), employees (8), managers (2), and the owners (2) at Kappy's, a casual dining restaurant located in a suburb of a large Midwestern city, during two data collection waves. The first data collection wave, which represented the open coding stage, consisted of interviewing 15 customers and the owners, George and Gus, during a three-week period. The second data collection wave, which represented the selective coding stage, occurred three months later and lasted for two weeks. During this time, 29 additional customers were interviewed along with eight employees and two managers. The open coding and selective coding stages will be discussed in depth in later sections.

Kappy's opened in 1979, replacing a former "Big-Boy" restaurant and older-aged Greek, Italian, and Jewish customers typically patronize it. The restaurant's exterior is basically non-descript, but its interior is fully of vitality and sounds of lively banter. When customers walk into Kappy's, George, the owner, greets his regular customers by their first name and kisses them hello. Then, George escorts the regulars to their usual seating areas. In fact, George has embossed several booths with brass names plates that denote regulars' names and serve to demarcate their usual seat location. For instance, Kappy's regulars, such as Toby, Jean, Max, and Anna, tend to sit in the corner booth, so their brass name plates are affixed to that particular booth.

Kappy's was elected as the sample site because its patrons seem to vary widely in terms of their behaviors with respect to the restaurant. For some customers, Kappy's is simply a place where they purchase a meal or buy a cup of coffee. For others, Kappy's is a place where

they "hang" two to three times a day, seven days a week. These customers are the regulars whose personal worlds are often deeply intertwined with the restaurant, more specifically, to their social relationships held with others in the restaurant.

Another reason why Kappy's was selected for study is that the primary author's mother had become a regular at the restaurant after she experienced the death of her husband. Therefore, the author was able to immediately join several eating groups in Kappy's and to obtain rich insights from customers in a naturalistic manner. This personal connection to Kappy's customers greatly enhanced the ability to collect rich, personal data (Lofland and Lofland 1995). In addition, the author's personal connection to the study is critical in grounded theory studies as the methodological procedures are time consuming as the emergent theory is typically slow to emerge and the relationships with categories are often difficult to define (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 2001). In addition, George, managers, cashiers, and the servers all assisted in the primary author in collecting data as they were enthused about the interest that the author displayed regarding the role that Kappy's plays in its customers' lives.

The interviews were theoretically sampled in a manner that maximized variance in data responses. For example, the primary author helped the restaurant staff open the restaurant. By doing so, the author was able to conduct interviews with regulars, typically older-aged retired, widowers, who volunteer their time at the restaurant to help the staff prepare for its opening. After the restaurant opens, these men move to their usual seats at the counter. Throughout the day, the primary author was personally introduced to different other regulars, via George, the managers, employees, or by his mother. In addition, interviews were conducted with customers who eat with large groups at Kappy's, such as members of the "Boys Club," the "Wednesday Night Bowling League," the "Thursday Night AA meeting," the "Village Hall Breakfast," the "Tuesday Synagogue Group. Finally, interviews were conducted with customers who patronized Kappy's simply to "get a bite to eat." The personal introduction served to set a tone of immediate comfort as most customers would ask the researcher to join them at their table while they ate. In fact, over the course of study, several of the regulars assigned the nickname to the primary author as "prof". Interviews were also conducted in the restaurant's enclosed waiting area, or outside of the restaurant, in order to

interview customers who do not maintain social relationships in the restaurant.

Open Coding

The open coding stage of grounded theory represents the initial stage of a grounded theory. As I previously discussed, the goal of this stage is to delimit the core category. Because researchers enter the field without possessing a clear understanding of the primary research problem, the questions asked of informants typically change during this data collection stage. In addition, because a grounded theory study focuses on understanding people's actions and interactions related to a particular situation, it follows that some people are more involved in the situation compared to others. As a result, the depth and length of the interviews varies across the informants. For example, in this study, interviews with customers who simply stopped at the restaurant for a meal would last five to ten minutes, while interviews with regulars often lasted an hour.

The primary author wrote detailed notes, representing informant quotes and personal observations, during each interview. Each informant was permitted to read, and to delineate, his or her statements. Memos, which represent a compilation of researcher thoughts and comparisons of the interviews to one another, were written at various breaks throughout the day. In fact, the restaurant permitted the primary author to set up computer equipment at the Boy's Club booth in order to transcribe notes and observations during the day.

Consistent with Glaser's (1998, 2001) and Strauss' (2001) recommendations, interviews were not tape-recorded. Both Glaser and Strauss profess that researchers should focus on writing field notes by listening intently to informants and that listening is dulled by a researcher's reliance on a tape recorder. Also, taping slows down data collection because transcription yields a plethora of unnecessary data to code. Finally, tape recorders often inhibit the free-flowing responses of informants. Pilot interviews revealed that older respondents provided much richer data when the interview results were manually, versus tape, recorded. Overall, 250 pages of field notes were collected.

Place Experience as the Core Category

The purpose of grounded theory is "to account for a pattern of

behavior which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser 1978, p. 93). As such, the core category of this study centers upon uncovering the manner in which Kappy's customers experience the restaurant and the role that it assumes in their lives. In order to develop the core category, each interview began with questions such as "why are you at Kappy's today" or "what does Kappy's mean to you." To maximize data variance, five interviews were each conducted with customers whom George denotes as family, relatives, and friends. As George said:

> *We have three types of consumers. I call the first group the family. They are the regulars that we take care of. They're the base of our clientele. They represent fifty to sixty percent of the business. They're typically here at least five times a week. The second group is the relatives. They're semi-regulars who are in once a week. They tend to restaurant hop, although they love the name recognition and warm feeling that they get at Kappy's. They represent thirty percent of the customers here. The third group of customers is the acquaintances, not friends. They typically come in with coupons for a purpose, like a quick nit. A lot of them don't come back. They represent 20% of my customers.*

In addition, in order to maximize theoretical sensitivity, referring to a researcher's ability to be sensitive to thinking about data in theoretical terms (Strauss 2001), the primary researcher altered sampling so that different types of customers were continuously interviewed one after the other.

Place-as-Practical

The customers who were personally unknown by the staff, or the acquaintances, tended to point out that Kappy's is simply a place where they satisfy food and beverage consumption needs. Many of these customers stated that they patronize Kappy's because it is a place where they can purchase quality meals at reasonable prices and that is located near their homes. For these customers, the restaurant is merely a place of exchange activity that is isolated from their personal lives. When they were inquired about what Kappy's means to them, these customers were stupefied. For example, a customer said:

> *I live downtown. My mom lives in the neighborhood, so I'm here about once every two to three months. We only have breakfast here, no lunch or dinner. That's it (F, early 30's).*

Another customer mentioned that the restaurant is only acceptable for lunch:

I only came to Kappy's today because I had a $5.00 coupon. There is nothing outstanding here. The food was average and we had a good waitress. It was fine for lunch (F, late 30's).

Overall, the incidents in the data collected from these informants revealed that they patronize Kappy's merely as a response to unfulfilled consumption needs. For example, incidents that explained why these informants were at Kappy's included phrases such as, "to have breakfast," "to get a bite," or "to get a cup of coffee." As a result, these incidents, or properties, were brought together under the category, place-as-practical. Place-as-practical is then conceptualized as a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy a specific consumption need. Therefore, this conceptualization of place, from a consumer's perspective, corresponds to the discipline's present conceptualization of place, as a locale where buyers and sellers engage in utilitarian exchange activities.

Place-as-Gathering

In contrast to the acquaintances who patronize Kappy's solely to purchase a meal or beverage, the relatives, who typically dine with friends in the restaurant, discussed that in addition to eating, they patronize the restaurant to socialize, to kibitz, or to "hang" with the group. A Boy's Club member said:

The Boy's Club…On Taylor Street, there were all clubs, not gangs, clubs. But, when you move to the suburbs, it's all different. At some point, you don't even know who lives next door to you. And, George, one day, said I'm going to build a booth, a special booth, for us…the Boy's Club (M, 72).

For these customers, Kappy's is a place where they eat and socialize:

The food is excellent, quality and quantity, and the service is excellent. They josh around with you here. It's a lot of kidding around. They're friendly. They got to know our names, all of them (M, 87).

As the social camaraderie may be more valuable than the meal itself:

> *We get camaraderie for our money; the latest jokes, commentary on whatever is in the news or sports team in Chicago, a wager here or there. If the food wasn't good, we would still be here. The food might have brought us in, but it has become more than that (M, 65).*

In excerpts from these customers, the incidents revealed that they patronize Kappy's not only to eat a meal but also to gather with their commercial friendships (Price and Arnould 1999). For example, the incidents that explained why these customers were at Kappy's included phrases such as "to have fun," "to josh with the girls," "to kibitz," or "to socialize." These incidents were considered as properties that were subsumed in the category, place-as-gathering. Place-as-gathering is conceptualized as a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy consumption and companionship needs. This category transcends the discipline's view of the place concept, as a mere subdivision of space, into a space in which they sustain meaningful social relationships.

Place-as-Home

The richest data arose from the family members, referring to regulars who patronize Kappy's with alacrity two to three times a day, five to seven days a week. The typical Kappy's regular is an older-aged, or elderly, widow or widower, who is also retired and who resides alone. When asked what Kappy's means to them, the regulars usually described the restaurant as their home-away-from-home and they talked about the care, the sense of being acknowledged, and the kindness that they receive at Kappy's.

> The following excerpt, from a recent widow, provides insight into the love, kindness, and assistance that regulars receive at Kappy's:

> *It's sometimes tough for me to get up in the morning. Sitting alone has not been as painful as I expected it to be. You see, it's a friendly atmosphere here. I am lonely at times, I have friends, but I'm still alone. But, I'm not alone at Kappy's. This place is my home away from home. I feel like I belong here, it's the kindness, friendliness, and so much love. You know, when I couldn't get my car doors open because of the ice, I didn't know what to do. So, I called Kappy's and talked to Mike (morning manager). He told me what to do (F, early 70's).*

Another widow relishes being acknowledged and feeling safe at Kappy's:

I'm told that I belong. I'm told, "It's nice to see you." I'm acknowledged, they tell me, "Where were you? I looked for you". This tells me that someone cares. I feel safe knowing that if I have a panic attack that there is always someone there that I know will do the right thing for me (F, 62).

While another widow experiences Kappy's in order to escape the eerie quietness of home:

I feel at home here. It's hard going places alone. In a way, it's my second home. I feel better when I'm here. I like seeing other people; it's not an empty, quiet place. There are different people here and I like to hear the music. I enjoy my meal better eating with other people than I do sitting in my house with nobody (F, 70s).

Another regular uses the restaurant to escape their humdrum everyday life:

I feel better about myself when I'm at Kappy's. When I'm at work, at about 3:00, I think about going to Kappy's. You're getting away from the regular stuff, it's an escape. I can't go to Florida or Vegas, so I come here. It's an hour or two away from the world (F, late 50's).

These incidents revealed that regulars tend to patronize Kappy's not only to satisfy a consumption need and to socialize with others, but also to satisfy a need for personal, emotional support. For instance, in addition to coding incidents relating to the food and to commercial friendships, these informants discussed that they were at Kappy's because "this is where I belong," "they care about me," "so much love," "to temporarily escape" and "to feel safe." These incidents were classified as properties that were fused into the category, place-as-home. Place-as-home is conceptualized as a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy consumption, companionship, and emotional supportive needs, such as feelings of well-being and care. The concept of place-as-home greatly extends the discipline's understanding of the place concept. For the place-as-home concept reveals that customers can humanize a servicescape and transform it into a second home; a place of rest and refuge in the contemporary marketplace.

To date, marketers have essentially perceived that place is comprised of objective elements that are isolated from consumers' personal worlds (Sherry 1998, 2000). Yet, place-as-home demonstrates that this conceptualization of place, as a simply point-of-exchange is not entirely valid as consumers may experience places in order to obtain more than products and services, but a sense of togetherness, belongingness, and love.

It is worth noting here that we do not believe that consumers initially experience places-as-home; in fact, it is unlikely that many consumers initially plan to experience a commercial establishment in this manner. By speaking and eating with customers who experience the place-as-gathering and place-as-home, it became clear that many of them had an aura of loneliness, often due to experiencing negative life events such as retirement, empty-nest syndrome, an empty marriage, divorce, or death of a spouse. Perhaps, in an attempt to escape, or to prevent, the melancholy and isolation of their personal lives, regulars attempt to vivify a servicescape into a new home. Hence, a third place may be conceived as a human place, where customers are at ease, in a place that is their home-away-from-home.

Open coding represents that initial step of a grounded theory analysis and the mandate of this stage is that the researcher enters the field with "conceptual nothingness" and ends the stage with creation of the core category. The core category for this study was finalized at the end of the three weeks. The next step in the study was to turn to the selective coding stage.

Selective Coding

As we previously discussed, during the selective code a researcher rounds out the core category by delimiting coding to variables directly, or indirectly, related to it. Given that the core variable in this study explains how consumers experience places, a pertinent question regards understanding why consumers experience the same place differently. In addition, from a marketing management perspective, it is worth exploring how a consumer's place experiences impact behaviors such as loyalty and repeat patronage.

Alleviate Social and Emotional Loneliness in the Marketplace

In order to acquire an understanding as to the questions that will be asked of informants during the selective coding stage, researchers may turn to relevant literature, usually outside one's substantive area of research, for guidance. Given the predominance of loneliness within data collected from customers who are either family or relatives, we turned to the loneliness literature for guidance (Forman and Sriram 1991; Goodwin and Lockshin 1992; Kang and Ridgway 1996; Lofland 1982; Lopata 1969; Rook 1987; Russell et al. 1984; Sorkin, Rook and Lu 2002; Stroebe et al. 1996; Stroebe and Stroebe 1996; Stroebe, Stroebe, and Hansson 1988; Weiss 1973, 1975). Within this literature, researchers typically discuss the "driving force" of loneliness; a force great enough to cause people who were normally shy to aggressively seek social activity. Along these lines, loneliness appeared to represent a driving force that encourages many of Kappy's customers to seek out and to patronize it on a regular basis.

In order to develop an understanding regarding the possible relationship between loneliness and place experience, I turned to Weiss' (1973) classic loneliness typology, which is often cited in health and social psychological literatures. Weiss postulated that individuals could suffer from two types of loneliness; social and emotional. Individuals confront social loneliness when they perceive that they lack a sufficient number of friendships and the feelings of companionship that friends provide. Individuals often tackle social loneliness after they experience events such as relocation, retirement, empty-nest, or the death of friends. As a consequence of social loneliness, individuals also endure its negative symptoms including boredom, aimlessness, and feelings of marginality. Individuals may permanently remedy these symptoms by forming new friendships. Perhaps, we can now understand why some customers experience Kappy's as place-as-gathering. The ability to habitually "hang out" with commercial friendships alleviates pathogenic effects associated with social loneliness.

Individuals confront emotional loneliness when they perceive that they lack a close, emotional relationship with another individual, such as a spouse, or partner and the feelings of emotional support (e.g., well-being, security) that these individuals typically provide. Individuals often suffer from emotional loneliness after

they experience events such as the death of a spouse or partner, divorce, or marital separation. As a result of experiencing emotional loneliness, individuals often confront negative symptoms such as anxiety, isolation, or a "nameless fear" that prevents one from concentrating on activities such as reading or television. In addition, after experiencing the lose of a spouse or partner, individuals often experience social loneliness, along with its negative symptoms, as established friendships tend to diminish, or to lessen in quality after conjugal bereavement and divorce (Lofland 1982; Weiss 1973).

Individuals may temporarily allay symptoms associated with social loneliness, by forming a close relationship, marital or non-marital, with another individual who provides emotional support. In fact, Weiss (1973) coined the term, supplementary relationship, to delineate relationships betweens individuals who are "in the same boat" and who are able to provide each other with emotional support. A caveat is that although individuals allay feelings of loneliness with their supplementary relationships, the pangs of loneliness rematerialize when individuals return at night to their empty homes (Hunt 1973)

Perhaps, we can now understand why some customers experience Kappy's as place-as-home. As a result of experiencing the death of their spouses, individuals confront negative symptoms associated with both social and emotional loneliness. By serving as a forum for large eating groups that engage in pure sociability, as well as a place where the conjugally bereaved and divorced may routinely assemble, regular patronage to a third place becomes cathartic to customers' overall health.

In order to probe whether or not Kappy's customers alleviate loneliness symptoms via patronage, a second data collection wave occurred approximately ninety days after the first wave. Twenty-nine customers, eight employees, two managers, and George, the owner were interviewed during a two-week period in the restaurant. Similar to the first wave, informants were asked questions such as, "why are you at Kappy's today" and "what does Kappy's mean to you." However, the customers were also asked questions about their patronage and to explain whether or not their patronage to Kappy's had changed over the years. In addition, employees and managers were asked questions such as their opinion as to why regulars patronize the restaurant.

During the second interview wave, it became evident that many customers patronize Kappy's in order to remedy pathogenic effects associated with social and emotional loneliness. For example, George said:

> *People come to Kappy's for the social as much as they do for the food. There are a lot of single people. People have passed away. I don't want to say they're lonely, but they come to Kappy's. And, they come and we kibitz. We sit around and talk. After a mate passes away, the customer always comes to Kappy's more.*

While a waitress explained the real reason why a regular patronizes the restaurant:

> *A regular is looking for good service and conversation. They like the entertainment. We have squirt gun fights in the restaurant. I have so much fun here. I'm the Easter Bunny here at Easter, and at Christmas, I'm an elf or Santa. Last summer, we were goofing around and the guy at the counter tipped me for being entertained. He said, "You know, it's my first time here. I'll be back for the entertainment.*

The data also revealed that customers who experienced the place-as-gathering did so after they experienced events such as empty-nest or retirement. For example, an empty-nester said:

> *I'm not cooking anymore. My children are out of the house. What do I need it for? We come here six nights a week for dinner. Why do we come here? The food, the social, George; he is so caring. We're regulars here so they cater to us. They make us feel welcome (F, 62).*

While a retired customer said:

> *We come here to get out of the house and to have adult conversation. Otherwise, I'd sit in the house doing nothing but clean all day. We're both retired. (F, 66).*

And her husband commented:

> *Sure, I'd sit home and watch war tapes all day (M, 70).*

The data also revealed that customers who experience the place-as-home often maintain extremely close relationships in the restaurant.

For example, many customers maintain a relationship with George that is analogous to a parent-child relationship. For instance, a widower said:

> *Well, you have the atmosphere of this person, George. He is warm and he has a good heart. He is cordial. And, he makes you enjoy being in his company. He makes you feel like you belong, like your part of his family, his extended family; not his immediate family (M, 80).*

While a widow considers George as her adopted son:

> *It's fun here; it's hamesha (Yiddish for cozy, home). I get kissed by George every time I'm here. He is my adopted son. I'm sure that he has a lot of adopted mothers here (F, 72).*

Another widower described why she left Ruthie, a waitress, a $20 tip on an $18 bill:

> *You see, if I went to a psychiatrist, he would charge me a hundred and sixty dollars. So, Ruthie listens to me for an hour, and I give her a twenty dollar tip on an eighteen dollar bill. I feel better telling her my problems. So, it's really a deal (F, 65).*

Another customer, whose wife is dying from cancer, spoke about how his patronage to his "second home" will change after his wife passes away:

> *This place is damn near my second home. People tell us that all the time; that it's our second home. The owners treat you like family. My wife can't walk, but we still come here on Saturday for breakfast. That's all my wife can do now. It makes her feel good to see the people. We have Ellen on Saturdays, but all the waitresses are good to us. When my wife is no longer here, I'll be coming here for two meals a day (M, 72).*

This discussion leads us to argue that place becomes interconnected into customers' worlds as the drive to remedy, or to prevent, symptoms associated with social and emotional loneliness encourages them to seek out and to experience place-as-gathering or place-as-home. Rather than create new conceptual categories regarding the antecedents that impact the manner in which consumers experience place, I linked together Weiss's loneliness typology with the core category. As a result, I put forward the following propositions:

P1:   As a response to unfulfilled consumption needs, consumers will experience a place-as-practical.

P2:   As a response to unfulfilled consumption and companionship needs, consumers will experience a place-as-gathering

P3:   As a response to unfulfilled consumption, companionship, and emotional support needs, consumers will experience a place-as-home.

Relationship between Experience and Behavior

I now explore the relationship between place experience and outcomes such as patronage behavior and expressed loyalty. To probe this relationship, the informants were asked when they plan to patronize Kappy's again, and whether or not they consider themselves loyal to Kappy's. The data revealed that customers who experience the restaurant as a place-as-practical typically expressed a weak, or a nonchalant commitment to patronizing Kappy's. These customers typically stated that their future patronage depended upon whether or not they were in the neighborhood at the same time that they felt like eating "diner food" or whether they had a coupon to the restaurant. Other customers said that they would return to Kappy's in a few weeks, when they were in the neighborhood doing errands, such as visiting relatives who live close to the restaurant.   For example, a customer said pointed out:

> I wouldn't say that I'm loyal to Kappy's. I like having a diner in the neighborhood. I like the prices and I like the food. So, I wouldn't care what was on this corner, as long as it served good food at reasonable prices (M, 45).

For these customers, the drive to repatronize the restaurant is based upon their commitment to objective elements that is found within the physical servicescape, such as prices, location, and product selection (Bitner 1992; Sherry 1998). Thus, loyalty among customers who experience Kappy's as place-as-practical is directed towards information about the place, rather than to the place per se. The properties that delineate this information (e.g., location, prices) were encompassed under a category conceptualized as cognitive loyalty. Oliver (1997, 1999) coined the term, cognitive

loyalty, to describe a shallow type of customer loyalty that stems from customers having a commitment to "information" (e.g. attribute performance levels) about a particular brand, rather than to the brand itself. In this state, purchasing is routine and customers do not even process their satisfaction with it. By extending the cognitive loyalty concept from brands to places, I put forward that customers who experience a place-as-practical demonstrate a cognitive place loyalty as they are loyal to information about the place (e.g., product selection, prices, location), as opposed to being loyalty to the place per se.

Customers, who experience Kappy's as place-as-gathering, tended to express a desire to patronize the restaurant primarily in order to sustain their social relationships with other individuals inside it. Overall, these customers discussed that their loyalty stemmed from their commitment to their social relationships that they sustain with other customers and employees in the context of the restaurant, rather than to the place itself. For example, a customer said:

> *I'm a regular because my brother-in-law and his wife come here. If they stopped coming here, we would stop coming. We come to Kappy's mainly to socialize with them, more so than the food (F, 60's).*

Another customer said his family's patronage is dependent upon Lucy, a waitress.

> *We come here for Lucy, then the food. Breakfast food is pretty much straight forward. Now that Lucy is pregnant, we've talked about leaving Kappy's. We're not sure if we'll come back if Lucy doesn't come back (M, 30's).*

The properties such as "loyal because of my friends here," "loyal because of an employee or manager," "loyal because of a person or persons" were conceptualized under the concept of community loyalty. Community loyalty extends Oliver's (1997) loyalty phase concept by putting forward that customers may express a loyalty to patronizing a commercial establishment because of their coveted membership in a place-based social village (Oliver 1999), or given the meaningful nature of their commercial friendships in the place. Thus, the depth of this loyalty to is strong; yet, it is also entirely contingent upon a group consensus to gather in a particular commercial establishment.

Many of the customers who experience Kappy's as place-as-home expressed having an affective bond to the establishment, so that the place and social relationships held with others in the place, become deeply integrated into the customers' personal lives and experiences. For example, a customer stated:

> *I wouldn't leave this place even if someone gave me a $1M home on a beautiful island in a beautiful place. I depend on George (the owner) for my meals and he said he would never let me down (F, 60s).*

Another customer said that her peers could not prevent her from patronizing Kappy's:

Now, when I call my girlfriends and I tell them that I want to go to Kappy's and they say that they don't want to go, I still go by myself. You're never alone at Kappy's. If I had my choice, I would eat here every single day (F, 60s).

In fact, some customers expressed that they feel disoriented without the restaurant:

> *Kappy's was closed Christmas and New Years Day and I felt lost. George said I should come to his house for dinner. So I did. Kappy's is comfortable, it's home, and I've become friendly with the people, with the waiters, waitresses (F, 50's).*

After all, Kappy's is more than a restaurant; it is a sacred, hallowed place:

> *We're here to serve and I personally believe that God wants me at Kappy's. God brings people together at Kappy's for a reason (George, Night Manager).*

For these customers, their commitment to patronize Kappy's is indisputable as they use terms such as "loyal until the day I die," "forever loyal," "can't live without Kappy's" to describe their loyalty to patronizing the restaurant. Thus, I encapsulated these properties under Oliver's (1999) concept of ultimate loyalty. Although Oliver conceptualized the term to denote an intense, resilient loyalty between a customer and a brand, we suggest that customers may also express ultimate loyalty to a place.

This discussion leads us to put forward that a relationship exists between consumers' place experience and their future behavioral intentions. The findings suggest that as a place assumes a role in customers' lives, beyond that related to facilitating austere product or service consumption, customers become increasingly committed to repatronizing the place. While many places may satisfy utilitarian consumption needs, fewer can simultaneously satisfy social needs, and fewer places yet can further satisfy both social and emotional needs. As such, I propose the following propositions:

> **P4:** Consumers who experience a place-as-practical will exhibit a cognitive loyalty to the place.

> **P5:** Consumers who experience a place-as-gathering place will exhibit a community loyalty to the place.

> **P6:** Consumers who experience a place-as-home will exhibit ultimate loyalty to the place.

Grounded Theory Workshop

At this point in the research, all of the conceptual categories that comprise the emergent framework (Figure 1) have been developed and defined. In order to ensure the accuracy of the core category, as well as methodological procedures, the author attended three of Glaser's semi-annual grounded theory workshops (see Glaser 1992, p. 230-233, or www.groundedtheory.com for details). During these workshops, both Glaser, and approximately 12-15 doctoral candidates, who are involved in grounded theory dissertations, meet to exchange and to code each other's data. In addition, participants have the opportunity to have their working papers critiqued by Glaser and to meet with him personally to discuss individual research projects.

Although Glaser and the participants approved of the framework's core category and related antecedents and consequences, Glaser pointed out that the core category could also be centered upon a process that illustrates how senior citizens move from "hanging out" with their traditional families to commercial friendships. Another participant took a philosophical view of the Kappy's data and suggested that the core category could be conceptualized as consuming food-for-body, food-for-spirit, and food-for-soul. Overall, both Glaser and the participants concluded that the offered

framework illustrates a relevant and interesting explanation as to why older-aged adults develop meaningful relationships with customers and employees in commercial establishments.

Discussion

The primary objective of this article was to heed Sherry's (2000) challenge by generating a comprehensive theory regarding how and why consumers' experience places in their lives. I met this challenge by adhering to the tenets of grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 1978, 1998, 2001; Strauss 2001; Strauss and Corbin 1998). In doing so, I generated a parsimonious, relevant, and modifiable framework that centers upon the manners in which consumers experience places in their lives. In addition, by clarifying grounded theory methodological procedures, which have somewhat disappeared from articles that claim to utilize the methodology, I demonstrated a process by which other researchers can follow in order to field original theories that arise from consumers, rather than from samples and from disciplines far removed from the realities of the marketplace (Sheth, Bagozzi, and Chakravarti 1992).

Sherry (1998, 2000) was the first marketing researcher to suggest that the discipline's widely accepted conceptualization of place, which dates back to the work of McCarthy (1960), and which considers place analogous to organizational distributional activities, was imperfect. Also, it was Sherry who exposed that marketers tend to deem place as being alienated and isolated from consumers' personal lives and experiences. Consequently, he speculated that marketing researchers have become estranged from understanding how consumers vivify a built environment and how consumers may transform physical servicescapes into significant centers of their lives.

Interestingly, Sherry forewarned that others in marketing might perceive his call to reassess the place concept as him "peddling the strange." Yet, I found Sherry's call enlightening. This was especially so as I was intrigued that his mother began demonstrating unexplainable loyalty to a neighborhood diner following the death of his father. In actuality, it is the discipline's frameworks, which postulate that satisfaction miraculously leads to loyalty, and not Sherry's assertion, which are somewhat unsettling (see Oliver 1999). Most extant frameworks fail to offer an explanation as to why and how regulars transform a non-descript neighborhood diner into their

home-away-from-home. As a result, I dedicated myself to exploring the place concept anew and to momentarily setting aside my knowledge of the literature in order to field an original, parsimonious, relevant, and modifiable theory of why and how consumers experience places in their lives.

By utilizing grounded theory methodology, with its emphasis on generating theory from groups, or subgroups, of individuals, I developed an understanding of the role that places may assume in consumers' lives *from their perspective.* As such, I discovered that consumers might deem certain places as more than mere subdivisions of space where they engage in utilitarian exchange. If truth be told, it is not Sherry who is "hawking the anomalous," but rather, it is the widely-accepted marketing mix, and its one-sided emphasis on how consumers simply respond to seller initiatives, that has estranged marketers from fully understanding how and why servicescapes can be profoundly meaningful for some consumers.

Is it not intuitive that consumers must do more in the marketplace than simply respond to a seller's product, price, place, and promotional efforts? Indeed, this study demonstrates that consumers are active social agents who enter places not only to purchase products and services but also to obtain feelings of human togetherness, such as companionship and emotional support, which only other individuals can provide. Furthermore, while products and services are integral to sustaining a consumer's health and wellbeing, so to is companionship and emotional support. Perhaps, it is now clear why regulars patronize third places with steadfast loyalty. Regulars not only buy a meal; but also, they purchase a remedy that helps them either prevent or assuage the pathogenic effects of loneliness that ensues from their experiencing negative life events.

A half-century ago, the sociologist, Gregory Stone (1954), postulated that some consumers enter the marketplace not only to obtain products and services, but also to obtain feelings of friendship from retail employees in order to counter loneliness. Since then, marketing researchers have also found that some consumers engage in exchange activities as a means to obtaining feelings of friendship from service providers and from other customers (Adelman and Ahuvia 1995; Adelman, Ahuvia, and Goodwin 1994; Forman and Srinan 1990; Goodwin and Gremler 1996; Gremler and Gwinner 2000; Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner 1998; Kang and

Ridgeway 1996; Price and Arnould 1999). In addition, over twenty-five years ago, Bagozzi (1975) put forward that most marketing exchanges are laden with social and psychological significance, and yet, he reiterated that marketers insist on exploring utilitarian marketplace exchange activities. Finally, I can offer the discipline a theoretical framework that organizes these disparate articles and that provides an explanation as to how and why consumers can satiate unfulfilled biological, social, and psychological needs in the marketplace.

Future researchers may consider utilizing the proposed framework to heed Bitner's (1992) and Sherry's (1998) call to extend the servicescape framework. In fact, the framework suggests that a consumption setting may be comprised of three types of servicescapes. The first servicescape delineates physical elements comprising a consumption setting (1992). The second servicescape appears to denote the existence of a social servicescape (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy 2003), referring to the social relationships that are held among customers and employees in a consumption setting. The third servicescape may be considered as the humanistic servicescape, referring to personal, emotional elements such feelings of well-being and security, which customers may receive from other individuals. Truly pioneering work regarding the impact of each servicescape on consumer approach/avoidance behavior remains to be accomplished.

In addition, other researchers may attempt to apply the framework to recent research on consumers' desires to participate in product or brand related communities (McAlexander, Schouten, Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Oliver 1999). Perhaps, the need to remedy symptoms associated with social and emotional loneliness, compared to mere brand affinity, is a more powerful influence that encourages some consumers to partake in brand/product communities. This is not to say that all consumers who partake in communities do so as a response to loneliness; however, the prevalence of loneliness among older-aged adults may encourage many to seek solace in the commercial domain.

Beyond doubt, we know very little in the discipline about loneliness as a driver of consumption. Yet, with the graying of America, this topic is of extreme relevancy.   Additionally, while this study emphasized how older-aged consumers may remedy loneliness in the marketplace, other researchers may explore how other consumer

groups, who are susceptible to loneliness, such as teenagers, business travelers, or ethnic (e.g., African-American, Hispanic;) or subcultural (e.g. gay/lesbian) consumers (Meyer 1995; Weiss 1973), utilize the marketplace in order to remedy loneliness symptoms.

A limitation of this research is that the data emerged from Kappy's present customers; hence, the restaurant played some positive role in each informant's life. However, it is possible for places to assume negative roles in consumers' lives. For example, rather than facilitate exchange between buyers and sellers, some places may encourage consumers to engage in place avoidance via discriminatory practices. Interestingly, place avoidance is also a topic worthy of future exploration.

Another limitation of this study is that grounded theory generates propositions that are empirically assessed in future studies. Thus, whether or not the proposed relationships empirically hold is not yet known. In addition, because a grounded researcher may theoretically sample indefinitely, a grounded theory project does not possess a true ending point.   However, due to time, monetary, and creative constraints, a researcher terminates a grounded theory study at some point. As a result, although the offered framework is relevant, generalizable, and able to organize disparate articles, future theoretical development regarding the consumer-place relationship is warranted.

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