Dining with "Mama": Four Newcomer Socialization Experiences Inside a Small-Town Diner

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Drawing from Lindolf & Taylor's (2002) approach to participant-observation, four researchers spent a total of 60 hours in the field. We acted as participants do: we ate, drank coffee, spoke with the waitress, waiter, or fellow customers when prompted, and read newspapers or pretended to study while recording our field notes. Via thematic analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), I uncovered how one rural, small-town diner, known as Mama's Place, socializes customers into a family culture. Socialization processes were enacted via: employee and customer's personal orientation to space, caring obligations to another, and questions increase socialization. Other experiences include discomfort limits socialization, the importance of teaching yourself, approved diner practices, and how previous socialization impacts the present. This untapped area of research, not only contributes to the field of communication, but also sets the foundation for other disciplines to explore socialization and dynamics of American hometown diners.

It was my second to last visit and I somehow found myself running down a cracked, uneven sidewalk after another patron of Mama's Place. It all began after I paid for my delicious pancakes covered in peanut butter that Karen, my waitress, looked down and noticed she didn't give the previous customer back his credit card. My field notes confirm my memory. *"She said, 'Oh, he left his card. Can you see him? Is he where you can yell at him?' She asks. I collect my change and rush outdoors without thinking. I look both ways until I see him. I then yell at him twice as I run his way. He turns around and I tell him he left his card. He turns around and says, 'Was on a mission,' as he passed by me. As I turn back towards the diner, I see Karen holding the deeply tinted door open while smiling. She said, 'Thank you.' and nodded with approval."* As I reflect on my field notes I wonder, how did I get to the place where I would run down the street for a waitress? Why did I feel this pressure? I knew if I didn't oblige, I would be rude; after all "Mama" asked me to do this. At least this is how I felt in the moment and still now as I write these sentences, but how silly? Is it the psychological adjustment leading toward membership Schlossberg (1981) discusses? I'm a customer in a small town diner, but wait…I'm more than that.

This specific record in my field notes reveals one snap shot of my own socialization process within a small-town diner. Mama's Place was no longer a place I could go and be served. I had "chores" of my own. I had obligation to the organization. I was socialized and must contribute my part and pay forward the ways Mama took care of me. I have no doubt that if the guy who left his card continued to frequent Mama's Place he might find himself in a similar place in the future. In this paper, I not only share personal experiences with being socialized as a newcomer into a small town diner, but share the socialization experiences of my co-investigators. However, before I share more experiences of being socialized by Mama, I will situate this study within organizational socialization literature, describe the methods of this study, and, lastly, I explore socialization experiences of four people, of which I am one, within a small town dinner.

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Organizational Socialization of Newcomers

Van Maanen & Schein (1979) defined organizational socialization as the process through which an individual acquires the attitudes, behavior, and knowledge needed to function or participate as an organizational member. As we consider all of the potential organizations in our society, De las Cuevas claims family is one of the largest and most important agents in the socialization process (as cited in Vallejo & Langa, 2010). Via socialization we acquire new patterns of behavior, norms, beliefs, and motives that are accepted and valued by the dominant social group (Jablin, 2001; Bogler and Somech, 2002).

Family owned businesses, or in our case, a family-owned diner, offers a second family socialization. This occurs by the family owned business subjecting their "values and assumptions [which] are logically present in the way the family manages the firm and understands the business" (Vallejo & Langa, 2010, p. 51). The limits between "the family" and the "family firm" are not clearly defined (Vallejo & Langa, 2010). This occurs due to the transmission of the culture of the family that owns the business onto those not in the family (Vallejo & Langa, 2010). For example, waiters and waitresses hired into a family firm are socialized by the family culture that is present in the organizational culture. It is impossible to escape the family owned business' socialization. In fact, Vallejo and Langa (2010) claimed participants "cannot remain unaffected by the values and assumptions of the owning family because these are, after all, at the origin of the behaviors and actions that take place in the firm itself" (p. 52). Vallejo and Langa (2010) remind us that it is important to remember that "second family socialization" may not be consistent with our own family's socialization (p. 52). Through the socialization processes of family businesses strong bonds are created amongst all parties involved. For example, "employees of family firms [are] more likely to be ready to personally commit themselves to their firm more strongly and show higher levels of involvement" (Vallejo & Langa, 2010, p. 58). The time this socialization occurs varies. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2002) uncovered that intensity can increase the rate at which socialization occurs. Therefore, dependent upon intensity levels within the organization, socialization will vary.

Upon examining Vallejo and Langa's (2010) research, socialization is clearly not a passive process. In fact, newcomers are proactive and behave in ways which actually facilitate the socialization process (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Morrison, 1993; Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998). Griffin, Colella, and Goparaju (2000) informed us that proactive socialization tactics of newcomers include: performance feedback seeking, information seeking from technical sources, information seeking from co-workers, information seeking from supervisors, relationship building with co-workers, relationship building with supervisors, informal mentorship, job change negotiation, positive framing, involvement in work-related activities, behavioral self-management, and observation/modeling (p. 454). With these proactive tactics in mind, one must also consider the discourse through which the information is sought.

Discourse "structures expectations for what kinds of messages should be performed" (Barge, 2004, p. 236). In addition, it structures the expectations "for the kinds of identities and relationships individuals should form with the organization and other organizational members" (Barge, 2004, p. 236). By studying the discourse of

organizational socialization, the expectations and values particular organizational cultures demand of their participants become visible.

Socialization of Service Customers

Blum-Kulka (1997) informed us that "Dinnertime provides opportunities for both the negotiation of and the socialization for cultural styles of politeness" (p. 142). One possible avenue for exploring meal-time conversations rests within a diner. Aside from tipping behaviors (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Garrity & Degelman, 1990; Hornik, 1992; Hubbard, Tsuji, Williams, & Seatriz, 2003), diners are an exciting, relatively untapped area of research in communication. Expanding Blum-Kulka's (1997) idea of dinnertime to the diner context, I may explore socialization via the necessity of participants expressing their meal needs and desires. Scholars then have opportunity to see how staff and other participants in the diner context react both verbally and nonverbally as levels of appropriateness are assessed and socialization of expected, required, and appreciated behaviors are taught via the organization's socialization.

The impact of organizational socialization on customers has hardly been investigated (Kelley, Skinner, & Donnely, 1992). Establishments which neglect the ability to capitalize on customer talents lose a competitive edge to those who do (Schneider & Bowen, 1995). However, Kelley, Skinner, and Donnely (1992) found that satisfaction levels of customers are "directly related to their contribution to service quality" (p. 208). Service delivery involves the "human performance of both service employees and service customers" (Kelley, Skinner, & Donnely, 1992, p. 197). However, "consumer socialization generally does not provide consumers with organizationally specific behavioral guidelines" (p. 198). In order to accomplish this task a clerk or waitress for example may need to assume the informal mentor role. Griffin, Colella, and Goparaju (2000) suggest that "building informal mentor relationships would be most helpful for newcomers when the social aspects of socialization are individualized" (p. 471).

Throughout the organizational socialization in service encounters Kelley, Skinner, and Donnely (1992) told us that customers' perceptions of an organization's climate become more favorable as customers "gain a stronger appreciation for organizational values and begin to feel more a part of the organization" (p. 208). This socialization process has the opportunity to "convey the benefits of customer participation in the service encounter" which has the potential to enhance customer satisfaction (Kelley, Skinner, & Donnely, 1992, p. 208). On the opposite side, customers who are dissatisfied with their service are less likely to contribute to the service encounter (Kelley, Skinner, & Donnely, 1992). In order to socialize service customers with hopes of raising satisfaction rates we learn the importance of service organizations' socialization tactics. Replicating organizational values and expectations in service customers will provide more benefit than harm to organizations such as small-town diners. By serving as "informal mentors" as to how the service organization functions, as well as its expectations, waiters and waitresses have the opportunity to guide hungry customers through a mutually beneficial exchange and socialization process.

Committed customers typically result in customers having positive comments about the establishment to relay to both the organization and others, as well as present or potential problems and how to correct problems which may hinder the likelihood of

providing for customer needs (Bettencourt, 1997). Once customers are socialized and committed, their commitment level is "significantly related to many beneficial customer behaviors" (Bettencourt, 1997, p. 400). Customer commitment leads to individuals "more likely to act as partners in service delivery" (Bettencourt, 1997, p. 400). Although customers may see themselves as "partners" in the transaction, they are actually nothing more than a volunteer and product of the organizational socialization process which has been ongoing since their first encounter. These "volunteers" within the service industry begin to identify with the organization the longer they utilize the organization's services. This leads "volunteers" to partake a sense of membership (Bhattacharya, Hayagreeva, & Glynn, 1995).

Service Customers as "Volunteers"

For this project, four co-researchers "volunteered" to visit Mamma's Place. As a volunteer service customer, we not only had a choice, but power in our service exchange interaction. In studying volunteerism, Kramer (2011b) identifies what it means to be a full member. Such membership includes time commitments, positive attitudes toward financial commitments, awareness of fluid membership, the importance of communicating with friends, promotion of events or activities, and clear enjoyment due to membership. When individuals choose to spend their time at the same restaurant they are investing these same volunteer commitments Kramer (2011b) uncovered. Kelley, Skinner, & Donnely (1992) suggested that future research consider the impact service organizations have on individual customers. This study seeks to do just that. As part of a larger project on diner socialization, the remainder of this paper will explore the socialization experiences of four co-investigators in a small-town diner.

Methods

By serving as participant observers, the research team's experiences revealed similarities and differences in the ways we were socialized by service employees and the ways we responded to being socialized. Demographically, co-researchers self-identified as being female (n=3), male (n=1), Caucasian (n=3), Indian (n=1), American citizens (n=3), Indian citizen (n=1), middle-class (n=3), and working class (n=1). Instances in which our backgrounds influenced our socialization experiences will be discussed throughout this study, as who we are influenced our socialization experiences. To ensure researcher and participant confidentiality, pseudonyms are utilized throughout the manuscript. To make sense of each researcher's unique perspective, I employed the following methods:

Data Collection

Leeds-Hurwitz (2005) explained that the key to understanding human behavior lies within, "the context in which the behavior occurred" (p. 337). Due to the significance of diner culture, it was vital to spend as much time as possible at the diner to discover themes as well as analyze how participants utilize communication. As a research team, we sought to learn what phenomena occur within the context of a hometown diner, little did we know at the time that we would undergo unique organizational socialization processes. We identified and chose Mama's Place as our ideal location for research due to its location in a small, rural, college town.

After gaining approval through our university institutional review board (IRB), we enacted our roles as participant-observer customers. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued, "the validity of participant observation derives from researchers' having been there" (p. 135). Each of the four researchers committed to spending 15 hours (60 hours total) at Mama's Place over a five-month period to ensure substantial experience. Guided by Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005), we understood that our specific time commitment would depend upon our research goals. We agreed that theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) was our goal and met periodically throughout our participant-observations to ensure we reached such, by discussing instances of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness, thus fulfilling Owen's (1984) criteria for salient meanings.

Through participant observation, we gained competence in the two parallel paths that Lindlof & Taylor (2002) described. We became: (a) "increasingly skilled at performing in ways that are honored by group members," and (b) "increasingly sharp, detailed, and theoretically relevant" in our descriptions (p. 135). Thus, fulfilling Fitch's (1994) criteria for evidence by "being deeply involved and, closely connected to the scene, activity, and group studied" (p. 36). We acted as inconspicuously as possible and made sure that word of our research project did not get out to the staff or other diners. Thus, our participants were unaware that they were being studied. In other words, we acted as participants do: we ate, drank coffee, spoke with the waitress/waiter, or fellow customers when prompted, and read newspapers or pretended to study while recording our field notes in various locations of the diner. As participant observers, we observed Mama's Place throughout various times of the day in order to offer a realistic view and a wide scope of diner participants. Throughout observations, we learned that participant demographics ranged, dependent upon the time of day. For example, in the mornings, individuals were predominately male and over the age of 30. Lunch crowds entailed a broad mix; participants typically consisted of almost every age range with an emphasis on college-aged individuals. The evening crowd equally varied, but, during late night early morning hours, college-aged individuals coming home from the local bars frequented the scene. This process grounded results in participants' voice, rather than the voice of researchers.

Data Analysis

To make sense of the data the research team gathered, I (author) employed a thematic analysis. Leeds-Hurwitz (2005) asserted that, "data collection and analysis go hand in hand for the duration of an ethnographic research project" (p. 329). Via constant comparative methods (Strauss, 1987), I noted initial themes that began to emerge as I reviewed field notes after the fact. The results of the initial analysis were "used to refine further data collection and observation" (Leeds-Hurwitz, p. 330). I repeated this procedure multiple times throughout our project. This method of continuously moving back-and-forth between data and analysis is not only one of the characteristics of ethnography, but it enriched the process by allowing co-investigators a chance to discuss findings and encourage keeping the focus on the participants' voice (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005, p. 330). I repeatedly read all researchers' field notes in order to see what themes emerged throughout the data. Consistent with Lindlof and Taylor (2002), I performed a negative case analysis, as I paid particular attention to where our understanding of the

phenomena diverged as indicated within field notes, which enriched understanding of the socialization processes the research team experienced.

As thematic analysis suggests, I let our data sit as I continually revisited it to see what themes naturally emerged. I noticed data which, "relate to each other in such a way that they seem to belong to a category" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 215). Reviewing fieldnotes and, "a strong current of inductive thinking" stimulated the development of our themes (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 215). Throughout this entire process, I engaged in Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) approach to reflexive analysis. As evidenced in field notes, each researcher employed a different method which helped me to obtain a clear perspective. For example, there were those of us who welcomed feeling like part of the family while others resisted in small ways by not taking part in the taken-for-granted assumptions in the dinner. Members who resisted the family culture ignored the daily special board announcement. When these members inquired about the specials, they would receive the behavior correcting response, "Did you see the special board?" Those who enacted the role of "outsiders" of the family culture only asked questions and spoke when prompted. At times, they resisted engaging in overtly friendly conversation by offering short replies to answers and not asking follow-up questions. In contrast, those who enacted the role of "insiders" and attempted to be a strong part of the family culture often inquired into the health and well-being of staff family members and other customers. In addition, these researchers became "regular" customers that read the daily special board, and ordered without the assistance of a menu. At times those pursuing the insider role never needed to order a drink or meal because the staff knew what we wanted and how we liked it. This reflexive process guided this research. This process helped balance the group data as I had both a clear insider and outsider perspective. In the following findings, excerpts from field notes are *italicized* to demarcate our observations, but also to ease readability.

Author's Experience

Inside Mama's Place hangs Helnwein's Boulevard of Broken Dreams which is an outside looking in view of a classic 1950's American diner scene. Helnwein paints an image of a happy, closed-knit group in a small space. It looks almost family-like. I see Marilyn Monroe laughing, James Dean and Bogie looking calm, cool, and collected as if they are enjoying relaxation as their waiter, Elvis Presley, looks excited and energetic. My examination of the artwork is interrupted by an elderly woman wearing a pink Mamma's Place t-shirt and high-waisted blue jeans.

"Forgot to put my name on it" said Karen. Little did I know at the time that she would be my tour guide throughout my oncoming socialization and that I would be willing to chase down a customer for her who left his credit card. *She picked up my ticket from the table and quickly scribbled her name in bubbly cursive font. 'There, so you'll have a pal,' she smiled as she rushed back to the kitchen to pick up an order for another customer.* This was my first encounter with Karen, the woman who would quickly become my "second grandmother." I quickly learned that I was not a customer at all. I was "company," but in the process of becoming "one of the family." This small town establishment has been family owned and operated for years and with each field visit I quickly not only began to recognize the regulars, but became one myself. Karen used the receipt as a means of induction. Her signature on my receipt served as a "stamp of approval" which gained me access into Mama's Place. In a way Karen was "marking her

territory" as a way to indicate that she herself would be taking care of me and socializing me into the family culture of Mama's Place. I noticed two key themes of socialization during my time at Mama's Place: treat the space like home, and I have an obligation to the "family."

There's No Space Like Home

One large participant of my observations was Karen's grandbaby Sarah. Sarah's father would bring her to the diner almost every morning I conducted observations. Sarah frequented Karen on trips to refill company's coffee cups and to retrieve bags of ice from the freezer. *While holding the child a customer inquired into who she was. Karen responded, 'This is my grandbaby.' The group of people at the table responded with, 'We're family.' Karen made a joke about them being dysfunctional which caused the entire diner to erupt in laughter.*
This small town diner was in fact family both in the blood and "adopted" sense.

One day as Karen finished filling coffee cups, Karen continued to play with the baby. She picked it up and held the barefoot baby's hands as she walked in a circle around the long middle table. She came to my table smiling and said, 'This is my grandbaby.' I asked her name while my co-investigator played with her, she said, 'Sarah' before walking her to the next table of guests. She then picked her up and carried her into the kitchen. She then said, 'I've got cracker [from Sarah] all over,' as they walked into the kitchen. Karen's interactions with Sarah modeled the expected behavior of those within the diner. Life was dirty and family is important. Karen's behavior socialized and served as an example as to how the diner's patrons should utilize the space.

Even the way customers treat the space and each other is family-like. On my first visit, I noticed *customers commented on the delicious food and interacted with each other.* Interestingly, *everyone sat in the corner next to each other, not leaving an empty space between the next table even though customers may choose where they sit. On my first visit, as I tried to figure out how the touch screen juke box worked a customer interjected and offered her assistance to me by stating, 'It's wifi. Costs $1.'*

The atmosphere Mama (Karen) created was trusting. *I observed a man in a white polo order and then leave the restaurant. He disappeared from view, leaving his cell phone and note pad on the table. He returned a few moments later to his possessions.* The staff modeled this behavior by constantly leaving change on the counter. *A customer in an 80's washed jean jacket, grey pony tail, baseball hat, and shorts entered the store. He ordered a bagel with cheese, bacon, and egg. He paid and right before leaving the store said, 'I want butter on it.' He returned later. The waitress said, 'Your change is on the counter.' She then, came out from the kitchen and gave him his bagel.* Although I was able to treat the diner as a safe, home space, I was not able to eat and go. I had chores of my own to do.

Family Obligations

The obligation I felt to the family was obvious in the social pressure I experienced when a fellow customer left his credit card and I chased him down the street. This type of care in the form of assistance was also expected of co-workers. Throughout my field notes, I have records of cooks helping waitresses and waiters and vice versa. In one

specific moment, the cook helps deliver the food as Karen is busy with other customers. In another instance the staff member in charge of busing the tables takes over the register so Karen can continue to wait on customers.

Additional forms of obligation to family involved showing care and concern for another. Karen constantly revealed a caring persona. For example, Karen knew I wanted a glass of water with only a small amount of ice. As I revisited my field notes, I constantly made note of the fact that, *as soon as I entered Karen would rush to the kitchen to retrieve a glass of water for me without request.* She even memorized my order and began to ask me if I needed a menu or if I wanted pancakes. On one specific day, not only did Karen have a big glass of water and a straw just for me, but she also had questions. *'Hi, How'd you do on your test?' she inquired. I didn't have a test, but assumed that is why Kendall thought I was 'studying' last time. I responded, 'Ok, I think. We'll see. There's a paper coming up, so that's my focus now.'* This also revealed the ongoing dialogue that exists amongst the family culture and customers, or "company," of Mama's Place. Inside Mama's Place part of my "chores" are to pick up where we left off and I am expected to remember and continue conversations. Karen's inquisitive tones revealed to me I was expected to remember small details and show concern for others within Mama's "family."

Amanda's Experience

Similar to my "seal of approval" from Karen, Amanda's socialization invitation to the diner arrived as a 5x7 yellow laminate card. The card was presented by her waiter, Robert, which read "Early Bird Riser Specials, 7 a.m. – 10 a.m., $3.49." This card listed 5 meals at the $3.49 discounted price. Amanda's field notes reveal two key themes of socialization during her time at Mama's Place: questions bring forth socialization and the culture of caring for others.

The Importance of Questions

Amanda was provided with the "secret" 5x7 Early Bird Riser Special card only after stating this was her first visit to the diner and inquiring what was good. The waiter then informed her that the entire menu was good. In fact, there was nothing he didn't like. On a separate visit Amanda learned the diner makes their own ranch. A friend who was joining her during that visit asking, "What else is homemade?" The waitress responded, *'The PIES! Oh, the little lady that make 'em… mmmm…. Peanut butter, banana split, that's [holds hands in exaggerated measure] this high, key lime cheesecake.' We all agree that they sound delicious. The waitress continued, 'We won't have 'em for a while, cuz 'er house got blown over by the tornado.'* This information explained why the diner did not have any dessert options during our field visits, which is information we would not have obtained without asking a question.

The hours of operation of Mama's Place also confused the research team. Prior to a visit, Amanda writes, *it's late and I'm uncertain that the diner will even be open when we arrive. Our group has checked the website and taken a menu, which list different hours of operation. Then, there's a sign posted on the window and Wednesday's hours are scratched off and written over – it now says 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. However, it was open this morning and closed again when our group went at 3 p.m. Who knows? They don't seem to care that things contradict one another, and even in conversation the workers get*

a little confused. However, asking staff when the diner was open gave us mixed results. In comparing field notes, we were told different times by different people on different occasions. For example, on Amanda's first field visit her waiter told her that they were open 24 hours, but on a second visit the waitress cautiously explained the diner is briefly closed, but then reopens during the day. Even upon the completion of this project, we cannot accurately explain the hours of operation for Mama's Place, as they maintain a polychromic sense of time.

Caring for Others

Caring for others was a central theme to Amanda's field notes. Staff at the diner showed care and concern for their company. The care and concern created an entire diner filled with customers who adopted and mimicked the staff's concern as they were socialized. I (Author) also noted this theme and many of Amanda's field notes indicate similar actions performed by staff members. However, Amanda has the added advantage of observing and interacting with James, an elderly individual with limited speaking capability.

Amanda met James on her first visit to Mama's Place. In her field notes she describes him as, *a rough looking man walks in with his flannel jacket adorned with buttons and a rugged hairstyle. James communicated with a series of grunts, moans, and seemingly indistinguishable words which only the diner staff could distinguish.* An example of staff concern for James is as follows: *'James, what would you like today? Eggs?' He replies with a grunted, 'Yeh.' 'Two?' Robert asks. 'Uh hmm,' James responds. 'You want bacon or sausage?' 'B'cn.' 'How about coffee? You want a mug or a big cup?' 'Behgn.' Within only a few moments she had his coffee in a large Styrofoam cup in front of him. In motherly fashion, Karen says, 'Be careful and don't get burnt. There's your milk and there's your spoon.'* Karen modeled the type of caring behavior she deemed appropriate for all of "Mama's Family" to exhibit. Even Karen's language revealed concern for James. After ensuring Amanda was ok Karen said, *"I've got to go take care of him [James]."* The next example reveals how caring behavior was acknowledged and mimicked by two customers named Nathan and Tasha.

Nathan and Tasha were engaged in conversation when James turned around and grunted a 'How you?' This began their conversation. 'Wait till morning?' she responds to a few muddled grunts. 'Oh, ok,' she replies as if she really understood what he said. Jimmy pointed to the specials board. Tammy realized what he wanted to know and answers, 'Yeah. I'm gonna have a salad. He's having breakfast.' James coughs and sniffs loudly. Tasha asks him 'Got a cold? Got medicine? Don't you have a doctor?' Each of her questions was answered with dramatic nods of his head. Amanda continues her observation of this snapshot in time by concluding, *Tasha is being sooooo sweet to Jimmy! She says, 'Hope you feel better soon.'* This example demonstrates how the modeling behaviors of Karen acted as a socializing agent upon Tasha who then adopted and reenacted the same caring behaviors as witnessed on James. Nita's experiences offer a different perspective on the organizational socialization of Mama's Place.

Nita's Experiences

Being from India, Nita has not experienced many American diners and, therefore, offers a unique perspective from her other co-investigators who grew up with diners,

worked at diners, and had a genuine love for any diner. Nita's field notes reveal two primary themes: uncomfortable surroundings limit and cause one to resist the socialization process, and one must teach themselves how the organization works.

Discomfort limits socialization

Nita's first field visit did not include a "socialization invitation" or "seal of approval." Instead, Nita was greeted with grease. I'm not talking about Crisco, but rather a byproduct of 100% American diner aesthetic. Unnoticed by Author and Amanda, Nita writes explicitly about her discomfort with the grease. She initially encountered the grease on her first visit to the diner. Moments after being greeted by "greasy air," she writes, *I still feel the grease in the air – it smells of food, oily food!!* Nita describes one detailed encounter with grease as follows: *I place my hands on the table and then onto my chin, and just look around. I am trying to get a feel of the place. My hands feel different. I feel something on them. It's the grease! There is grease on the tables. The tables are clean. This grease is the 'settled in' grease…I look up and see there is grease on the vents as well. I am not surprised.*

In addition to the troubling grease, the temperature of the space may serve as a means of distraction for service customers. After her waitress checked on a neighboring table, *she made her way to accompany the cook who was smoking right outside the main door of the diner. The server forgot to the pull the door behind her and so we were left with the door wide open and the cold air gushing in. The place started to get cold – I was cold. I needed someone to shut the door.*

If the grease and cold temperature was not enough to set her over edge, Nita feels uncomfortable within the diner due to the proximity of the bathroom to where she eats. Upon first observation of the diner she recorded in her field notes that she "looked away." She further explains, *the bathroom door is always left open – yet it never bothers the customers at the diner. It is like a part of the décor there that is present and does not bother them or upset them during their visit to the diner. Even after a few visits to the diner, I do feel a little uncomfortable with the bathroom door being left open.* In fact, Nita recorded this as a primary theme in her data log four times throughout her observations. She writes in disgust, *the bathroom door, is still open and it stays like that.* Her obsession with the door continues as she writes, *the women's bathroom door was still open (from this afternoon) and I think it is a little odd as this is the first thing that customers would see when they enter through the door – an open bathroom door! How much more weird can this get!* Although she notes this does not seem to impact other customers as it does her, Nita's focus on the grease, cold air, and bathroom door actually begin to create judgments upon the establishment and distract her and from the overall socialization process.

On another occasion Nita questions herself whether wearing Indian dress was appropriate or not after her waitress approached her and inquired, *"So you're from India?"* Since she stood out in the environment, she grew uncomfortable and wondered if she should alter her dress as a means to not draw attention to herself. Additionally, an early morning visit at 2:25am caused Nita to be uncomfortable and leave the establishment since she was the only female present. This obviously limits socialization due to a lack of participation or desire to remain in the diner.

Nita's experiences reveal a need for people to feel comfortable in their surrounding as not to miss cues, invitations, and opportunities for organizational socialization. It is possible the waitress inquired into her dress as a social lubricant in which to get to know Nita and, thus, socialize her into the organization.

Teach Yourself
As Nita familiarized and taught herself the way Mama's Place organized itself she began to notice customers who did not know the rules. She imagined a college aged guy was new to Mama's place since, *he [just] stood there at the entrance of the diner and waited till the waitress from the kitchen told him – 'You can have a seat anywhere you like' and the customer responded by saying thank you and sat.* Although in this instance Nita was able to witness a newcomer's process to self-socialization, her own journey did not begin this way. On one of her initial visits to the diner Nita reflects in her writings by stating, *I learnt that there was no one who could help you find a seat but you could seat yourself where ever you wished.*
It was up to Nita to learn how the diner worked, operated, and how she must socialize herself in the ways of the organization. Growing up inside the United States, I (Author) was socialized in various eating establishments to pick up on various cues as to where I pay for my meal. However, for Nita, this was a new process for her. At Mama's Place, customers pay at the register, but this information is not always communicated to newcomers. *Robert [her waiter] came and placed my ticket on my table. Going and paying at the counter was a new thing for me and so I placed my card on the ticket and waited there for a few minutes till I realized that I was supposed to get up and go pay at the counter. I stood up and walked to the counter and paid.*
Next, I turn to Simone's field notes which offer further socialization experiences within Mama's Place.

Simone's Experiences
Simone offers a unique perspective different from Author, Amanda, and Nita. In fact, her first reaction to the diner was to turn the other direction. She notes, *at first glance, I wonder, where am I? Do I really want to eat food that is cooked in a place like this? I forego my gut feelings and proceed into the diner seating area.* Simone's experiences complement her co-investigator's findings by revealing two themes: the organizational socialization of approved practices and how prior socialization from other groups may limit socialization of a new group.

Approved Practices
Throughout her field notes, Simone notes various staff members of Mama's Place and customers treating the space like home. For example, staff members frequently go outside on smoke breaks leaving a full diner to "fend for themselves." Customers read newspapers and scatter homework across their tables. Staff members sit down at customer's tables and "chat it up" with them. Similar to my theme of treating the space like home, Simone's notes take the interpretation of these behaviors being approved or acceptable, not home-like. Simone's notes reveal that honesty is encouraged even at the sake of business. In a conversation between the cook and a waitress, Simone shares the following:

> *Waitress: What is that?!?*
> *Cook: Those are pumpkin pancakes.*
> *Waitress: Euugh…I love pumpkin anything, but those look nasty!*
> *Cook: Try it.*
> *Waitress: [She must try it…I can't see them, only hear them loud and clear!]*
> > *Eugh! Those are gross! Ahh nasty! What are those? That is the worst*
> > *thing I have ever had! I love anything pumpkin, but that just ruined*
> > *pumpkin for me forever! Oh my god! That was terrible! Ahh sick!*
> *Cook: What? Your grandma thinks they are good…*
> *Waitress: Does anyone even order those? They are horrible!*
> *Cook: Well, a girl [Simone] out there has them, and she doesn't seem to have a*
> *problem!*
> *Waitress: Well, I don't know, but those are nasty!*

Simone finalizes this conversation by offering her own opinion that this is *not good for the business, but no one but me seems to care. Reminds me of family. You can say what you want where ever you want…whenever you want…doesn't matter because you were honest.* In addition to approved and acceptable behavior, Simone's notes reveal her struggle with prior socialization experiences.

Impact of Previous Socialization

Simone's previous socialization experiences impacted her observation and feelings towards Mama's standards of cleanliness and health. In addition to containers being left open without lids on them in the kitchen, Simone constantly mentions the presence of flies and smoke in the diner. On her first visit to the diner she notes, *lots of flies flying around the diner like a meat market.* When observing a waitress carrying bags of ice into the kitchen, she sees her throw them to the ground which is *kind of gross to me; I may not get ice from here on out.*
This statement indicates withdrawal and distancing from diner life since ice is a part of every glass. Although Simone becomes accustomed to the acceptance of flies in her water and bugs in her water glass, she still notes their presence such as a silverfish crawling from behind a 1950s style portrait. Like Nita, Simone experienced staff members smoking outside of the establishment with the door propped open. She describes the experiences as: *Door was kept open a lot, breeze from outside was cold and the smell of the smoke from the smokers outside fumigated the diner. I breathed in a lot of secondhand smoke during this session and secondhand smoke is more carcinogenic then primary or mainstream smoke.* She not only refers to her time in the diner as a detached "session," but describes how her health is at risk by being part of Mama's Place in this specific moment.

In addition, Simone offers her commentary on other customers within Mama's Place which reveals how other people within the organization may lead to judgment and withdrawal by newcomers in the organization. On Simone's third visit a group she observed reminded her of what she defines as a "white trash bash" which added to her distaste of the dinner. Her story is as follows: *One of the women, we will call her 'C'' for 'Chatty' talked the entire time, never letting the other two people have a word in her conversation. She also had a ton of facial piercings. The other woman, we will call her 'N' for 'Nails,' had extremely fake nails that were long, and black, with rhinestone*

fireworks. Trash, is all I could think of. The observation of this group existed throughout her visit in which she reported hearing *bar fight incidents, police reports, and how her friend's uncle hit on her.*

Although my interpretation of Simone's field notes is that she hated this experience due to the conditions and groups present that did not meet her expectations, her tone changes in latter entries. In fact, when informed of a new college student discount Simone notes she respected the place more. After hearing from her waiter that college students get 15% off now on Wednesday through Sundays, she told him, *the food here is already reasonable…probably the most reasonable near campus. He agrees with me, and says that he tells the owner that all the time…tells her that she is never going to make money with prices this low. He tells him that she wants to accommodate to the college students and that they need lower prices. I am fine with that, and respect this place even more!* This tactic reveals that individuals who may not initially respect the organization may be enticed to even stand up for the establishment if they are gaining extra incentive.

In addition to incentives, we learn that Simone notes the good intentions of Mama's Place and develops a genuine concern for the staff members. Her concern for the organization results in her hiding her displeasure for their food. *The grease on the rye toast is nearly dripping off the toasted bread. The sauerkraut is more bitter than normal…overall, not yummy diner food. I eat my French fries and push the sandwich around so that it looks like I ate it. I don't want to hurt their feelings. Their food is so cheap and they put a lot into making the food here, so the last thing that I want to do is offend them.*

Concluding Thoughts

Overall, our socialization experiences within Mama's Place may be summarized as follows: We learned that this particular diner initiates new customers with either a personal "seal of approval" such as staff introducing themselves verbally or nonverbally as in Author's experience when Karen signed his receipt so he'd "have a pal," or newcomers are able to self-identify as in Amanda's case and are then provided with information regarding the organization once they seek and initiate their own socialization. I (Author) did not receive this treatment because I did not ask the questions. It seems if I did ask questions, perhaps I did not ask the "right" questions which would be a great extension of this study. An ethnography of communication should be employed within diners to explore how exactly communication is utilized in order to socialize its members and newcomers. However, it is important to note that not all members within our research team were "welcomed" into Mama's Place the same way. Nita and Simone were left to find their own ways into the organization.

We also learned that this particular diner had family expectations and obligations which were imposed upon its customers and "produced and reproduced in the everyday discourse of family members" (Jablin, 2001, p. 735). Amanda observed caring for others as both an expectation and obligation. This was quite evident through her numerous observations and interactions with James, an elderly customer with impaired speech. Perhaps Amanda and my experiences were so positive because we genuinely liked the staff members of Mama's Place and welcomed getting to know them as individuals and as a community. In other words, we did not seek to resist the socialization we endured or

hesitantly experience all the diner had the offer. Nita and Simone's experiences seemed less positive due to barriers such as cultural differences, personal bias, and prior socialization from other institutions. Combining our experiences offers insight into how one organization's attempt to socialize customers is perceived and received differently.

As we consider future directions for this research, I believe this particular study would benefit from a bona fide group perspective (Putnam & Stohl, 1996). In addition, Kramer's (2011a) multilevel model for examining voluntary membership and the various levels which enhance the bona fide perspective offers great potential for analysis, particularly for Simone's experience. These perspectives may be an appropriate concept when considering customers and the various group memberships they maintain and bring with them into diners. Karmer (2011a) claimed one important area to explore is the "socialization of different types of voluntary members based on either a typology of volunteer activities, length of commitment, or dimensions of volunteering" (p. 250).

A more specific focus on membership and the meanings staff and customers affix to Mama's Place would add further depth to this study. Although not explored in depth in this study, my experiences with Karen identify her as a key socializing agent in this specific organization. Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2002) found that intensity can increase the rate at which socialization occurs. If Karen is the primary, "intense" socializing agent, that Griffin, Colella, and Goparaju (2000) recommend would be helpful in socializing newcomers within Mama's Place, many of the differences in our experiences as a team could be explained. Amanda and I had more experiences and interaction with Karen, which may have accounted for their positive experiences. We chose to communicate with Karen because we quickly identified her as a "key player" and someone who would reward our investment (Waldeck and Meyers, 2008). As we continue our diner research, attention to key players and their tools, tactics, and tricks of socializing newcomers and members will only add to our findings and research.

For now, we leave you the words Mama expressed each time after receiving payment for her services. "See ya tomorrow." It isn't a question, but rather an expectation that we'll be seeing each other again. In fact, we will. Until then.

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