

Observation Exercise: Notes and Analysis

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Assessment and Evaluation—EDTC 809

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Observation Exercise: Notes and Analysis

The setting is a popular coffee restaurant chain located in the heart of Upper Montclair, N.J, a diverse suburban community. The observation took place on October 5, 2018, on a Friday afternoon between 3:10 p.m. and 4:15 p.m.. The observational exercise will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do customers spend their time in a coffee shop?

RQ2. How do customers interact with their environment? With the employees and with each other?

The observation addresses the research questions and uncovers so much more by listening to conversations and watching the social interactions between customers and employees. The following observation report will present three sections: jottings, full observational notes, and analysis.

Jottings

- Crowded
- Long lines
- Crisp, breeze each time door opens
- Loud conversations
- Several different conversations
- Teenagers yelling
- 4 Employees always moving
- Laptops
- Phones
- iPads
- Working
- Friends doing homework/ working on a project
- Baby boomer reading newspaper
- Mom holding medicine/ prescriptions
- Groups of friends
- Coffee
- Yogurt and pastries
- Smiles and laughter

- Chairs
- Dark Walls
- Windows emitting sunlight
- Round tables
- Laptop Bar seating against the wall
- Bar Table and Chairs
- Constant movement/action
- No quiet space
- Not much room
- Talk of Time /Schedules
- Sleeping woman
- Another sleeping woman with puffy eyes
- Full makeup and colorful clothing on a regular female customer
- Diverse cultures
- Baby Boomers to Gen Z customers
- Payment by card and phone app
- Animated conversations
- Tense atmosphere
- Tired customers

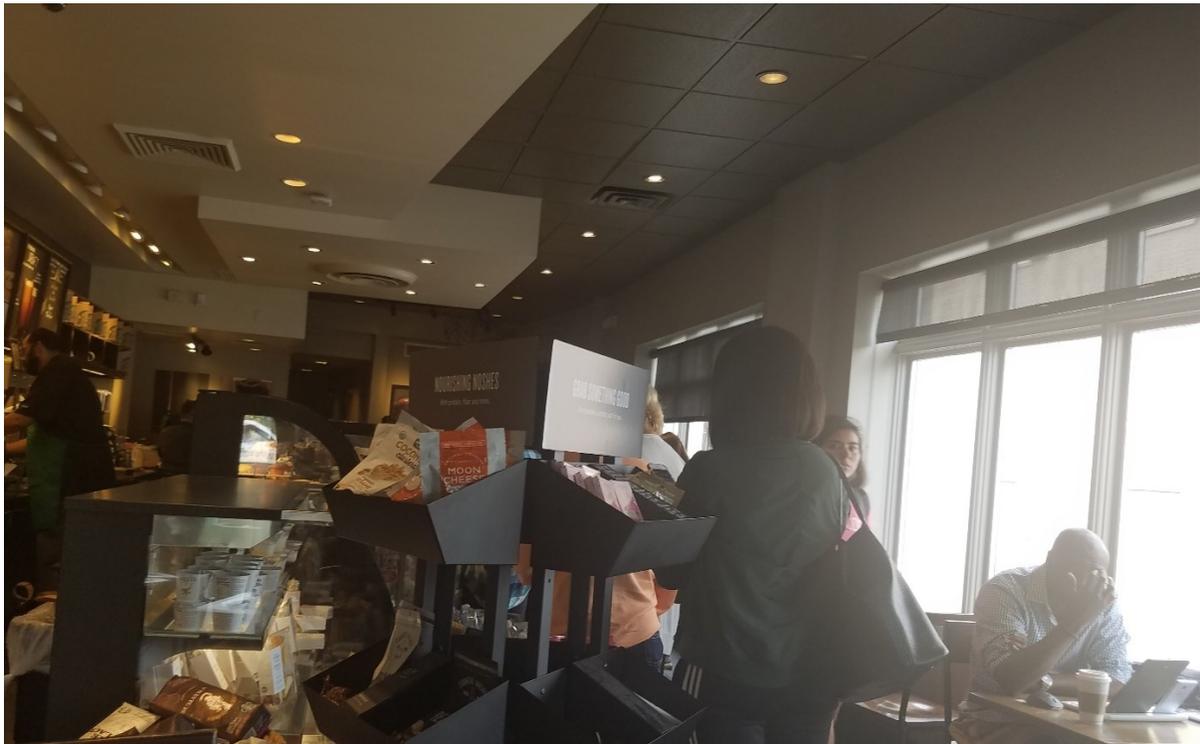


Figure 1. Observer view of the inside of the café in Upper Montclair, N.J. Picture taken October 5, 2018 at 3:17 p.m.



Figure 2. Observer view from the opposite end of the café in Upper Montclair, N.J. Picture taken October 5, 2018 at 3:32 p.m.

Observational Notes

Friday, October 5, 2018, was a bright, unseasonably warm day though with moments to welcome a crisp fall breeze. Upon entry the café was bustling full of people, with a line almost out the door, there was one empty seat to begin the first phase of the observation. The smell of coffee and baked goods with hints of seasonal aromas such as pumpkin and maple permeates the air. The crisp fall breeze enters the café each time a new customer or group of customers open the door. The café is not well lit but the sunshine coming in from the windows provides lighting for customers to read. The floor is dirty with evidence of heavy foot traffic throughout the day. The product displays and signage are in disarray reinforcing the busyness of this establishment.

The bar table seating by the entrance door café provides a clear view of the employee or baristas interactions with customers. There was also an opportunity to hear conversations as customers enter the coffee shop as well as observe what people do while waiting in line. The café offers access to Wi-Fi and ten tables to seat two people at each. At the other end of the café, laptop bar type of seating is available to seat six customers. The laptop bar chairs face the dark wall where a young woman is sitting alone working intensely on her laptop. The three high bar tables with chairs are available with two at the back and the one table close to the entrance, which as a participant-observer, the higher seating near the entrance door provides a better overview of activities. After observing from this view for 30 minutes, observation changed to participation by standing in line to purchase coffee. The final phase of the observation is the seating viewpoint in the back to observe customers as they wait for their items after waiting in line to place their food and coffee orders.

The Line

This part of the observation while sitting on the chair at the bar type table provides an insight into the conversations people have and what people do while waiting in line. At 3:10 p.m., 15 people are waiting in line to place their order, but there is a constant flow of people coming through the entrance doors. Though not clearly visible, there are customers at the other end of the café waiting for their order. On this line is an of four teenage girls all with hair in ponytails, with one raising her foot claiming in an exaggerated tone of the gum on her sneaker. All are wearing shorts, t-shirts, and sweatshirts. At the end of the line, there is a woman with white hair using a walker. Standing behind the groups of teenagers is another woman with a young son perhaps a four or five-year-old taking care of business on her phone while reading and holding the two bags containing medical prescriptions. There is a mother and daughter in

athleisure wear talking about plans for the weekend. A gentleman in gym gear walks in, looks at the line, looks at his phone (presumably for the time) sighs then walks out. Two men with phones in hand walk in talking with one saying to the other talking about a conversation with a “rich chick” –then, “I told her, “I like your life.” Another middle-aged woman in a fuchsia jacket, dramatic makeup and plenty of accessories walks up to one of the servers and returns the restroom key as the server starts chatting and says, “Thanks, Ruth.” Ruth returns to her “office” where she has two tables together, books and newspapers, with some coffee and plates. It appears Ruth is a regular at this establishment. Next to Ruth are two young adults perhaps college students or business colleagues sitting at a table to two square tables together just as Ruth arranged her office, the colleagues are dressed casually using a MAC laptop, looking intensely at some papers and pointing to their computer. As customers are entering the café, they are talking about their schedules, where they need to be and where they need to go. The phrase “I am so tired” is said a few times from customers on the line. One teenager claims, “I am starving” and a few other comments such as “I need to sleep” and one with “I wish I could sleep now.”

The Tables

There is a row of small round tables adjacent to the windows that face the busy parking lot entrance and view of the sidewalk with many people walking through the shopping district. Sitting at one of the round tables is a woman dressed professionally in a navy dress and dark blazer, she is sitting with her back against the window and fixing her glasses while looking at her phone and falling asleep—she is trying to stay awake but keeps nodding off.

At another one of the round tables is a gentleman with white hair and glasses reading the newspaper and drinking coffee, he is keeping to himself and not looking around.

At the next table, another gentleman perhaps a professional man in his early 30s is sitting looking three devices—he has a phone, and an iPad set on some charging display holder and a laptop. He appeared to be taking care of business and intense from the time of my arrival at my leaving the coffee shop. A gentleman asks if he may sit next to me while he is waiting for his friend, and my response is “yes, of course.” Within five minutes his friend came to the table with two coffee cups and said, “let’s go!” Another group of three teenage girls, all with phones in hand enter with loud, incomprehensible conversation. At another table is a middle-aged woman, with cropped brown hair and glasses is sitting with a young boy perhaps 12 years old, she is sleeping while he is leaning over the table reading through a comic magazine.

Employee Interactions

There are three males and one female mixing the drinks while two male employees are taking orders and speaking to the customers. Approximately five minutes into the observation, one male employee ends his shift, then a vibrant smiling, barista starts his shift, and he was engaging with each customer throughout the remaining time during the observation. Perhaps in his early twenties, his sandy-blond mohawk-like hairstyle with a ponytail is remarkable, and he is smiling and talking to each customer, the customers are smiling and speaking with him as well. The barista records the customer name to pick up the order. All the customers either pay using their phone apps or using either a credit/debit or store card—I did not see one person pay with cash. The orders are transferred electronically to the baristas making the coffee. The baristas then announce the drink is ready and the customer name. The employees are efficient and are in constant motion as it was difficult to jot down their many movements. The employees are college students or adults in their early 20s; one is an African American male with a beard and mustache; another is a thin red-headed white female, and another male I could barely see. The employees

are polite to each other as there is much movement behind the counter, I observe them saying or motioning to “watch out” or excuse me. Each is busy completing their assigned tasks and keeping the busy work area clean.

As Customer and Participant-Observer

After 20 minutes of observation at 3:25 p.m., the line is much shorter, and I decide to stand in line to order the new Nitro Coffee Drink. Ahead of me is a woman with a shopping bag perhaps in her early 50s, and she is purchasing the ready-made yogurt parfait and a cappuccino. She pays with her card. Behind me are two teenage boys talking about school and the weekend. I also notice the three people sitting in the back—two on laptops and one on the phone facing the dark wall. There are also two bar tables with one person each flipping through their phones while waiting for their name to be called to pick up their orders. As the counter person is wrapping up the conversation with the previous two teenage girls, I am ready to place my order but first, ask the server if there is milk already in this drink. He smiles and explains the drink to me by exclaiming: “You need the Nitro!” He describes the drink as a cold bittersweet chocolate coffee. I order the drink and pay with \$6.00 cash, and he discards the receipt and keeps the change. The area which I did not see before is where customers wait for their orders. There is confusion as to where to stand, and where to get additional items such as napkins, straws and sugar and milk to add to the coffee. As the barista calls each person’s name, Nick, Julie, Owen, then Susan, I notice each person looking around for the table to fix their coffee. The table with milk and other items is by the entrance. I did not realize I received a strawless lid for my iced coffee drink and only realized this when I stuck my finger in the spout. It is now 3:45 p.m. and I sit down at one of the bar tables in the back. The same girl from the earlier observation is still sitting at the laptop bar facing the wall working on her laptop. The gentleman reading the paper also from the

previous observation grabs his paper then leaves. One woman picking up her coffee from the pickup section proceeds to sit down at that table where the man just grabbed his paper. She is a middle-aged woman with salt and pepper hair. She closes her eyes and appears to fall asleep. The intensity of the number of customers has died down, and the workers behind the counter seem to look relieved of less stressed. The one employee exits the counter area and starts cleaning the tables with a rag. It is now 4:15 p.m.; I exit and as I am exiting there is no longer a line but as I open the door to exit another group of three teenage girls walks through the door.

Table 1

Full observational notes with coding of themes

Observational Notes	Coding
<p>Friday, October 5, 2018, was a bright, unseasonably warm day though with moments to welcome a crisp fall breeze. Upon entry the café was bustling full of people, with a line almost out the door, there was one empty seat to begin the first phase of the observation. The smell of coffee and baked goods with hints of seasonal aromas such as pumpkin and maple permeates the air. The crisp fall breeze enters the café each time a new customer or group of customers open the door. The café is not well lit but the sunshine coming in from the windows provides lighting for customers to</p>	<p>Weather</p> <p>Weather Furniture</p> <p>Seasonal Foods Aromas/ Scents to relate to setting Café Busy</p> <p>Weather/Temperature Conversation Customers Coffee Food Degree of Lighting</p> <p>Reading Weather Degree of Lighting Dirty/disarray reflection on activity</p>

<p>read. The floor is dirty with evidence of heavy foot traffic throughout the day. The product displays and signage are in disarray reinforcing the busyness of this establishment. The bar table seating by the entrance door café provides a clear view of the employee or baristas interactions with customers. There was also an opportunity to hear conversations as customers enter the coffee shop as well as observe what people do while waiting in line. The café offers access to Wi-Fi and ten tables to seat two people at each. At the other end of the café, laptop bar type of seating is available to seat six customers. The laptop bar chairs face the dark wall where a young woman is sitting alone working intensely on her laptop. The three high bar tables with chairs are available with two at the back and the one table close to the entrance, which as a participant-observer, the higher seating near the entrance door provides a better overview of activities. After observing from this view for 30 minutes, observation changed to</p>	<p>Signage Employees (Baristas) Customers Layout Furniture</p> <p>Conversations Technology</p> <p>Degree of Lighting (Dark)</p> <p>Laptops Working Waiting</p> <p>Orders</p> <p>Seating / Layout</p>
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<p>participation by standing in line to purchase coffee. The final phase of the observation is the seating viewpoint in the back to observe customers as they wait for their items after waiting in line to place their food and coffee orders.</p> <p>The Line</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">This part of the observation while sitting on the chair at the bar type table provides an insight into the conversations people have and what people do while waiting in line. At 3:10 p.m., 15 people are waiting in line to place their order, but there is a constant flow of people coming through the entrance doors. Though not clearly visible, there are customers at the other end of the café waiting for their order. On this line is an of four teenage girls all with hair in ponytails, with one raising her foot claiming in an exaggerated tone of the gum on her sneaker. All are wearing shorts, t-shirts, and sweatshirts. At the end of the line, there is a woman with white hair using a walker.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Line Waiting Order Seating Tables</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Time</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Line Waiting Order Teenagers Hair: Ponytails Gym clothes/Comfort wear Hair Phones Family Friends Health</p>
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<p>Standing behind the groups of teenagers is another woman with a young son perhaps a four or five-year-old taking care of business on her phone while reading and holding the two bags containing medical prescriptions.</p> <p>There is a mother and daughter in athleisure wear talking about plans for the weekend. A gentleman in gym gear walks in, looks at the line, looks at his phone (presumably for the time) sighs then walks out. Two men with phones in hand walk in talking with one saying to the other talking about a conversation with a “rich chick” –then, “I told her, “I like your life.” Another middle-aged woman in a fuchsia jacket, dramatic makeup and plenty of accessories walks up to one of the servers and returns the restroom key as the server starts chatting and says, “Thanks, Ruth.” Ruth returns to her “office” where she has two tables together, books and newspapers, with some coffee and plates. It appears Ruth is a regular at this establishment.</p> <p>Next to Ruth are two young adults perhaps</p>	<p>Gym clothes/Comfort wear</p> <p>Plans</p> <p>Weekend</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Conversation</p> <p>Age: Middle Aged</p> <p>Clothing</p> <p>Makeup</p> <p>Tables</p> <p>Coffee</p> <p>Books</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>Students</p> <p>Business</p> <p>Office</p>
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<p>college students or business colleagues sitting at a table to two square tables together just as Ruth arranged her office, the colleagues are dressed casually using a MAC laptop, looking intensely at some papers and pointing to their computer. As customers are entering the café, they are talking about their schedules, where they need to be and where they need to go. The phrase “I am so tired” is said a few times from customers on the line. One teenager claims, “I am starving” and a few other comments such as “I need to sleep” and one with “I wish I could sleep now.”</p> <p>The Tables</p> <p>There is a row of small round tables adjacent to the windows that face the busy parking lot entrance and view of the sidewalk with many people walking through the shopping district.</p> <p>Sitting at one of the round tables is a woman dressed professionally in a navy dress and dark blazer, she is sitting with her back against the window and fixing her glasses while</p>	<p>Laptop</p> <p>Papers</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Time/Schedules</p> <p>Health (Tired)</p> <p>Health (Hunger)</p> <p>Health (Sleep)</p> <p>Layout: Furniture/Tables</p> <p>Glasses</p> <p>Phone</p> <p>Sleep</p>
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<p>looking at her phone and falling asleep—she is trying to stay awake but keeps nodding off.</p> <p>At another one of the round tables is a gentleman with white hair and glasses reading the newspaper and drinking coffee, he is keeping to himself and not looking around.</p> <p>At the next table, another gentleman perhaps a professional man in his early 30s is sitting looking three devices—he has a phone, and an iPad set on some charging display holder and a laptop. He appeared to be taking care of business and intense from the time of my arrival at my leaving the coffee shop. A gentleman asks if he may sit next to me while he is waiting for his friend, and my response is “yes, of course.” Within five minutes his friend came to the table with two coffee cups and said, “let’s go!” Another group of three teenage girls, all with phones in hand enter with loud, incomprehensible conversation. At another table is a middle-aged woman, with cropped brown hair and glasses is sitting with a young boy perhaps 12 years old, she is</p>	<p>White Hair Glasses Reading Newspaper</p> <p>Phone Laptop iPad Business Early 30s</p> <p>On the go</p> <p>Groups / Friendship</p> <p>Phones</p> <p>Middle Aged</p> <p>Sleeping</p> <p>Family</p> <p>Reading Magazine</p>
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<p>sleeping while he is leaning over the table reading through a comic magazine.</p> <p>Employee Interactions</p> <p>There are three males and one female mixing the drinks while two male employees are taking orders and speaking to the customers. Approximately five minutes into the observation, one male employee ends his shift, then a vibrant smiling, barista starts his shift, and he was engaging with each customer throughout the remaining time during the observation. Perhaps in his early twenties, his sandy-blond mohawk-like hairstyle with a ponytail is remarkable, and he is smiling and talking to each customer, the customers are smiling and speaking with him as well. The barista records the customer name to pick up the order. All the customers either pay using their phone apps or using either a credit/debit or store card—I did not see one person pay with cash. The orders are transferred electronically to the baristas making the</p>	<p>Orders</p> <p>Smiling</p> <p>Hair</p> <p>Age</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Payment</p> <p>Name</p> <p>Movement</p> <p>College Students</p>
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<p>coffee. The baristas then announce the drink is ready and the customer name. The employees are efficient and are in constant motion as it was difficult to jot down their many movements. The employees are college students or adults in their early 20s; one is an African American male with a beard and mustache; another is a thin red-headed white female, and another male I could barely see. The employees are polite to each other as there is much movement behind the counter, I observe them saying or motioning to “watch out” or excuse me. Each is busy completing their assigned tasks and keeping the busy work area clean.</p> <p>As Customer and Participant-Observer</p> <p>After 20 minutes of observation at 3:25 p.m., the line is much shorter, and decide to stand in line to order the new Nitro Coffee Drink. Ahead of me is a woman with a shopping bag perhaps in her early 50s, and she is purchasing the ready-made yogurt parfait and a cappuccino. She pays with her card.</p>	<p>Young Adults</p> <p>Polite</p> <p>Motion</p> <p>Line</p> <p>Coffee</p> <p>Shopping</p> <p>Age: Early 50s</p> <p>Food</p> <p>Payment</p>
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<p>Behind me are two teenage boys talking about school and the weekend. I also notice the three people sitting in the back—two on laptops and one on the phone facing the dark wall. There are also two bar tables with one person each flipping through their phones while waiting for their name to be called to pick up their orders. As the counter person is wrapping up the conversation with the previous two teenage girls, I am ready to place my order but first, ask the server if there is milk already in this drink. He smiles and explains the drink to me by exclaiming: “You need the Nitro!” He describes the drink as a cold bittersweet chocolate coffee. I order the drink and pay with \$6.00 cash, and he discards the receipt and keeps the change. The area which I did not see before is where customers wait for their orders. There is confusion as to where to stand, and where to get additional items such as napkins, straws and sugar and milk to add to the coffee. As the barista calls each person’s name, Nick, Julie, Owen, then Susan,</p>	<p>Laptops</p> <p>Degrees of lighting</p> <p>Laptops</p> <p>Furniture</p> <p>Counter</p> <p>Conversation</p> <p>Teenagers</p> <p>Smiles</p> <p>Order</p> <p>Payment</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Layout</p> <p>Layout/Placement</p>
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<p>I notice each person looking around for the table to fix their coffee. The table with milk and other items is by the entrance. I did not realize I received a strawless lid for my iced coffee drink and only realized this when I stuck my finger in the spout. It is now 3:45 p.m. and I sit down at one of the bar tables in the back. The same girl from the earlier observation is still sitting at the laptop bar facing the wall working on her laptop. The gentleman reading the paper also from the previous observation grabs his paper then leaves. One woman picking up her coffee from the pickup section proceeds to sit down at that table where the man just grabbed his paper. She is a middle-aged woman with salt and pepper hair. She closes her eyes and appears to fall asleep. The intensity of the number of customers has died down, and the workers behind the counter seem to look relieved of less stressed. The one employee exits the counter area and starts cleaning the tables with a rag. It is now 4:15 p.m.; I exit</p>	<p>Coffee</p> <p>Tables</p> <p>Laptop</p> <p>Work</p> <p>Newspaper Glasses Reading</p> <p>Age: Middle Aged</p> <p>Hair: Salt and pepper</p> <p>Health (sleeping)</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Employees</p> <p>Cleaning</p> <p>Teenagers</p>
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<p>and as I am exiting there is no longer a line but as I open the door to exit another group of three teenage girls walks through the door.</p>	
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Analysis

Research Questions

RQ1. How do customers spend their time in a coffee shop?

RQ2. How do customers interact with their environment? With the employees and with each other?

Ethnographic research explores how people navigate every day life (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Using the example of the ubiquitous coffee shop provides a lens to the slice of daily life and the coffee shop, a staple in American culture and society. The time of the observation is also key to the observation, and it was after school which is evident by the demographic, though Baby Boomers through Generation X customers filled the café during the observation. As a researcher, for a richer understanding to fully answer the research questions, I would select different days during the week and different intervals during the day and evening. The expectation is the demographic and observations at 6:00 a.m. would vary from the observations at 10:00 p.m. The atmosphere and activity were intense; thus, this affects the observation details. If this was a more slow-paced atmosphere I would have had more of an opportunity to observe the customers on a more granular level. If I were to go into more in-depth descriptions of each person for this observation, then the description would add more to answer the research questions. As a participant-observer it was important to experience what each customer experiences by waiting in line, engaging with the employees, and ordering coffee. If I want to pursue a more profound understanding, I would observe the café each day at least during

four different intervals during operating hours. Changing seats was also crucial to get a better perspective of the activities and observations at different sections of the café.

Time, schedules and technology are recurring themes as are the overall themes of work, tiredness and overall health. To address RQ1 about how customers spend their time in the coffee shop is most of the customers spend the time waiting on line to order and spend the time looking on their phones and speaking with friends. Other customers sitting at the tables spend their time working on laptops, reading and sleeping. Though going in as a researcher, I expected to find a relaxing atmosphere instead I found a non-stop productive place where many are taking care of business as well as taking a break from the busyness of their everyday lives.

The café layout could be more intuitive with the better flow of tables and displays but apparently, this is not a deterrent. The employees (baristas) were very customer service oriented by smiling and engaging with the customers, and this is also a pivotal element in answering the research question about how customers interact with the environment. The customers working on the tables seem comfortable bringing their devices and working while having their coffee.

As an observer, I was surprised at how I felt. I sensed customers and their main concerns about health and time. Many customers claim they are tired, many were sleeping and many with puffy, tired eyes needed sleep ordering lattes and various other energy boosting teas or drinks. Many are also on their phones with the sense of stress and scheduling their day. The health theme continues with the worried mother with a bagful of prescription medication. Also, many of the customers are wearing athletic clothing show concern for health and fitness or comfort. The experience as an ethnographic researcher transcends reading about the subject, using all your senses to experience the subjects makes the research richer and provides a deeper understanding that uncovers unexpected phenomena.

References

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2014). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.