An application of proxemics to restaurant interiors: tabletop cooking and its implications for the millennial user

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An application of proxemics to restaurant interiors: Tabletop cooking and its implications for the millennial user

by

Joshua E. Kassing

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Interior Design

Program of Study Committee:
Lori Brunner Stone, Major Professor
Fred Malven
Thomas Schrier

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2016

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DEDICATION

This research study, and the countless hours invested by all those involved, is dedicated to those designers who commit their careers to the pursuit of investigation without fear of failure.

*Investigation*; at its most fundamental level, this is how I understand design as a discipline. It is a constant attempt to better the human condition through acute observation, critical analysis, the manipulation of form and context, and ultimately the act of pursuing proactivity. Design is not a science, nor a math but rather an experimental quest that requires us to amass a set of knowledge through exposure. That exposure, in my opinion, is what shapes us as designers. We don’t have to live the way we do. What we are obligated to do, however, is live amongst other humans, and that is the condition we should be designing for. Cultures, societies, and trends will shift and constantly evolve, but the fundamental acknowledgment of our presence amongst other humans is essential.

This is my contribution to design research, and an attempt at investigating the human condition.
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Although it is my name that will ultimately appear on the cover of this document, it is imperative that I recognize the people who made my graduate studies possible. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family who has supported me in everything I do. Without your constant guidance and reassurance, I would never be where I am today. I could never thank you enough for all you have done for me.

Second, I would like to thank my incredibly understanding friends who have patiently stood by me through a rigorous two years. You have been sure to keep my life balanced, reminding me when a break has been earned. Sara, you’re my person. You will never know how much your friendship means to me.

I would like to thank Lori Brunner Stone, my major professor, for not only being an incredible advisor and mentor, but also for being an irreplaceable motivator. You’ve kept me grounded in the present, yet constantly remind me to consider the future and the potentials it holds. In addition, I would like to thank my additional committee members, Fred Malven and Thomas Schrier, for their support and encouragement throughout the course of my studies. I would like to thank my students, for constantly challenging me as a designer and continually producing amazing work.

Finally, I would like to thank Iowa State University, most specifically the College of Design, for providing me an incredibly diverse foundation as I move into the next chapters of my life. It has been an unforgettable seven years.
This study is an investigation into the relationship between tabletop cooking and designed restaurant interiors, attempting to better understand how Edward T. Hall’s notion of proxemic theory might involve itself as a significant proponent in the recent growth of this restaurant typology, specifically for millennial users. In order to investigate this concept, a multi-method research approach has been implemented that attempts to examine current restaurant preferences of millennial users, current tabletop cooking culture, and its current relationship to proxemics; ultimately identifying the commonalities that might explain a significant correlation between these entities.

The purpose in conducting this study is essentially two fold. First, analyzing the current context in which tabletop restaurants exist. This means understanding the existing conditions that define tabletop cooking facilities as a typology and place, in addition to investigating what they might look like in the future. Second, introducing proxemic theory as a framework for analyzing millennial user behavior and preferences within this context. As a continuation and expansion of both the analyses, interior design implications will be discussed as a means of indicating how this data might impact the future of restaurant design. This study employs mainly qualitative research methods to determine the relationship between the analyzed topics, gathered in a rather heuristic manner.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to provide the background information necessary in order to understand, and ultimately appreciate, the contextual framework surrounding this research study. It outlines the purpose, significance, objectives, scope, and nature of the study amongst other things. Most specifically, it outlines the research questions that will be addressed throughout the remainder of this investigation as they pertain to restaurant interiors and proxemics.

Background

In order to better understand the significance this research holds for the principle investigator of the study, it is necessary to first briefly discuss his background and relationship to the subject matter.

At the age of sixteen, Kassing was hired as a server at the Eau Claire, Wisconsin, location of the restaurant chain Red Robin. The franchise is nationally known for its gourmet burgers and boozy shakes, accompanied with other American comfort fare. Over the course of nearly a year of employment here, he was given the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of the restaurant and food service industry including service etiquette, social dynamics, appropriate timing, food and health safety, restaurant functions and layout, required personnel, and payroll.
After moving to Ames, Iowa, in 2009, he was offered a server position at Hickory Park Restaurant Company, a restaurant known for its borderline chaotic atmosphere; with bells ringing, lights flashing, tin trays banging, and people of all walks of life coming to socialize and dine in one enormous, ware-house like building. Compared with most other restaurants in the region, this seemingly massive establishment has the capacity to seat over four hundred guests at any given time, while supporting an active staff of over three hundred members. After nearly a year and half of employment, he was promoted to a manager and was introduced to several facets of the industry in which he had not yet been exposed. These included managing staff, predicting high and low volume times, coordination of large groups, pro-bono events, catering, issue resolution, allergy precautions, and time management. In essence, the experience as a manager gave insight into the behind the scenes activity that would generally go unnoticed by the public, yet is what makes a restaurant function effectively.

In 2013, having left Hickory Park Restaurant Company, Kassing was offered a server position at +39 Restaurant, Market, and Cantina which is also located in Ames, Iowa. This higher-end, authentic Italian restaurant was new to the area, and Kassing had an opportunity to help shape the reputation that the restaurant was to establish for itself. This included branding, restaurant layout, uniform assignments, menu creation and design, interior décor, seating types, and lighting. As of now, the restaurant has become highly successful and is currently scheduled to open a second location in Des Moines, Iowa.

Although this information may appear to be superfluous, it is essential in understanding the relationship Kassing has established with the restaurant industry and
the extensive experience he has gained as a result. Through exposure to several restaurants, in multiples states, of varying typologies and employment positions, he has gained the ability to take notice of the nuances of restaurant culture that ultimately inspired this research. Restaurants are inherently social spaces, meaning social dynamics and human behavior becomes an integral part of the overall experience. Without the proper background in restaurants or the service industry, it could be difficult to analyze and identify this behavior. A lack of exposure to this type of environment, from multiple perspectives including both employee and guest, could result in a distorted analysis of the data in that behavior in restaurants is not always as it appears; the intentional seems unintentional and vice versa. Particularly when the focus matter is something as intimate as proxemics and human behavior, it is crucial that the investigator has a thorough grasp of a restaurant’s inner workings and collective dynamics so the research may be conducted in an effective manner. In addition, the extensive background in restaurant culture has allowed Kassing the resources, both human and logistical, necessary to conduct this research, including managerial approval.

In terms of a design background, Kassing has a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Iowa State University in addition to his pursuit of a Master of Fine Arts degree in Interior Design, which this thesis is in partial fulfillment of. The background in both restaurants and design has collided in this thesis research. This allows for an analytical approach to the study from both perspectives, with experience that legitimizes the positions and reinforces the significance and relationship to the subject matter for the principle investigator.
Problem Statement

The restaurant industry in the United States is an ever-growing, complex network that continually challenges the conventional dining experience. “Quality food. Quality service” is often not enough to initially attract, and ultimately establish a restaurant as a legitimate player in this highly competitive industry (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Users are now requiring an experience: a dining experience that goes beyond the food, but becomes something inherently dynamic and social (Simpson, 2003). This experiential requirement has propagated a substantial increase in restaurant typologies, with facilities that question conventional functionality, aesthetics, culture, content, and atmosphere often rising to the surface. In addition to an increase in typological categories, this demand for an experience has consequently amplified the involvement of interior designers in the restaurant design process.

A fascinating restaurant typology has gained increasingly noticeable popularity amongst millennial users in the past decade, implying there might be interior elements that are particularly attractive to this demographic. The typology is being called tabletop cooking and it challenges the conventional American dining experience. This study is an investigation into the relationship between tabletop cooking and designed restaurant interiors, attempting to better understand how Edward T. Hall’s notion of proxemic theory might involve itself as a significant proponent in the recent growth of this restaurant typology, specifically for millennial users. In order to investigate this concept, a multi-method research approach has been implemented that attempts to examine current restaurant preferences of millennial users, current tabletop cooking culture, and its current relationship to proxemics; ultimately identifying the commonalities that might
explain the significant correlation between these entities. If a proxemic relationship does in fact exist, then the question of how might interior designers implement this knowledge in the restaurant industry begs to be asked. If proxemic tendencies exist in tabletop cooking culture amongst millennial users, might then, the success of the typology have the potential to translate to other restaurant typologies and ultimately have implications in reshaping the conventional American dining experience?

Study Purpose

The purpose in conducting this study is essentially two fold. First, analyzing the current context in which tabletop restaurants exist. This means understanding the existing conditions that define tabletop cooking facilities as a typology and place, in addition to investigating what they might look like in the future. Second, introducing proxemic theory as a framework for analyzing millennial user behavior and preferences within this context. As a continuation and expansion of both the analyses, interior design implications will be discussed as a means of indicating how this data might impact the future of restaurant design. This study employs mainly qualitative research methods to determine the relationship between the analyzed topics, gathered in a rather heuristic manner.

Significance of the Study

Restaurants are an integral element of American culture, not to mention world culture, existing as social outlets for people of all ages and demographics. In a context dependent on an intricately choreographed system of functionality, aesthetics,
atmosphere, and dynamics, there is an inherent complexity that is continually being challenged by both user and staff. Consequently, one might argue there are human behaviors that could be attributed mainly by the spatial context in which both user and staff are placed. This iterates the importance of what the spatial context entails, a context heavily influenced by interior designers. By investigating the potential of a correlation between proxemics and tabletop cooking facilities, a blossoming restaurant typology that is challenging American dining norms, we are not only able to impact that spatial context, but in addition, impact how people live their everyday. Restaurant culture has become an entirely defined subset of our culture as a people, signifying its social and cultural weight. If we can somehow diagram how human behavior is impacted by a given context such as the one presented in this study, imagine the potentials that information might lend to the future of how people consume food; not only out of necessity, but as an inherently social experience. This information could then be applied to an infinite number of other contexts, and done so in a meaningful way.

We are currently at a place in time where conventional norms, in many facets of life, are being challenged by a new wave of users being raised in an age where technology dominates. This means as technology continues to develop and shift, as will the American public and its’ associated behavior. As this behavior is changing, given the continually evolving context, it is essential that we analyze those things which impact our everyday. In our case here, restaurants are a significant part of our culture and it is imperative that the analysis of their existence is done so in a manner consistent with the rate in which they are changing.
Objectives

The objectives of this study include the following:

1. Define what composes, or what might compose, a tabletop cooking facility in terms of designed interior elements.
2. Investigate restaurant preferences amongst millennial users, and analyze those findings against the existing conditions of a tabletop cooking restaurant facility and identify commonalities.
3. Identify the elements of proxemic theory that exist currently in a tabletop cooking facility, and analyze them in coordination with millennial preferences and observed behavior.
4. Indicate potential design interventions that might somehow accommodate the findings in terms of interior design elements.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between tabletop cooking and designed restaurant interiors, attempting to better understand how Edward T. Hall’s notion of proxemic theory might involve itself as a significant proponent in the success of this restaurant typology, specifically for millennial users. In addition, interior design implications will be discussed as a means of indicating how this data might impact the future of restaurant design.

1. What interior elements help to define or structure a tabletop cooking facility? How does it look now? What might this place need to look like?
2. How are millennial users responding to this type of dining environment? What is their purpose in being there? Why are they seeking this type of dining experience and/or environment?

3. Given these perceptions and conditions, how are the fundamental theories of proxemics currently being integrated, utilized, or challenged in a tabletop-cooking restaurant?

Scope, Assumptions, and Limitations

This investigation is being conducted to help identify potential relationships between tabletop cooking restaurant interiors, proxemics, and millennial users, ultimately suggesting potential design implementations as a result of the data. Demographically speaking, millennial users are the focus. Data utilized in this study will be gathered from current or recent graduates of a large mid-western university, through a mixed-method approach involving a casual observation, formal observation, short survey, focus group, and individual interviews during the spring semester of 2016.

Assumptions of the study include that participants provided information honestly, that participants acted as they would normally had they not been participating in a research study, and that the inclusion criteria of the sample are appropriate and therefore, assures that the participants have all experienced the same or similar phenomenon of the study.

Although this research was carefully prepared, we must address its limitations and shortcomings. First, the definition of “tabletop cooking” includes different methods of food preparation and presentation, the method featured in this study focuses on the
Teppanyaki grill which comes with cultural implications. There are other types of tabletop cooking facilities that might yield different results. Second, because of the resources available both financially and logistically, this research was conducted only on a small population of students who represent a specific demographic within a mid-western town. Therefore, to generalize results for larger groups and in varying geographic locations, the study would be more thorough with more participants at different levels and backgrounds. Third, there are cultural variables that are inherently present in both restaurant design and proxemics that would most likely change geographically. Finally, assessment of the qualitative data was collected and conducted by the author himself, and it is unavoidable that in this study a certain degree of subjectivity and margin of error can be found.

Nature and Order of the Presentation

This study consists of five chapters in total. Chapter 1 provides the background information of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, objectives, and the research questions that shape the study. This chapter also defines the scope and limits of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review, highlighting a compilation of selected works that help to frame the context of the study. Specifically, it addresses tabletop cooking, experiential restaurant design, proxemic theory, and the millennial user.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to conduct the research component of the study. The methods include casual observation, formal observation, short survey, focus group, and individual interviews.
Chapter 4 presents the results and analysis of the data, indicating substantial components of the qualitative data.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion where implications for design are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

**Summary**

In summary, this chapter has presented the foundational information necessary to understand the study as a cohesive whole. It has addressed the overarching research questions, in addition to overall objectives and purpose of the research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of literature acts as a dissection and reiteration of works that help to frame the context for this study. Experiential dining is discussed as it surrounds the social and logistical constructs of this research topic, including information regarding the history of tabletop cooking as it fits into this restaurant typology. In addition, an evaluation of Edward T. Hall’s notion of proxemic theory is deconstructed, in hopes of identifying which components of the theory are most pertinent to the realm of interior design. Finally, with the demographic focus of this study being millennial users, this user type is more specifically defined and contextualized.

Experiential Dining/Servicescape/Communal Dining

Desire for Experience, Value, and Innovation

The process by which experiential restaurant design has woven itself into the American social fabric is an essential element to understanding the typology as a designed interior. In the past several decades, the United States has seen “an increasing number of examples of what has become known as ‘theme’ and ‘entertainment’ design within a new experience economy” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Tabletop cooking as a restaurant typology falls under both of these categories, while simultaneously remaining an experiential restaurant type. Ruhama Simpson of Washington State University completed a research study in 2003 that investigated the development of experiential
restaurant types, and notes a statement made by Ada Louise Huxtable saying American
users are now demanding

…entertainment and escape from the disturbing or humdrum aspects of urban and
suburban life” indicating the importance of an experience accompanying food in
the service industry. (In Simpson, 2003)

In addition, Simpson notes,

With the apparent desire for amusement and experiences among the American
population, ‘theme’ and ‘entertainment’ design has “become a dominant factor
influencing design and real estate development decisions… It is reshaping our
expectations of what places can do for people.” (Beck, 1999)

Experiential restaurant design can be traced back hundreds of years, through
centuries of cultural and social variables, but has seen an exponential increase in demand
in recent years. Simpson notes,

Today’s society has become all about the other “time and place” through
escapism. “Players [in reference to architects and designers] see powerful forces
at work, particularly a growing public appetite for fantasy and escape from life’s
increasingly mundane reality”. (Russell, 1997)

Simpson goes on to mention,

Today’s idea of escapism is being provided with another time, space, place,
atmosphere or environment that transcends one’s everyday experience within any
given medium. (Simpson, 2003)

Simpson’s notion of “escapism” in an important factor in the overall development
of experiential restaurant design, particularly in tabletop cooking facilities. This study
also states,

These mediums can be anything that provides some degree of escapism, large or
small. A variety of mediums for escapism have become popular because of their
therapeutic properties. (Simpson, 2003)

There is undoubtedly a desire for escaping the mundane in American culture, but
particularly with food.
In our modern society, a popular form of escapism occurs frequently with dining out. More and more restaurants are being designed or are changing their designs to provide another time, space, place, atmosphere or environment for everyday users. (Simpson, 2003)

Bonnie Riggs (2012), a restaurant analyst for The NPD Group stated in a study that,

...customers aren’t just going to go for the cheapest thing. They’re going to judge “value” as the best quality they can get for their money – meaning that consumers will expect to get what they pay for. Successful restaurants will be the ones that can provide quality food to consumers at affordable prices. (Riggs, 2012)

Value could be defined simply monetarily, or perhaps, also include experience.

An incredible dining experience could be considered value added, essentially, compensating financially. It is important to acknowledge that quality and price, terms that are often very much used in correlation to one another, play a large role in terms of success of their relationship to restaurant experience.

There is a term used frequently when discussing the collision between design and the hospitality industry, and that is the notion of “Servicescape”. This is a concept originally developed by Booms and Bitner, two service marketing strategists, which emphasizes the impact the physical environment has on any place that is serviced-based, such as a restaurant or hotel (Booms & Bitner, 1981). The idea of Servicescape is often implemented when assessing the differences in user experience between restaurants where the quality of food is comparable. The user may perceive a higher level of quality in one facility versus the other as a result of the designed environment in which they experienced the service, even though the quality of food remains the same. Booms and Bitner defined a Servicescape as,

...the environment in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service. (Booms & Bitner, 1981)
Both the interior and exterior conditions are addressed when looking at Servicescape. This might include factors such as the landscape, signage, adjacencies, parking, and public access to interior design and décor, atmosphere, noise or sound levels, temperature, and smells.

The desire for a restaurant experience goes beyond theme or price, however, as we are in an age where services and technology dominate the business industry. Hudson Riehle, the Senior Vice President for research at the National Restaurant Association made a comment stating that,

There is a substantial pent-up demand for restaurant services, with two out of five consumers saying they are not using restaurants as often as they would like. (Riehle, 2012)

This indicates the demand for restaurants in general, but most specifically, those which offer services beyond the conventional dining types. He goes on to say,

Technology is becoming an expectation rather than a novelty. Consumer interest in technology remains strong and will keep growing, spurring restaurant operators to dedicate more resources to customer-facing technology such as Smartphone apps, ordering kiosks, and mobile payment options. (Riehle, 2012)

This statement gives insight into what types of services, services we have a demand for, might be appearing in the upcoming years. Beyond improving the functional logistics of restaurant operations, these services will dramatically impact a restaurant user’s experience; particularly those dealing with an intimate setting so often seen in tabletop cooking facilities.

Darren Tristano (2012), the Executive Vice President of Technomic Inc. mentioned that,

We’ll see rising numbers of farm-to-fork concepts that offer regional craft beers and wines, and regularly changing menus of upscale comfort foods made with
local produce and culinary customs in mind. The settings may include salvaged fixtures or building materials. (Tristano, 2012)

He goes on to say,

…around the clock dining moves closer to the mainstream and operators look for wars to build checks and meet millennials hunger for group grazing. (Tristano, 2012)

It is clearly noted that millennials are seeking a group-dining environment, while remaining conscious of what is going into their bodies. Not only does this impact them personally, it impacts the overall experience of the restaurant. It begins to have implications regarding restaurant layout and function, in addition to seating, lighting, preparation space, and social dynamics. Beyond that, Tristano even mentions material qualities such as “salvaged fixtures” implying a certain demand for atmospheric design elements.

The Teppanyaki Grill

A brief elaboration of the Teppanyaki grill is provided here, seeing as it is the tabletop cooking method focused on for data collection in this study. Although there is very little scholarly work regarding the history of the method as it has slowly developed over time, most sources found follow a strikingly similar timeline.

Rooted in Asian origins, it is important to mention that there are clearly cultural variables that could impact the definition of tabletop cooking, however for this study we are focusing on the definition in an American context.

Zojirushi, an American product company that designs and fabricates cooking and food preservation products has defined tabletop cooking as,
…a term we use to describe cooking at the dining table rather than on the stove. It is interactive and everyone gets to join in on the cooking process. The best part of this type of cooking is that one can enjoy it with family and friends. (Zojirushi, 2016)

This renown gourmet product company has gone on to subdivide tabletop cooking into three distinct categories, with products and devices designed specifically to accommodate each category. The history of this restaurant typology is rooted in Asian origins, and as a result, has impacted how these categories are divided. However, almost all American tabletop cooking restaurants would fall under one of the three. For the sake of definition and our purposes, we will be using categories Zojirushi has delineated. They are described in further detail here to help frame our knowledge of the continually evolving restaurant typology:

_Nabemono:_

The Japanese hot pot style has been around for generations, where the meal is centered around a boiling pot of ingredients like meat, fish, tofu or vegetables. Popular hot pot dishes such as _sukiyaki, shabu-shabu_ and _chanko-nabe_ are easy to make; so easy that they can be cooked right at the dinner table as you enjoy the company of friends.

_BBQ (Barbecue):_  

A typical Japanese barbecue is all about _yakiniku_ and _yakitori_. While Americans grill hamburgers and hotdogs in the backyard, most Japanese families grill bite sized pieces of marinated meat or chicken kabobs on bamboo skewers indoors; and on the family dining table. This type of cooking is done on a gridiron, unlike
Teppanyaki, which is done on a skillet.

Teppanyaki:

In the U.S., the Teppanyaki is most known for the chefs who flip shrimps onto your plate and juggle the pepper shakers. But in Japan, there are many other kinds such as okonomiyaki, monja-yaki and yakisoba. At home, the Teppan grill is brought to the center of the table, and bite sized portions of meat, fish and fresh vegetables are grilled as you eat, similar to at a restaurant.

Although there are three main categories within tabletop cooking, the focus of this study will be on Teppanyaki. A Teppanyaki restaurant is used as the data collection site for this study, one example of a type of tabletop cooking restaurant. A similar study could be run in any of the other types. One might argue there are additional types that exist in the United States as sub-categories of these larger ones, but without a widely accepted definition we will be using these as our standard.

To put it simply, Teppanyaki translates literally to “grilling on an iron plate.” In traditional Japanese cuisine, Teppanyaki style cooking is used for meats such as steak and seafood, as well as dough-based foods like yakisoba (fried noodles) and rice.

The originator of the teppanyaki-style steakhouse is the Japanese restaurant chain Misono, which introduced the concept of cooking Western-influenced food on a Teppan in Japan in 1945. (Misono, 2016)

Although Misono is often given credit as the founder of the tabletop method, some believe the tradition began over 200 years ago when families would prepare food together on small grills. Others believe it began in the early 1900s with chefs introducing
the style, along with their intricate knife skills, to diners. Regardless of which story is true, Teppanyaki has evolved greatly over the last hundred years, moving from food that was simply "broiled on a steel grill" to something of an art form. Soon after the birth of the preparation style, restaurants found the cuisine was not nearly as popular with the Japanese as it was with foreigners, who enjoyed,

...both watching the skilled maneuvers of the chefs preparing the food as well as the cuisine itself, which is somewhat more familiar than more traditional Japanese dishes. (Misono, 2016)

As a result of rising tourist interest, the restaurant chain began increasing the “performance aspect” of the chef’s preparation, therefore amplifying the theatrical effect of the dining experience. In the case of the United States,

...teppanyaki was made famous by the Benihana restaurant chain, which opened its first restaurant in New York in 1964. Benihana and other chains of Teppanyaki steakhouses continue to place an emphasis on the chef performing a show for the diners, continuing to introduce new variations and tricks. The chef might juggle utensils, flip a shrimp tail into his shirt pocket, catch an egg in his hat, toss an egg up in the air and split it with a spatula, flip flattened shrimp pieces into diners' mouths, or arrange onion rings into fire-shooting volcanoes. (How Benihana Started, 2007)

Teppanyaki is most often confused with Hibachi grilling. Hibachi, however, utilizes an open-grate grill, whereas Teppanyaki uses a flat, solid, griddle-style cooking surface. This makes Teppanyaki suitable for cooking smaller and more finely chopped ingredients, including rice, bean sprouts, onions, carrots and mushrooms. Many Japanese Steakhouses deem themselves “hibachi grills” when in fact they are very much Teppanyaki grills integrated into tables around which many people (often multiple parties) can sit and eat at once, in a typically semi-circular or linear fashion. Users are able to sit next to or across from one another, with the chef viewable from all positions.
Social Food Preparation

Over the course of human history, it has become glaringly obvious that the preparation of food is an inherently social activity. The idea of “open concept floor plans” in suburban homes, which intentionally place the kitchen front and center in terms of programmatic layout has become a standard in residential design. Large kitchen islands, with a central range surrounded by seating has promoted an environment that encourages the involvement of all guests in the food preparation process (Conran, 2002). Although there was a significant period of time where kitchens were isolated entirely from the rest of the home, the opposite is now becoming the case; they are considered one of the most essential components, both socially and logistically (Conran, 2002). This same line of thinking could be used to partially explain the success of tabletop cooking restaurants, seeing as their layout is often similar.

Far before indoor kitchens were even being considered, the social implications of cooking were being developed.

The social effects of cooking with fire are as important as the bodily and technical effects. Cooking is one of the great revolutionary innovations of history not only because of the way it transforms food – there are plenty of other ways of doing that-but also because of the way it transformed society. (Shryock, Smail, Earle, p.137)

The authors go on to say,

The campfire becomes a place of communion when people eat around it. Society takes shape around communal meals and predictable mealtimes. Cooking with fire introduced new specialized functions and shared pleasure and responsibilities. It was more creative, more constructive, of social ties than merely eating together-which collaborative bands of scavengers already did, as they guarded each other from rival predators around a dead carcass. Once fire became manageable, it began to bind communities- literally providing focus, because tending flame demands a division of labor and shared effort. (Shryock, Smail, Earle, p.137)

It is difficult to miss the similarities between the origins of cooking which
developed thousands of years ago, and the current conditions present at tabletop cooking restaurants. From centering around a heat source, to the division of both social and necessary responsibility, to the fostering of an inherent social environment, one could easily see how the cooking methods from generations previous surface quite literally in this modern day restaurant type.

Fire was socially significant for all the reasons that people gather round it still: for light and warmth, and for protection from pests and predators. Cooking intensified fire’s social magnetism by making eating an activity practiced in a fixed place at a fixed time. (Shryock, Smail, Earle, p.137)

Shryock, Smail, and Earle give an example that relates directly to the importance of the act of preparation, versus the eating of the food itself; and integral component of tabletop cooking and the consequential proxemic variables. The authors go on to say,

Cooking can even replace eating together as a ritual of social adhesion. When Bronislaw Malinowski, the pioneer of Pacific island anthropology, was at work in the Trobriand Islands, one of the ceremonies that most impressed him was the annual yam-harvest festival in Kiriwina, where most ceremonies took the form of food distribution. To the accompaniment of drums and dancing, prepared food was arranged in heaps and then carried off to the various households to be eaten in private. The climax of what most cultures think of as a feast—the actual eating—is never reached communally…But the festive element lies in the preparations. (Shryock, Smail, Earle, p.137)

Just as the dynamic performance of the chef is integral to the tabletop cooking experience at a Teppanyaki grill, as is the festive nature of the food preparation in this example. More than anything, this helps to reiterate the social importance of involvement with food preparation, no matter the role one may assume.
Proxemic Theory and Seating in Restaurants

Edward T. Hall and Proxemics

Developed as a conceptual framework by the cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall, proxemics is most fundamentally regarded as “the study of the way people use physical space and in interpersonal interaction is described” (Ickinger, 1982). However, the definition of the term has changed over time and can be interpreted differently by people depending on its context. Em Griffin is the author of the widely used communication text “A First Look at Communication Theory” with currently nine editions published. She notes, during his time as a professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, Hall initially introduced the term as, “the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture” (Hall, 1966). In her published work regarding Hall and communication theory, Griffin compares Hall’s work to that of Benjamin Lee Whorf, an American linguist, stating that just as “…linguistic relativity claims that language shapes our perception of reality, Hall believes space speaks to us just as loudly as words” (Griffin, 1991).

In a dissertation completed for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Yale University (1982), Dr. William J. Ickinger provides a chronological account of how Hall has adjusted his definition of the term proxemics over time, beginning with the earliest:

…the study of how man unconsciously structures microspace - the distance between men in the conduct of daily transactions, the organization of space in his house and buildings, and ultimately the layout of his towns. (Hall, 1963, p.1003)

…the study of the ways in which man gains knowledge of the content of other men’s minds through judgments of behavior patterns associated with varying degrees of [spatial] proximity to them. (Hall, 1964, p.41)

the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture. (Hall, 1966, p.1)
...the study of man’s transactions as he perceives and uses intimate, personal, social and public spaces in various settings while following out of awareness dictates of cultural paradigms. (Hall, 1974, p.2)

Regardless of which of Hall’s definitions are considered to be final, this list offers insight into the realm of proxemic theory, framing the content considered while observing and analyzing behavioral patterns. Ickinger argues that the final definition is the one most closely associated with proxemic research. Although our study is by no means a rigidly “proxemic” study, it does use the elements and concepts behind proxemic theory to draw conclusions regarding behavior present in restaurant design.

Ickinger goes on to break down the definition of proxemics into three distinct components; First, the study of transactions, specifically, interpersonal interactions. Second, these interactions are “viewed in spatial context”, where Hall has delineated four zones including the intimate zone, personal zone, social zone, and public zone. Third, the notion that this behavior is typically considered “learned or culturally determined” rather than “entirely dictated by innate biological or physiological processes” (Ickinger, 1982, p.8). The second point, the definition of spatial zones, will be discussed in the next section.

Additionally, Dr. Ickinger states the following that is essential to not only this study, but in understanding proxemic theory in general:

Although the purely proxemic aspect of interpersonal interaction the physical separation or “interpersonal distance” between people has been shown to vary significantly across cultures and in different situational contexts, proxemic behavior cannot, in general, be studied apart from other behavior in interpersonal interaction, personal experience and common sense, supported by a growing body of research, suggests that information is transmitted between people in face to face interaction through a combination of verbal and non verbal behaviors, and that it is conditioned and filtered by the predispositions and attitudes that make up a person’s internal state before meaning is attributed to it. (Ickinger, 1982, p.8)
Spatial Zones

Seeing as Hall was both an anthropologist in addition to a consultant on cross-cultural interaction, he argues that most cultures are rooted in a common biology, and uses animal behavior in order to predict how humans might act (Griffin, 1991, p.61).

Griffin uses the example,

For instance, animals are territorial. Some mark their space with urine to stake a claim for privacy. Hall says people use furniture, walls, and fences to accomplish the same purpose. (Griffin, 1991, p.61)

Hall makes several references to a fundamental difference between comfort and control. Control is often established by marking one’s territory, similar to how animals might act in nature.

Griffin notes the importance of boundaries in terms of marking one’s personal space. She states,

Those with whom we are intimate may enter into the sphere without harm to either party. Invasion by others causes distress. Because of our animal nature, we all have a zone of personal space, but the are of personal space differs greatly from culture to culture. (Griffin, 1991, p. 61)

Typically, the United States is known for their apprehension towards touch as a cultural phenomenon, a position shared with Asians and Northern Europeans. We “feel an aversion to casual touch and resent spatial intrusion” as Griffin states. According to Hall, our ego extends approximately a foot and a half out from our body, meaning our “personal bubble” or “personal zone”.

Although the four spatial zones defined by Hall are anything but concrete, he has quantified the distances for an average American. Context and situational conditions may impact these distances, however, that is most often the case in any anthropomorphic study. As Ickinger mentions in his research, Hall originally delineated eight unique
spatial zones, but ultimately decided these were far too complex. His resolution was to reduce the number to four zones, with a two-fold system applied; close and far phases of each zone (Ickinger, 1982, p.10).

*Zone 1: Intimate Distance (0 to 18 inches)*

This zone includes a close phase, being zero to six inches, and a far phase, being six to eighteen inches. This distance addresses intimacy, meaning a voluntary decision made between people who are drawn to one another. Typically, strangers are not allowed or invited into the intimate zone by adult, middle class Americans. Ickinger includes a selection of Hall’s explanation of the zone:

At intimate distance the presence of the other person is unmistakable and may at time be overwhelming because of the greatly stepped up sensory inputs. Sight (often distorted), olfaction heat from the other person’s body, sound, smell, and feel of the breath all combine to signal unmistakable involvement with another body. (Hall, 1966, p.112)
Zone 2: Personal Distance (18 inches to 4 feet)

**Figure 2.** Personal Distance

This zone includes a near phase that extends to two and a half feet, and a far phase beyond that. Ickinger includes a selection of Hall’s explanation of the zone:

‘Personal Distance’ is the term originally used by Hediger to designate the distance consistently separating the members of non contact species. It might be thought of as a small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others. (Hall, 1966, p.112)

Griffin notes this selection written by W. H. Auden in “Prologue: The Birth of Architecture”:

Some thirty inches from my nose  
The frontier of my Person goes,  
And all the untilled air between  
Is private *pagus* or demesne.  
Stranger, unless with bedroom eyes  
I beckon you to fraternize,  
Beware of rudely crossing it:  
I have no gun, but I can spit.

It appears as though Hall agrees with Auden, however he thinks he was a foot off (Griffin, 1991, p.62). The outer edge of our territorial bubble lies approximately at the eighteen-inch mark, and thus beginning our assumed
personal space. It is at this point that the sense of someone else’s body heat is no longer tangible, in addition to their most powerful odors. We are able to focus our eyesight, and levels of vocalization begin to intensify. Although only “ritualized” touch is typical, another person is still within reach that allows for other forms of touch including grasping and shoving. Depending on whether a person enters the near or far phases of the zone is a good indicator of the closeness of the relationship (Griffin, 1991, p.62).

**Zone 3: Social Distance (4 to 10 feet)**

![Figure 3. Social Distance](image)

This zone includes a near phase from four to seven feet, and a far phase from seven to ten feet. This distance is more commonly used in business settings, in particularly formal situations. The further you go out from this distance, the more effort communication requires (Ickinger, 1982, p.11). Ickinger includes a selection of Hall’s explanation of the zone:

The boundary line between the far phase of personal distance and the closer phase of social distance marks, in the words of one subject, the “limit of domination.” Intimate visual detail in the face is not perceived, and nobody touches or expects to touch another person unless there is some special effort. Voice level is normal for Americans. There is little
change between the far and close phases, and conversations can be overheard at a distance of up to twenty feet. (Hall, 1966, p.114)

Griffin calls this zone the zone of “impersonal transaction” where we as humans must rely solely on what we can see and hear. Near the middle of the range, one can perceive the entire face. Beyond that distance, it’s considered acceptable to ignore another’s presence and is relatively simple to disengage from conversation.

Zone 4: Public Distance (10 feet to infinity)

Figure 4. Public Distance

This zone includes a near phase from ten feet to twenty-five feet, and a far phase beyond that. Once a person has reached this distance away from another, it is now impossible to pick up on subtle nuances of meaning from the face or tone of the voice (Griffin, 1991, p.63). There are also significant sensory shifts that occur beyond the twelve-foot mark; Speech becomes louder, there is a more intentional choice of words and phrasing of sentence structure, and changes in depth perception. At this distance, people are typically perceived as “in a setting”
versus claiming attention as an individual (Ickinger, 1982, p.11). Ickinger includes a selection of Hall’s explanation of all four zones:

The descriptions of the four distance zones have been compiled from observations and interviews with non contact, middle class, healthy adults, mainly natives of the northeastern seaboard of the United States. A high percentage of the subjects were men and women from business and professions; many could be classified as intellectuals. The interviews were affectively neutral; that is, the subjects were not noticeably excited, depressed, or angry. There were no unusual environmental factors, such as extremes of temperature or noise. These descriptions represent only a first approximation. They will doubtless seem crude when more is known about proxemic observation and how people distinguish one distance from another. (Hall, 1966, p.109/110)

After reviewing multiple sources that have been completed more recently, it has been found that Hall’s original estimates were in fact highly accurate. Even over the course of a few decades, fundamental proxemic distances have remained consistent since the early 1960’s. Ultimately, proxemic theory is essential in understanding how users communicate with a space, or with one another; both critical pieces of information that very much inform interior design moves. In terms of proxemics as a communicative strategy, Nicolai Marquardt and Saul Greenberg completed a study in 2015 addressing user proxemic interaction. They stated,

People often use changes of spatial relationships—such as interpersonal distance or orientation—as an implicit form of communication. For instance, we keep certain distances to others depending on familiarity, we orient toward people when addressing them, we move closer to objects we are interested in, and we stand or sit relative to others depending on the task at hand. (Marquardt & Greenberg, 2015, p. 2)

In the scholarly world, there are hundreds of proxemic studies that have been completed since Hall proposed the notion in the mid 1960’s. Anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers alike have completed investigations that question or
attempt to implemented the findings Hall had originally suggested. However, over the course of this literature review, very little research, if any, has been found that indicates how proxemic theory can be applied to a designed restaurant interior. The research that is being used as precedent for this study, as beneficial as it is, doesn’t propose a study where a restaurant environment is used as the tool to evaluate proxemic human activity. In a space as social as a restaurant environment, it is obvious that the environment itself plays an integral role in the promotion or demotion of certain activity, most specifically, behavior related to proxemic factors. This is where scholarly research is lacking in terms of proxemics’ application to spatial design. This is not just a study of human behavior, but rather a research study meant to investigate how a designed interior might impact ones behavior. Based on the knowledge collected in this literature review, this study would be the first proxemic study of its kind. Framed by decades of research focused on the human behavioral element, it is time to discuss the environment that caused that behavior in a critical way.

The Millennial User

Defining the Millennial User

The term “millennial” is being heard now more than ever, as the group begins to play an increasingly larger role in society each year. But what is a millennial? To be honest, it’s possible that you could decide for yourself. The vernacular term has a loose definition, a pattern that seems to be consistent in this study, but nevertheless must be defined for the sake of this research as it is the specified demographic. For the sake of consistency, this section of the chapter will be sourced by a comprehensive study
completed in 2014 by The Council of Economic Advisors of the Executive Office of the President of the United States. Kassing agrees with the statements argued in the 2014 study, and therefore considers their findings as the standard for defining this demographic, in addition to its’ resulting data. With the overwhelming number of possibilities for the definition of the term “millennial”, the contextual framework necessary to understand whom the term represents is provided here.

According to the United States Census Bureau, millennials are those people born between the years 1980 and 2000, composing the largest generation in the U.S., representing one-third of the total U.S. population in 2013. The majority of people who fit this range are only in their early thirties, just now beginning their careers and as a result will be an important “engine of the economy” in the decades to come. They are the first generation to have Internet access throughout their childhood and adolescent years, significantly impacting how they were raised and how they developed socially, physically, and economically. In addition,

Millennials also stand out because they are the most diverse and educated generation to date: 42 percent identify with a race or ethnicity other than non-Hispanic white, around twice the share of the Baby Boomer generation when they were the same age. About 61 percent of adult millennials have attended college, whereas only 46 percent of the Baby Boomers did so. (CEA, 2014)

Many millennials were coming of age during a very difficult time in our economy, with the oldest being just twenty-seven years old when the 2007 recession struck. There was a surge in unemployment from 2007 to 2009, and many millennials struggled to find jobs. An important decision this group of individuals had to make was whether or not a college degree fell in line with their personal and professional goals. This decision was difficult in that 2007-2009 was a time of particular economic
uncertainty. Their adult lives were then shaped as a result of this decision, attempting to establish themselves at a time when economic opportunities were scarce. Though the economy has changed significantly since this time, the recession still drastically affects millennials and will continue to do so as they push further into their professional careers.

Diversity

As of 2014, millennials represented the largest generation in the United States, comprising nearly one-third of the total population in 2013. As of that same year, the highest majority of this population was only twenty-three years of age, acknowledging the impact this group will have for years to come. Beyond age ranges, millennials are a particularly diverse set of individuals. Many of them are immigrants, or the children of immigrants, who arrive as part of an immigration surge that began in the 1940s. Out of the people ranging from twenty to thirty-four years of age, around fifteen percent of them were born in a foreign country. This is strikingly higher than the 1950s, as well as near the almost twenty percent peak that occurred in 1910 during the last great immigration wave. (CEA, 2014)

Technology

The Council of Economic Advisers (2014) completed a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between technology and millennial users, the results of which are highlighted here.
In the past few decades, we have seen an incredible amount of advancements in both technology and computing. After the introduction of personal computers into school environments in the late 1970s, technology companies have,

…innovated at a startling speed, often rolling out a groundbreaking new platform or computer model every year. (CEA, 2014, p.7)

Because this increase in innovation and technology occurred during millennials’ childhoods, it has,

…shaped the ways that millennials interact with technology, and seems to have affected their expectations for creativity and innovation in their own work lives. (CEA, 2014, p.7)

Compared to previous generations, millennials are more connected to technology and believe their relationship with technology is what makes them unique (Pew Research Center, 2014). There is an unparalleled exposure to computational power and access to information, even though all generations have experienced technological advancements. Considering the current trends of the technological market, users have come of age in a world which “the frontiers of technology have appeared unlimited.” (Berkeley, n.d.)

As all of these advancements have taken place, there has been a drastic decrease in the costs of creating and distributing digital content. This allows millennial users to become “…pioneers in production, as well as consumption.” (CEA, 2014, p.7). One study in this research found that more than half of the millennials surveyed expressed interest in starting a business, and although we do have examples of well-known millennial entrepreneurs in their twenties, the generation is just now beginning to reach the peak age for entrepreneurship which generally occurs in someone’s forties or fifties.

In addition to computer technology, access to the internet and cell phones has changed the way millennials communicate and interact with each other. Three-quarters
of millennials have an account on a social networking site, and use them more frequently than any other generation. “The impacts of these practices have extended beyond millennials’ peer to their families” (CEA, 2014, p.7). For example, the Wall Street Journal reported that this is the first generation to have tech savvy parents, and that some millennials use texting or online chat to have running conversations with their parents throughout the day (Wall Street Journal, 2013).

**Value of Community**

Beyond being connected via social networking sites, millennials highly value the role that they play in their communities. Even over the course of the 2016 presidential race thus far we have seen record setting numbers of millennials actively participating in politics and the voting process. High school seniors today are, …more likely than previous generations to state that making a contribution to society is very important to them and that they want to be leaders in their communities. (CEA, 2014, p.9)

With a strong sense of community comes a strong connection to family, with many millennials noting a close relationship with their parents, with roughly half saying it is important to them to live close to their friends and family (Monitoring the Future, 2011). Their tight relationship with their parents often extends into the work environment, where some companies are reporting strong relationships being made between parts and their millennial employees.

There is an important correlation between millennials’ emphasis on community and tabletop cooking as a restaurant typology. Seeing as tabletop cooking is an inherently community-based activity, arguably at a micro-scale, millennials dedication to
community based thinking might give insight into the recent growth of this restaurant typology.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Overview

In order to investigate a research topic as complex and intimate as this, it is essential that a multi-method approach be used in order to collect the necessary data. This ensures the complexity of the topic is investigated thoroughly, with multiple opportunities for participants to engage with the topic and consequently provide the data used to analyze this topic. This research study includes the following research methods listed in the order in which they were performed: casual observation, systematic observation, short survey, focus group, and individual interview. Each was specifically chosen as way of increasing the depth of data collected. Seeing as this study is mainly qualitative, it is imperative that the chosen methods support not only the breadth of information, but also allow the participants the opportunity to elaborate on topics as a means of gaining insight into motivational and contextual drivers. Each method will be outlined individually, as the implementation varies from method to method.

The methods chosen were ultimately selected as a means of addressing the following research questions:

1. What interior elements help to define or structure a tabletop cooking facility? How does it look now? What might this place need to look like?
2. How are millennial users responding to this type of dining environment? What is their purpose in being there? Why are they seeking this type of dining experience and/or environment?
3. Given these perceptions and conditions, how are the fundamental theories of proxemics currently being integrated, utilized, or challenged in a tabletop-cooking restaurant?

Casual Observation

Throughout Kassing’s undergraduate career, he was fortunate enough to have served and managed at several restaurants in the Ames area, meaning he is comfortable and learned in the local industry and clientele. Although not seemingly crucial, this knowledge has allowed him to understand when the most appropriate time is for conducting this research. Variables such as time of day, day of the week, etcetera are the obvious things to be aware of, but even something as minor as time of the year can have a drastic impact on the potential observable data, especially considering this millennial demographic.

The casual observation took place at Fuji Japanese Steakhouse in Ames, Iowa on Saturday, January 17th 2016 between the hours of 5:45pm and 7:30pm. The following figure contains images from this location to give an idea of the interior atmosphere and layout.

![Figure 5. Fuji Japanese Steakhouse Interior](image-url)
This is the busiest part of the dinner hour for most restaurants in Ames. This weekend was particularly helpful in that it happened to be the weekend after the first week of classes at Iowa State University, meaning a large number of observable millennials were present. Many of these individuals had not seen each other since before the winter break, almost four weeks previous, meaning social dynamism was particularly detectable. For the sake of this study, only behavioral trends were noted amongst those who seemed to fit the millennial demographic. Although all data is undeniably important, this allowed the collection to be framed in a way that made the most relevant information necessary, especially in moving forward into a more formal observation.

The casual observation involved observing public behavior from within the restaurant, “disguised” as a customer. It is important to note that in a setting as social and public as a restaurant, it is crucial that the involvement of the principle investigator in data collection does not alter the behavior of those being researched. Significant measures were taken to ensure this is the case, including where the principle investigator was seated, how frequently notes were taken, and a particular hyperawareness of what was happening in the near vicinity. No video or audio recording devices were used in this observation. Notes were taken using a sketchbook and micron pen, noting tendencies, patterns, potentials for content analysis, physical documentation, etcetera that could inform future methods and overall behavioral trends.

Over the course of the nearly two hours that the casual observation was conducted, five different locations were observed throughout the restaurant. The length of time for each location varied from fifteen minutes (before being formally seated for dinner), up to one hour (at dinner). This allowed for the observation of users in a variety
of scenarios, ranging from more public to more intimate settings. Behavior observed in the less specifically defined spaces, or those that might be considered transition spaces from one defined area to the next, were found to be most dynamic and interesting.

Systematic Observation

The systematic observation component to this study, as an extension of the initial casual observation, is centered on three overarching ideas: user interaction, proxemic tendencies, and response behavior. By systematically observing users in this type of restaurant environment under these three categories, a more specific documentation of human behavior in terms of proxemics and interiors can be established. That being said, the data collection system that has been created involves three categories. As part of a sort of checklist, the goal of the systematic observation is to understand relationships between these three parts so we are able to apply that knowledge to interior design decisions. Although the observation criterion are not strictly interior design issues, user behavior can lead us to identifying both successes and failures within the designed space.

First, understanding user interaction, involves analyzing how users are interacting with other users. Sounds simple, but is integral to the research. Essentially this is understanding whether users behaving a certain way could be attributed to an interior design move that promoted that behavior. Before we can identify the move, we need to identify the behavior. This is a way of systematically identifying trends in user interaction.

Second, understanding proxemic tendencies. Most specifically, this is in regards to personal space and territoriality. Is there certain behavior that could lead someone to
believe was a result of a proxemic condition? This could be either positive or negative activity, but does the proximity of one user to another impact the dining experience? Even if this behavior is subconscious, this is a way of systematically organizing those patterns and tendencies.

Third, understanding response behavior. As mentioned in the causal observation, much of the behavior recorded was in response to another person’s actions or behavior. Ultimately, this could mean the behavior originated as a response to a designed condition. Although this is probably the most difficult of the three to observe and record, it is important to recognize what behavior is in response to another user, versus the user’s environment. If the distinction can be made, it could be very telling in terms of understanding a designer’s role in their ability to establish a certain atmosphere in a restaurant setting.

After compiling and analyzing this more narrowed collection of data, we will then able to note patterns, and ultimately relationships based on the findings. The checklist used can be found in Appendix A.

The systematic observation was conducted on Saturday, January 20th 2016 at Fuji Japanese Steakhouse in Ames, IA between the hours of 6:00pm and 8:15pm. This is the same weekday and time period as the casual observation, simply one week later. Dinner traffic was nearly identical, which helped to maintain consistency.

This portion of the research was run slightly differently than the casual observation in that the users volunteered as participants in the study. An invitation was sent to over thirty potential candidates to participate in the study, with twelve ultimately agreeing to be observed. The group included both male and female participants, five and
seven, respectively. The age for participants ranged from twenty-one to twenty-four, each being a current or previous student of Iowa State University. Some of the participants were familiar with one another, some were not (Ultimately, some found they in fact had mutual friends). In a town the size of Ames, Iowa, this wouldn’t be an unheard of scenario at a restaurant of this type. Participants gave both verbal and written consent to confirm their participation in a research study involving interiors and tabletop cooking. This form can be found in Appendix B. The purpose of the study was not revealed in order to ensure the legitimacy of the research. They were informed, however, that the research was being collected as data for a Master of Fine Art’s thesis. No recording devices were used for this portion of the study. The group was observed from a seat nearby from start to finish, but the principle investigator did not instigate any activity. Kassing was not part of the conversation, nor did he give them a time frame for the meal. The participants were simply instructed to go about a meal as they typically would. All participants had previously dined at Fuji Japanese Steakhouse, meaning they were all familiar with the restaurant itself. Behavior was noted on the checklist discussed previously, with a copy made for each participant. Each participant was assigned an ID number in order to maintain his or her anonymity, and a copy of the checklist was printed for each participant in order to track individual activity. This ID number was then used throughout the study for each participant. The participants were allowed to sit wherever they liked at the table, and were not told who else or how many others would be attending.

As with the casual observation, it was imperative that the presence of the principle investigator did not impact the behavior of the users whatsoever. Kassing was positioned
in a way that allowed him to observe the group without any chance of making direct eye contact. This meant he was able to spread out checklists and writing utensils in order to observe effectively, without his presence impacting the participant’s actions.

The checklist, as stated before, is broken down into three parts. The first involves what we will call “user interaction” that essentially measures the magnitude of interaction between that participant and others based on the frequency of the following behaviors: talks to person sitting directly next to him/her, talks to person more than one person away, yells to person sitting directly next to him/her, yells to person more than one person away, initiates personal conversation, initiates group conversation, engages with cell phone. The coordinating box is checked if and when the activity occurs, and also, a tally mark is made for each time this action is completed additionally beyond this first occurrence. It is relatively clear that this part of the observation focuses heavily on conversation, but ultimately, that is a significant part of user interaction. This information can be compared against other data to see if the magnitude of user interaction could somehow be impacted by the other observed factors.

The second part of the checklist, proxemic tendencies, measures the frequency and magnitude of behaviors that are a result of proxemic conditions including: shifts chair forward/backward, shifts chair left/right, shifts closer to another person, shifts away from another person, relocates entirely, relocates to carry conversation, leans forward/backward to hold conversation, places personal item to establish place, adjusts in chair. A tally mark is made for each time one of these actions is recorded and observed. These behaviors relating to proxemic theory can be compared against frequency and
physical location in order to draw conclusions about design moves that could have promoted or demoted this type of behavior.

The third part of the checklist, understanding response behavior, acknowledges when a participant is doing a certain behavior as a response to another factor: talks louder/yells, leaves table, mimics body movement. A tally mark is made for each time one of these actions is recorded and observed. This category is difficult to plan for, but blanks will be left for noting additional response behavior that could come up as a response to the participants’ behavior. Seeing how others respond to a given behavior can be particularly telling in terms of comfort levels and group dynamics, and is important to observe.

Looking back at the overall research questions for the study, it is important to note that this particular method was used to help answer the question regarding response. How are users responding to this type of environment? One could argue that for many, they aren’t even sure how they respond. They just act normally. This observation is an opportunity to record an observer’s perception of their behavior, and use that as a comparison to their own perceptions as we move forward into the survey, focus group, and interviews. For many, it could be that their behavior doesn’t necessarily match their own description of the dining experience. Factors like group dynamics and seating arrangement can sometimes cloud the perception of the overall experience, which allows for interesting comparisons.
The short survey was implemented as a research method in order to accomplish several things, but most fundamentally, it was a means of framing the focus group. The survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. Directly following the systematic observation that took place at Fuji Japanese Steakhouse in Ames, the twelve participants reconvened approximately a half hour later at the College of Design on Iowa State University’s campus. The group was told to meet in a conference room so that a follow up discussion could be held regarding their experience at dinner. In order to get the participants re-engaged, a short survey was conducted upon arrival at the new location. With both verbal and written consent (consent form can be found in Appendix B), participants completed the survey via the principle investigator’s personal laptop using Microsoft Excel. Each participant completed the survey individually, away from others to ensure both privacy and accuracy. Their assigned identification number was used to recognize which answers were tied to which participant, and each survey took approximately three minutes to complete.

The survey itself provides seventeen hypothetical scenarios and asks participants to choose a point on a five-step scale that indicates their level of discomfort in a given situation. The scale ranges from slightly to a bit, moderately, very, and extremely. Participants were asked to place an “X” in the column that most accurately describes their discomfort level in one of the seventeen provided scenarios.

The scenarios listed in this portion of the study were provided as a way of somehow quantifying data that might otherwise be collected qualitatively. By providing a scale, a range, of potential levels of discomfort, participants were able to gauge for
themselves whether or not an everyday scenario like this might make them uncomfortable. This information does a couple of things. First, it begins to specific relevant comfort levels for this demographic. The responses to this same questionnaire could yield much different results had another demographic been chosen. This is a reflection of the participants chosen for this study. Although each of the scenarios is not strictly related to restaurant culture, this was done intentionally so the purpose of the study was not compromised, which would consequently taint the data. Beyond maintaining a level of healthy ignorance, secondly, the quantification of the data allows for a numerical comparison against data collected in the other methods. As mentioned previously, the participants may say one thing but behave much differently. That is the nature of human behavior. This method is a way of comparing if their thoughts are consistent with their actions regarding proxemic tendencies, and then ultimately, if those tendencies coincide with interior design moves.

Focus Group

Following the completion of the short survey, participants were gathered in a conference area around a large table in order to conduct the focus group. The participants were made aware that they would be audio recorded during the session but that their identities would remain anonymous and would solely be attached to the identification number they were assigned during the systematic observation. They consented in both verbal and written form.

Questions used to promote conversation consisted of predetermined questions, questions that were developed in response to dinner, and questions based on the
discussion had. No additional personnel were present in the room. Some note taking did occur by the principle investigator, but the focus was on initiating quality conversation.

There are several purposes for conducting the focus group. First, it gives participants an opportunity to reflect on their dining experience in a critical way. One could argue most people wouldn’t take a second to consider how or why they acted the way they did when dining in a facility. By reflecting on their actions, participants may offer feedback that implies involvement of an interior design element. Second, it allows participants to acknowledge actions of one another. Many may not even be aware they acted in a certain way, or that a behavioral pattern was noticed, but others might have. In a scenario where people are unfamiliar with one another, one could argue they are more hyperaware of another’s actions compared to those they know well. Third, it allows the principle investigator to ask specific questions. Sounds simple, right? Well allowing a person to describe their experience, actions, thoughts, etcetera is powerful in that it can either provide consistencies between thought and action, or the exact opposite in that participants may think something but their behavior proves that in fact is not the case. These opportunities for comparison are crucial in this research process. Once a topic is raised in group conversation, it is likely that other build on the topics; topics they might not have initially been aware of but are excited to discuss. People like talking about themselves. They just do. A focus group allows time for this in a casual, comfortable atmosphere and it a fantastic way of collecting a large amount of information in a relatively short amount of time. In our case, the focus group lasted from approximately 8:45 pm – 9:40 pm. Although participants were initially informed that it would only take
approximately a half an hour, conversation was consistent and they enjoyed sharing their feedback.

Individual Interview

The purpose of this research method is to help better understand how millennials, now working in the professional world, prefer in a restaurant’s atmosphere as a means of comparison against the other research methods. Similar to the short survey, this method is more generalized in order to understand what millennials are seeking holistically, so when compared to tabletop cooking as a specific restaurant typology, conclusions can be drawn as similarities begin to surface. Are there elements of restaurant atmosphere in general that millennials are seeking or prefer, and if so, which of those elements exist in tabletop cooking restaurants? Are those preferences related to proxemic notions or interior design moves?

As college students are flocking to cities such as Denver, Colorado and Portland, Oregon, the restaurant industry has seen an increased demand for experiential dining; dining that involves more than just eating and drinking. Restaurant atmosphere is something that can provide an experience that sets a particular restaurant apart, in addition to playing a significant role in proxemic conditions. Ultimately, this information will be used to help compose a sort of perception of ‘culture’, used as a standard of comparison against the data collected from the twelve current Ames residents featured in the bulk of this study. From this cultural framework, certain design proposals could be made to accommodate the preferences articulated here.
The three subjects studied for this portion of the research are recent graduates of Iowa State University (May 2014), are ages twenty-three to twenty-four, and are currently working in the design field as professionals around the country. All students are alumni of the Bachelor of Architecture program, although not all are working in ‘architecture’ specifically. None of them were participants in other methods of this study. The individual interviews themselves were conducted approximately one month after the focus group was completed. The sample includes both male and female interviewees, who live in areas around the country ranging from New York City, New York to Seattle, Washington. Specifics on user profile information and full transcripts can be viewed in Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F. The users were chosen because, initially, because of their background in design and consequently, their ability to clearly articulate atmospheric elements that ultimately frame their preferences. Also, because of the personal relationship between them and the principle investigator, there is a confidence in their involvement in restaurant culture. The research would be somewhat irrelevant if the users didn’t go out to eat often, however, the users chose for this study utilize restaurants often in their social lives, and are therefore qualified to comment. As another point, they were also chosen because of their relocation since graduation. As part of the research, it is important to understand if their dining preferences have changed since living in Ames, Iowa, and if so, how. This information is crucial to understanding how proxemic conditions might be impacted post-graduation, and can be used to compare against those still in Ames.

Interviewee’s were contacted via text message to their personal telephone numbers regarding their participation in the study. Seven users were contacted, and three
responded with coordinating acceptance and availability. They were told the study would require about fifteen to twenty minutes of their time, via recorded telephone interview, and they would be required to do no additional work.

Before each interview, each user was read the following introduction as a sort of context for their responses,

The purpose of this research study is to better understand what type of restaurant atmosphere recent college graduates are seeking when selecting a particular venue to dine at, as part of an MFA thesis. The information you provide will be completely confidential, and feel free to include any information you consider valuable. The purpose of this study is not strictly designed based on your significant design background, but don’t feel restricted to only include design-based feedback. Ultimately, this information will be used to help compose a sort of perception of ‘culture’, based on our demographic, and cultures involve many elements beyond design. That being said, design elements are also crucial to the atmospheric conditions within a restaurant setting, so feel free to include comments regarding this as well.

Interview questions were based off of each user’s responses, and varied from participant to participant, but generally their responses were intended to answer these questions:

1. ‘When you first hear the words ‘restaurant atmosphere’ what things come to mind?’
2. ‘Do people play a role in a restaurant’s atmosphere? How so?’
3. ‘Can the food itself play a role in a restaurant’s atmosphere?’
4. ‘What expectations do you have going into a restaurant environment? Do those expectations impact your impression of atmosphere?’
5. ‘Have your dining preferences changed since moving away from Iowa? How so?’
These five were the questions that were somehow addressed in each of the interviews. Obviously, there was a great range of other questions that were prompted as reactions to their responses.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Overview

This chapter presents the results of the data collection, and the consequent analysis of that data. Although typically the results would be presented separately from the analysis, with the multi-method, mainly qualitative research methods utilized in this study, it makes most sense to display them simultaneously. The results and analysis of each research method are outlined individually, in the same order as they were presented in the previous chapter.

Casual Observation

The data collected from the casual observation including notes, sketches, and diagrams were compiled and analyzed in text form here. Since this is an observational method, the results are mainly qualitative. This section of the chapter highlights the significant findings of the casual observation and explains them in a way consistent with qualitative data.

Seating

The first and most frequent note made was in regards to seating. Seating was an integral part of this dining experience. Not only where someone sat, but more importantly, who they were being seated next to. The argument could be made that this would be the case in any restaurant, but there were several occurrences where people
would verbally discuss the “best possible arrangement” with one another in order to ensure what we could assume to be the “ideal” dining experience. In fact, two women were so adamant about the seating arrangement that they placed their personal belongings in a way that ensured their plan was seen through. The phrase “save my spot” was recorded six different times over the course of almost two hours, emphasizing how perception of place is not only essential to many users, but something that is always in question. Another similar phrase heard three separate times was, “do we have the table to ourselves?” implying that there were open seats left at the table and they wanted to be made aware if those would be filled or not. Each time the same response was given by the employees, stating they will not delay the meal in order to fill the seats but will fill them if there are other guests to accommodate. Surprisingly, the response was never seemingly positive or negative, but simply an affirmative “alright” or “okay sounds good” implying the users didn’t mind either way, they just wanted to be informed. In terms of the seating arrangement itself, male and female users responded very differently to the proposed arrangement in some cases. For example, one grill had several couples, maybe five or six, that were meeting for dinner. After everyone was seated and drinks were ordered, they realized the arrangement of husband/wife/husband/wife was ineffective in terms of conversation as they men wanted to talk with the other men and the women the other women, resulted in a web of separate conversations. About ten minutes into the meal, everyone stood up and rearranged to divide the men and women on opposite sides of the grill, allowing the conversation to flow much more easily. Obviously in this case the couples knew each other and were comfortable making the decision to change seats, but one must wonder how this might have been treated if the couples had only just met?
Personal Technology

Another note that was made involved the use of personal technology. In restaurants, we are so accustomed to seeing people on their phones during lulls in the conversation, taking pictures of their food instead of discussing it with the people around them, children playing games on cell phones or iPads to keep them distracted, etc. but interestingly enough that was seen very minimally in this environment. There were only two instances where personal technology seemed to somehow impact another’s experience, and children seemed to always be entertained. Of course, cell phones were used to record some of the more ‘show like’ attributes of the chef’s performance, but this was an inherently different use for personal technology. Rather than being used as a distraction or occupier of time, it became a more social activity that was done as reassurance that the memory was genuine and was worthy of recording. In general, discussion was rarely interrupted by personal technology.

Conversation

Since the topic was raised, conversation is something that was also interesting to observe. There were very few lulls in conversation in general, even amongst the tables where all guests didn’t know each other. In fact, it seemed that conversation was even more dynamic when people were introduced to one another and began making conversation. Rather than the discussion being reminiscent or reflective, they were very current. Conversation revolved around what was happening at the moment versus something that had happened in the past, unless a story was sparked by something that had occurred. Although not always the case, this was a pattern worth noting.
Noise

Noise levels typically became louder as the meal progressed, regardless of number of people in the conversation. In almost each case, it seemed as the presentation built, and people settled into their arrangement, conversations became significantly louder, and users began to talk over one another even if they might not have at the beginning of the meal. As users sat down initially, most were very intentional when they spoke, but as time passed people began yelling things as they saw necessary. Alcohol undoubtedly plays a role in this as well, but it seems to me the pattern was too consistent to blame alcohol.

Repositioning

Finally, a subtle but nevertheless important trend to be noted was the frequency of people repositioning themselves in their chairs. The restaurant chairs are free standing and tuck themselves beneath the eating surface overhang, but yet people were repositioning themselves constantly. Not only a readjustment of their bodies, but also a physical moving of the chair. This could have been forward or back, or side-to-side but regardless it happened much more frequently than what I would consider typical for a restaurant. Slightly comically, when unfamiliar guests were added to a table, almost always the people already would scoot their chairs down even though the additions had plenty of room themselves. Whether to establish their distance or simply out of habit, it was clear people needed to be proactive in establishing their physical relationship to those also at the grill.
Summary

In summary, the casual observation allowed the opportunity to explore potential locations within the restaurant to observe more closely, ultimately deciding upon the teppanyaki grill itself. It raised questions regarding seating arrangement, proximities, personal technology, conversation, noise levels, and personal repositioning that implies patterns to investigate more closely in the systematic observation.

Systematic Observation

The initial casual observation helped to narrow what it was that needed to be focused on systematically, and also logistically in terms of how to go about a non-invasive observation effectively. The results in the systematic observation, however, were particularly helpful in framing this research topic.

As the collection and analysis of the twelve participants’ systematic data was completed, certain patterns began to form as a result, patterns that were not exactly what had been anticipated. Seeing as this research method is fundamentally qualitative, for the sake of this study we won’t address specific numbers for each checklist category, but rather discuss the trends and patterns as a result of those numeric figures.

Gender Tendencies

First, women were typically the ones to initiate group conversation, while men tended to be the ones to initiate personal conversation. To be honest, this wasn’t particularly surprising, as this often does tend to be the case. As an extension of this, and not part of the checklist but something that was noted, men were often the only ones to
introduce themselves to the other participants with whom they were unfamiliar. The woman either waited to be introduced to or simply did not introduce themselves at all. Men rose from their chairs when introduced to, where only a couple of the women did. Again, this wasn’t part of the initial checklist but was noted. In general, the woman spoke much louder than the men, regardless of if the conversation was personal or group. None of the participants came as a pair, meaning a romantic couple, so this was not part of the dynamic. The men tended to speak frequently to the people sitting directly next to them, but rarely to anyone else. This came as a surprise. It was anticipated that the men would attempt to carry on conversation with the other men regardless of their seating arrangement, but in fact they didn’t. Woman typically had no problem raising their voice across the table.

**User Interaction**

Overall, user interaction began slowly. After introducing themselves and getting past small talk, there was a definite lull in the conversation for probably ten minutes. When the chef began preparing the food the conversation picked up noticeably and the dynamics began to establish themselves. There was one young woman who was clearly the “director” of the table if you will. She absorbed the sort of leadership role and ensured conversation was constant and everyone was being included. Two of the men were particularly shy, and didn’t interact much at all until food was being consumed. There was a topic of conversation that was raised multiple times, and that was “how much we love places like this”. They began discussing other teppanyaki grills in the area and those which they had been to, and many discussed family and friend events that had
taken place. It was clear that they were familiar with this type of restaurant and wanted to discuss it. As the dinner progressed, user interaction overall became increasingly more dynamic, and even led to plans made for the rest of the evening. It was interesting, however, that a sort of curve happened in conversation. Initially, conversation was made mainly between those who were sitting close to each other, then towards the middle of the meal conversation shifted to a group dynamic, and as the meal closed conversations came back to more personal based on proximity.

**Cell Phone Usage**

Cell phone usage was nearly undetectable. Very few even checked their phones throughout the meal, and if so, was very brief and did not impact the dynamic of the table whatsoever. This is potentially one of those examples of what *didn’t* happen actually being more important than what did. The fact these millennial users, often criticized for the over usage of cell phones, managed to make it through this entire meal without allowing them to impact their experience says something about the context. So often we see people use cell phones as a way of avoiding awkward situations, especially amongst people you don’t know. In this case, this was far from the truth.

**Proxemic Tendencies**

Proxemic tendencies leant some of the most direct observation results, but some of the most important. Everyone shifted, and moved. A lot. But it wasn’t the frequency of the movement that was particularly groundbreaking, but the curve it followed. It seemed to almost follow the curve discussed previously. As conversation began and was more
intimate, based on proximity, the more movement and shifting was detected. Especially amongst the men and one woman in particular. Once the conversation became a more group-like dynamic, the shifting forward and backward, left to right decreased substantially. As the meal finished and bills were being distributed, etc, the proxemic movements increased again. The most significant proxemic activity occurred at the very beginning of the experience when people were finding their seats. Many got to the table and simply stood there, waiting to be directed as where to sit. When the initial participants were sitting down and were unaware of the number of people coming, they each left at least one seat between them and the next person, regardless of their sex. After about half had arrived, the rest of the participants began to fill in the empty seats. As the seats were filled, the initial hesitation decreased substantially. They simply chose a seat and sat down versus the initial participants who were unsure as to where to place themselves. None of the participants relocated once they had committed to a location, however, after the meal some of the participants who knew each other, but were not sitting next to each other, got up and socialized standing around the grill. This was interesting, that they waited till the end of the meal to stand and eventually greet one another formally. Instead of the hugs, handshakes, or greetings happening when they sat down, they actually waited until the end to do so. Might that have to do with the social nature of the table they were seated at?

Response Behavior

Response behavior, as predicted, was difficult to record. However, it did lead to two significant findings. First, a mimic behavior that happened nearly thirty times over
the course of the meal. This behavior involved participants leaning forward to answer a
question if someone had leaned forward to ask it. Even if the question clearly directed
towards one person, often several leaned forward if the person asking the question had
already done so. Another mimic behavior that occurred was when someone got up from
his or her seat to use the restroom, the people on both sides of that person almost always
readjusted their seat in some way. Not just their position in the seat, but the chair itself.
The same behavior happened when that person came back from the restroom, and often
involved moving around personal belongings as well.

**Comfort versus Control**

This research shows there is a definite distinction between levels of both comfort
and control, even though they may very much inform one another. In terms of proxemics,
both are essential in understanding a positive proxemic response versus a negative one.
Proxemic activity can both promote certain activity as well as demote other activity, and
it is a matter of understanding which is the desired outcome in order to analyze user
response. A user might have control, proxemically, of their surroundings, and yet do not
feel comfortable. In contrast, another user might feel as though they have no control of
their proxemic condition, yet are very much comfortable. In either case, it is important to
separate the two when analyzing the proxemics of a restaurant environment. In many
cases, the user does not have control of how a restaurant is laid out or how they are
seated. In the case of tabletop cooking, it is typical that the user actually has a much more
significant role in framing their proxemic condition than in many other conventional
restaurant types, meaning they have a high level of control. This increased level of
control means that the user may then be indirectly or directly responsible for the level of comfort achieved. Although this relationship was not studied specifically in this research, it is a relationship that was noted and is worth pursuing in the future as an extension of proxemic research in restaurants.

**Summary**

In general, these results proved to be far more interesting than anticipated. Initially more generalized, basic restaurant behavioral trends were expected but these observations have led to some fascinating insights. Not only are their overarching tendencies, there are micro behaviors that are very much rooted in a response to a designed condition. This research method focused mainly on behavior. Although not specifically interior design, behavior is often a result of the context in which someone is placed. Meaning much of this behavior could be a result of how a teppanyaki tabletop cooking facility is designed. Now that we have noted and analyzed the participant’s behavior as a third party observer, we can compare that data to their responses in the focus group to see if it is consistent. The behavioral observation attempts to give us insight into the “how” questions. How are these people behaving? How are they responding? Often they may be unaware that their actions are far more telling anything they are consciously saying. With their behavior noted, we can begin to investigate why this restaurant typology is so attractive to this demographic, and ultimately, what design moves encourage this unique type of behavior that challenges conventional restaurants.
Short Survey

After each of the twelve participants completed the survey following the systematic observation, the data was compiled and analyzed numerically, and ultimately organized in table form. The following table shows the resulting data, with the highest marked category for each scenario indicated by a box. This table can also be found in Appendix G.
Table 1. Compiled Survey Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>SLIGHTLY</th>
<th>A BIT</th>
<th>MODERATELY</th>
<th>VERY</th>
<th>EXTREMELY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You're in an elevator with the only one other person and they're standing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directly over your shoulder.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man asks if you might mind moving seats so him and his wife could sit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next to one another.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You sit down on the bus and there's only one other person sitting in the</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back quietly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone you don't know sits down and joins you at your dinner table.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're stuck on a four hour flight and the person sitting next to you is</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleeping and leaning on you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You look up from where you are and a stranger is staring at you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone moves your coat from the back of your chair because it is resting</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on his or her own chair.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're driving and the person behind you is tailgating you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are multiple open seats in an area in which you are sitting, yet a</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>couple decides to choose the two directly next to you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're waiting in a line and the person behind you tries to engage in</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone moves your personal items that you placed specifically in order to</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hold your spot.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're at a park and someone sits down on the park bench next to you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone enters the room/group yet does not introduce himself or herself.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're put into a random group at work or in class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone is talking very loudly next to you while you are trying to have</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a conversation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An acquaintance hugs you.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A stranger on the street gives you a high five.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proxemic Conditions

The results of this data indicate several findings. First, regarding the three scenarios which are considered most uncomfortable for the participants (4, 5, 11), in each example there is a direct association with proxemic conditions. In each case, there is an example of a breach in the intimate or personal distance zones, resulting in an invasion of personal space or territoriality. This indicates that, in fact, proxemic conditions that fall within the intimate or personal zones are highly regarded for this group of individuals, whether they are aware of it or not.

Familiarity and Comfortability

A second finding involves a relationship between familiarity and comfortability. In essence, this data shows that whether or not you are familiar with a person in a given scenario isn’t enough to make it a particularly uncomfortable situation, but rather, the conditions in which the scenario is set. For example, 64% of participants indicated that an acquaintance hugging you is only slightly uncomfortable, whereas 82% of them said a stranger on the street giving you a high five is only slightly uncomfortable. This means that regardless of their familiarity with the person, the action itself is much more important than the relationship to the person. In this case, more participants indicated that a scenario involving a stranger is actually less uncomfortable than one with an acquaintance.
Personal Space and Territoriality

Third, a comparison of proxemic distances indicates that outside of the intimate and personal zones, even in social settings, users have little regard for another’s proxemic condition. For example, 67% of the participants indicated that if a stranger joined their dinner table they would feel extremely uncomfortable, versus entering a bus where someone is sitting in the back alone where the same percentage, 67%, of participants said they would only be slightly uncomfortable. This indicates that “negative proxemics”, a proxemic condition where an intensely negative outcome is the result, occurs most specifically in the intimate and personal distance zones. This suggests a relationship between these zones and their implementation in a restaurant environment.

If one were to address the two main overarching themes of proxemic theory, it would most likely involve personal space and territoriality. Each of the four proxemic zones somehow addresses both of these ideas, however, a commonality between all of them is this idea that one somehow defines personal space and personal territory, but because of this context, might not coincide with their typical proxemic tendencies. For example, in this survey, results showed that ten out of twelve participants found it extremely uncomfortable if a person were to move their belongings from the location which they were placed in order to hold their spot. In contrast, nine out of twelve participants said it would be only slightly uncomfortable if a stranger approached them on the street to give them a high five. Now, the moving of the belongings most likely involves the social or public distance zones, whereas the high five most certainly invades the intimate zone. So in this case, a stranger infiltrating the intimate zone is perceived by participants as significantly less uncomfortable than the moving of their belongings, even
though the proxemic zones would indicate otherwise. An infiltration of the intimate zone by a stranger should, according to Hall, be equal to if not more uncomfortable than non-physical interaction occurring in the social or public zones. But because this is an issue of an invasion of territoriality, claiming ones space as their own, it begins to break the pattern of proxemic behavior.

Both personal space and territoriality involve a motive; a declaration of ownership. In both cases, the user is somehow delineating a custom proxemic condition based on context. Based on the results of this research, the act of delineation can be done in a variety of ways, however, the method by which is it done is not what is important; it’s the fact the it was done in the first place. Those who didn’t clearly mark or somehow indicate personal space or personal territory were generally unaffected by actions that might question those zones, however, those who clearly marked them yet others ignored or disregarded were the ones who responded most negatively. From this research, the act of delineating personal space and territory, whether completed by the user or the environment, is directly correlated to proxemic satisfaction.

Focus Group

The focus group was recorded using an audio recording device, and following the session, was transcribed using a word processing program by the principle investigator. The principle investigator kept note of who was talking when, and that information is indicated through their personal identification number. The transcript for this session can be found in Appendix H. The results and analysis of this method has been done through a sort of content analysis, highlighted graphically in Appendix L, indicating trends and
highlighting specific examples of thoughts that represent the perceptions of this group of individuals. In order to fully understand the analysis of this qualitative study, reviewing the full transcript would be beneficial.

The focus group became a much more dynamic, much more telling research study than originally anticipated. Understanding that these people didn’t know each other before the study yet were so willing to discuss their experience was fantastic as the principle investigator. Initially, a full set of questions were prepared to keep the conversation going, but they did a fantastic job of maintaining conversation and adding input where they could. Admittedly, some of the subjects became rather repetitive. Meaning, there were several moments of “I know we’ve already discussed this…” or “Kind of like we’ve already said…” but that might speak to the nature of qualitative data gathering. Those repetitive ideas speak to their weight in terms of overall experience.

**Impression of Tabletop Cooking**

There were several topics discussed that might lead to design implications regarding their application to a restaurant’s interior. First, the overall knowledge of what “tabletop cooking” means. The term isn’t something that is used frequently, and is more a vernacular term versus a rigidly defined one. The participants seemed to have a good grasp on what defined “tabletop cooking” as a restaurant typology. Points were made that it involves a cooking element, such as a grill or griddle, and that it typically involves one person preparing food. There was a bit a discrepancy between whether or not the term applies specifically to restaurants or not, which came as a surprise. Participant 002 mentioned that,
…because honestly that word kind of reminds me of my grandma’s house…” in regards to her childhood, where “…all the kids would come over and she has like this big island in the middle of here kitchen and we would all sit around it and watch her cook.

This particular example is interesting because she mentions a kitchen island; a stand alone built structure that houses a cooking element, where people “sit around” something. Not only does it imply a method of cooking, it implies a group activity in which participants surround in a particular seating arrangement. This was particularly fascinating. Participant 002 made a connection between a residential cooking configuration, and that of a tabletop-cooking restaurant. This isn’t something that had even been considered up until this point. By many sources’ standards, this cooking typology was referring only to a public restaurant setting, but in fact, the application could very easily extend into the home. So, participants acknowledge that “tabletop cooking” involves a cooking element present at the table itself, is most often a group activity, and involves a participant either actively participating in or actively watching the preparation of the food. This information may sound basic or accepted, but with a term that is still being defined it is crucial to understand the public perception of this typology, and these responses begin to identify exactly that.

Micro-Culture versus Macro-Culture

The term “culture” has been used frequently throughout the study, and rightly so. Food and design are inherently related to culture, and a variety of scales. It is important to address the shear scale of cultural levels we are dealing with in this research. This research could address culture from various standpoints from the human world, to the western hemisphere, North America, the United States, the Midwest, Iowa, central Iowa,
Ames, South Ames, Fuji Japanese Steakhouse, to finally one grill at Fuji. This shows the variety in terms of cultural perceptions that could impact potential proxemic behavior. Hall addresses proxemics as being very much a cultural study just as much as it is a behavioral one, and it is important to note the proxemic implications this might have considering the bulk of our research was done here in Ames, Iowa. Had this research been done elsewhere, the micro or macro cultural conditions might have resulted in much different behavior. Regardless of how different that behavior might have been, it speaks to the culture of the place. Proxemics are dependent on culture, and we happened to be dealing with a rather specific one in this case.

**Group Experience**

Another crucial piece of information that was acknowledged during the focus group involves the idea of experience. Participant one stated,

…sometimes I think, why am I literally paying money to come to a place to cook my own food? Like why didn’t I just do this at home, you know?

which highlights the importance of user experience. The meal becomes more than just good food, it becomes an experience *worth paying for*. This same idea is raised multiple times and will be discussed further in this study.

Participants made it very clear that an essential part to tabletop cooking, in their eyes, involves the presence of more than just one person. It is a highly social, inherently “group” activity. Participant 005 mentions,

…but if I’m grilling by myself I definitely wouldn’t consider it tabletop cooking. I’d just say I was grilling you know?
meaning there is a clear separation between the actual cooking device and the inherent experience of tabletop cooking.

Along the lines of tabletop cooking being a group activity, participants mentioned the impact of the overall space in which they are typically exposed to this type of restaurant. Participant 007 mentions,

…a lot of times its like a group of people that are surrounding a table and someone comes and makes food for you so like there has to be a table, and chairs, and like a place to make food. Usually you see those like grill vent hood things that go above the tables too to catch the steam or whatever. But usually in a big room too…

while participant 002 mentions,

Yeah it seems like every hibachi place I go to has a big huge room with a ton of tables in them.

acknowledging the spatial conditions that often associate themselves with this typology. The idea of an open, grand space, a large space, or an “active” space is discussed frequently throughout the study. Participants state that the larger spaces are necessary to achieve the social presence that is appreciated in these types of environments. In the other direction, participants also acknowledged that the more private, ‘reservable’ rooms were also desirable as they allow for a more personal setting that is not as loud.

The “experience” of dining at a tabletop cooking facility was another of the most crucial pieces of information collected from the focus group. Participant 011 states,

Yeah they definitely hit in on the head. There is an experience part of it that’s awesome, it’s convenient, it’s fun.

Several mentioned the idea that a restaurant of this type is used most frequently for special events, such as birthdays, anniversaries, etcetera. Participant 009 states,

So this one time a bunch of my high school friends came to Ames to visit me, back when I was like a freshman, and they wanted to all do dinner and do
something fun but I was nervous because we had probably eight or nine people, but Fuji was the perfect place because we all fit and it was something fun for all of us to do. If conversation lulled we kind of just watched the guy at the table do his thing and everything was fine. Since we were all facing each other we were kind of all in one conversation. It ended up that the girls actually had a really good time and that was awesome because I was kinda freaking out. I thought since they didn’t know each other it would be weird but it was totally fine.

This statement encapsulates a lot of what one might argue this restaurant typology is striving for. It mitigates some of the issues more conventional restaurant typologies might pose through the introduction of an experience, in combination with a specific seating and dining arrangement, and heightened levels of comfort and control.

**Seating**

Seating was undoubtedly the most discussed topic of the focus group. Not only in terms of type of arrangement, but also the social conditions that are present as a result of their configuration. Participants made note that the typical seating arrangement involves a circular or semi-circular placement of chairs around a table with the cooking element located at the center. They stated chairs are most often in close proximity, and the table itself is able to host a large number of people compared to that of conventional restaurant types. Participants discussed the chairs themselves, and that because of their close proximities issues tended to arise that could made the meal potentially awkward, or intimate. Participant 006 noted,

Well first off the seats are way too close! I was basically rubbing elbows with the dude next to me, sorry this is awkward that I’m bringing this up but it’s true! I didn’t know these people and I feel like I had to be best friends with them just because of the way we were sitting at the table.

This statement addresses both the issues of proximities as well as the social conditions that are present while identifying seats. For example, participant 004 states,
Like, I don’t know these people and then we are expected to come up with like a seating arrangement when you just walk over to a table and there are thirty seats open it’s awkward. I was one of the first people there and it was especially awkward because I didn’t know what the hell was going on. I didn’t know how many people were coming, or even what group I was a part of. Like yeah that is a super huge problem for me, and honestly why I don’t go to places like Fuji unless I’m with a group of people. I feel like it’s so awkward if just a bunch of couples are put together at the same table and are like ‘hey you guys should get along’…

The magnitude of social dynamism that occurs in terms of deciding and committing to how a seating arrangement works is fascinating. Typically, seats are not assigned in an establishment like this. Users must choose their own upon being shown their table by the host. Participants were very adamant in acknowledging the issues that this poses, both logistically and socially. Participant 007 states,

Yeah I noticed that conversations were kind of being cut off around the table because of the way we sat. Like those two girls ended up knowing each other but were then set super far across the table so they couldn’t really talk. I kind of wanted to get up and ask them if they wanted to trade seats honestly.

while participant 002 mentions,

Did you guys notice that the chairs felt super low too? Or maybe the table was just high I’m not sure but it was sort of hard to eat. When you’re eating your elbows like flail out to the side but when you’re so close to the person next to you it can be hard to eat, especially when you’re that low. I don’t know I thought it was pretty awkward actually.

In general, seating was a large concern and something the participants were more than willing to discuss.

Individual Interview

As with the focus group, following the interview sessions transcripts were made using a word processor (Appendix D, E, F), fed by an audio recording device. From there the data was analyzed via content analysis, explained in detail below. The full content
analysis table can be viewed in Appendix I, but segments of it have been provided below. Each column represents one of the three interviewees, and an “x” indicates they mentioned that topic in their interview. It should be noted that this research method addresses a much broader range of data than the others, specifically to get an accurate perception of restaurant atmosphere. As a result, this section contains the most analyzed data. If questions were posed in a way that somehow suggested tabletop cooking as the only restaurant typology considered in their responses, the data would be significantly tainted. Based on previous studies done involving restaurant interiors, the breadth of this method was essential. Therefore, the data in this method addresses restaurants holistically and then will be analyzed in specific regard to tabletop cooking restaurants in the discussion to follow.

The breadth of the results of the data was much larger than originally anticipated. It was assumed that responses would be mainly textural, material, or in other words, more oriented towards visual aesthetic. In reality, the users were much more analytical than that, and gave good insight into what the fundamental meaning of atmosphere is. This involved, mainly, the existence of people in a place. The difference people can make when present in a restaurant. This has been broken down further into even more specific categories for the sake of analysis, but the majority of all three conversations involved discussion about people or people’s interaction with designed elements. It helped to articulate the crucial role people play in a restaurant setting. That being said, this content analysis focuses on the most frequently mentioned atmospheric elements into main categories and sub categories, detailed in full in Appendix I. The main categories were based on atmospheric elements that were mentioned most often, and include the
following in alphabetical order: alcohol, cost/price, demographics, expectations, lighting, noise, online culture, people, seating, and visual aesthetic. Results will be discussed based on each main category, then discussed wholly in the chapter to follow.

Table 2. Alcohol

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eases Tension</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar Culture/Energy</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

The idea of the presence of alcohol, or a bar type environment, was mentioned by all three users. The emphasis seemed to lie in the fact there is a fundamental change in atmosphere when alcohol was present. They mentioned people’s ability to loosen up, feel more at ease, and a general change in energy. The physical presence of a bar was also mentioned. This is idea that people act a certain way when a bar is present, or a certain sense of comfort that you know alcohol is available in case you want it. Especially when discussing romantic, or date-like, situations, two of the users (one male and one female) mention alcohol as a way of preventing awkward situations. It seems as though alcohol is almost a social crutch for the users. A crutch in both a positive and negative sense; when one needs a ‘way out’ of the current situation, or to a way of intensifying it. There was also mention of another interesting idea, that even if you yourself are not consuming alcohol from a bar, others who are can be a positive atmospheric addition to a place.
Watching others enjoying themselves, full of energy, and participating in a social activity such as drinking can be beneficial to your social context even if you are not part of theirs.

**Table 3. Cost/Price**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Cost/Price</th>
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<th>X</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere : Price Ratio</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

Although discussing cost and prices were not a focus of this study, seeing as they could be a separate research topic entirely, there was, in each case, mention of a ratio between cost and atmosphere. Users described a phenomenon where a certain price range suggests a certain atmospheric condition: in short, if they are going to be spending a significant amount of money, the atmosphere better be worth the money. If expectations are set for fine dining, for example, the atmosphere of the restaurant should be appropriate with a more formal feel, or oppositely, if they are looking to dine at a ‘hole in the wall’ place they heard about, and expectations are lower, users are ‘okay’ with the atmosphere and visual aesthetic to be slightly less impressive. This was a particularly interesting idea, that somehow price can sort of dictate atmosphere. It raises another issue entirely in that price points also attract different crowds and demographics, also impacting the atmosphere. Although, as a stated before, cost and price could be an wholly separate conversation, but it is important to include this atmosphere to price ‘ratio’ described because all three users mentioned it in their interviews, indicating its significance and relevance.
Table 4. Demographics

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<thead>
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<th>Demographics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old vs. Young</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Appropriate” Age</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As a segue from the previous topic, the issue of demographics was also raised by each of the users. This starts to combine with a topic discussed later in the study involving ‘people’, however the specific demographics discussed were significant enough, in my opinion, to warrant their own section. The issue of appropriate demographics was a significant point of discussion in that the users found it essential to surround themselves with people who ‘fit’ the atmospheric conditions of the place. For example, one user mentioned a potential awkward situation if her and her boyfriend are looking to go out for a date night, and they walk into a restaurant of older adults. Although not an inherently negative situation by any means, the atmosphere was just not the type of energy the couple was looking for in a restaurant. If that restaurant would have been filled with other young couples on dates, potentially first dates, the atmosphere could be much more active and energetic. As designers, it is difficult for us to predict what type of people will inhabit our spaces, but we also have the ability to heavily impact who does through design moves. Demographically, the atmosphere of a place can be rigidly defined by the types of people who inhabit a place as social as a restaurant or bar.
Table 5. Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations</th>
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<th>X</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Met/Not Met</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect Assumptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Recommendation</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</table>

Significant findings came from this category, and was arguably the most surprising. All three users made a very clear point in mentioning that their perception of atmosphere is most heavily impacted by the expectations they have, or do not have, for a place. If their expectations are very high, based on verbal recommendations or others, and the expectations are not met, they are disappointed. However, if little or no expectations are had for whatever reason, most people are willing to oversee atmospheric issues in comparison to other restaurant elements. Each user mentioned this idea of expectations being met or unmet, but they discussed it in different terms. One user described the awkwardness of entering a restaurant to find you are dressed inappropriately for the place, either underdressed or overdressed. Neither is ‘wrong’ per say, it just was not what the users were expecting and therefore their perception of the atmosphere was skewed. Another mentioned getting rave reviews about a place because of a suggestion from his parents, only to find out the restaurant was “dark and outdated”. This was particularly interesting because each of the users studied has a background in architecture, therefore, their awareness for aesthetic elements is heightened. He did acknowledge the food was amazing, the atmosphere was just not up to his expectations, again, articulating this idea
that it wasn’t that the place was unpleasant, it was simply that his expectations were different from what his parents had described, and therefore impacted his perception of the place. More than anything, users described a slight feeling of embarrassment in each case. It wasn’t that they were truly upset over the situation, they were more embarrassed by their circumstances and lack of preparation. Preparation might not be strictly necessary to enjoy a dining experience, but it is becoming increasingly popular to research a place before trying it, therefore, setting up your expectations prematurely. This will be discussed further in the ‘online culture’ category.

**Table 6. Lighting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lighting</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mood/Ambience</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the ‘cost/price’ category, lighting could be a research study on its own. However, it’s mentioned here because all three users mentioned lighting in one of two ways: a factor in the mood or ambience of the place, and as a functional tool. Two very different purposes for lighting, but both very important. One user mentioned the awkward encounter when you are unable to read your menu because the light levels are so low, and people begin to use their cell phone flashlights to read the menu. Mood lighting in a place plays an integral role in atmospheric perception as it can set the tone for a place: formal or informal, loud or quiet. Each user mentioned lighting as a way of describing, initially, the atmosphere of a place clearly indicating its’ significance. The higher the energy,
generally, the more money people spend. Lower light levels increase a person’s willingness to spend money, which can be seen in many restaurants and expensive retail environments. So not only is it setting the mood for a place, it can also impact the economic facet of restaurants, which ultimately, dictates atmosphere as well as discussed previously in the atmosphere to price ratio.

Table 7. Noise

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise</th>
<th>X</th>
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<th>X</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Music</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy/Not Busy</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Loud/Too Quiet</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

All three users mentioned noise levels as an atmospheric element, two of which mentioned it in their opening statement. Having background music playing was discussed by all three. They mentioned background music as a way of filling awkward silences, as well as its’ ability to make a place feel busy. Several users mentioned how awkward it can be to sit in an empty restaurant, but even if people are not there to fill it, music can often take their place. Feeling like a place is busy, regardless of it is or not, is an important element in a restaurant’s interior and this can often be accomplished through noise levels. Many of the users mentioned they like it to be loud in a restaurant, with multiple conversations happening and where the energy feels active. Again, it goes back to this idea of expectations and appropriateness in the type of place, but often, the “type of place” is dictated through noise. Too quiet, and people get awkward. Too loud and
people get frustrated. It’s a delicate balance and one that restaurants often struggle with. The demographic of a place can change from night to night, meaning restaurants must be flexible in their ability to accommodate the mood the users are setting for the place. Especially in a dating scenario, the users researched here mentioned the significance of music and noise. It seems that noise levels may impact a romantic setting much more drastically than, say, a group of friends in a social setting. Although both can impact the energy, users in this study mentioned, specifically, the importance of noise and music while on a date. People on dates, especially first dates, can have extremely heightened sensory experience because of the nervous and potentially awkward scenario ensuing. As conversation develops, it often revolves around the immediate surroundings, the atmosphere, and music can play a large role in that as it is often common ground for conversation.

**Table 8. Online Culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Culture</th>
<th>X</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

In recent years, in addition to tabletop cooking culture, *online* food culture has also boomed. Websites such as Yelp, urbanspoon, and even tripadvisor provide photos, ratings, and reviews of restaurants all over the world. People are becoming more and more dependent on these sites, and as described before, can heavily impact their expectations of a place. Two of the users mentioned online culture as being a part of their
decision making process for ultimately choosing a place to eat. We see this happen all the time, where food is delivered at a restaurant and the first thing people do is snap a photo and upload it online and on social media. The culture they are setting up online impacts the atmosphere just as much as the interior of the place itself. People are not only setting up expectations based on these posts, but they are passing judgment. Just as people judge an atmosphere when they walk into a restaurant, similar types of judgments are made online, however, they are unfortunately often inaccurate. As mentioned before, this goes back to the importance of lighting in a place. Imagine the difference of experiencing mood lighting in person compared to that which could be captured on a phone. Even though they are, essentially, describing the same thing, the perception could be entirely skewed. As people are beginning to rely on online culture to make decisions about where to eat, restaurants are losing their ability to control perception. One user mentioned that her mother looks at online photos before she ever tries a place. What an incredibly dangerous thing, for both the restaurant and the mother. The mother could be missing out on a fantastic opportunity because of a poorly taken photograph, and the restaurant could be losing business as a result, even though they have done nothing to deserve it. Although this could also be an entirely separate discussion, these two users made it clear that online culture is becoming increasingly important to our perception of restaurant atmosphere.
Table 9. People

According to the users researched here, people were viewed as an integral component into the atmosphere of a restaurant. As one user mentioned, people are willing to overlook visual aesthetics if they people themselves are interesting enough. The types of people you attract to a place, though very much a designed move, can become the most significant design move of all. One user explained her love for a small bar and restaurant near her parents home, which is small and outdated, however, the people there were friendly and welcoming. That is what keeps her coming back. Not the typical design elements, but the people themselves. There was mention, by all three users, about the social qualities of a place as it pertains to restaurant atmosphere, and each described their desire for positive social interaction. This may be different from other age groups as many older people tend to view dining as a secluded experience, often requesting tables tucked away or in a quiet area. This contrasts from this demographic studied, as they all mentioned the social and interactive nature of the dining experience. As a server, it is often difficult to read restaurant goers between the ages of about fifty and up, because their desires in dining experience vary so much from person to person. This is often not the case with younger customers. They are generally pleasant to servers, much less formal, and want to ensure they are a significant part of their dining experience. Many
older people make it very clear that a server is there only to serve them, an idea that rejects the potential social interaction of a restaurant. In general, however, this group of users made it clear that people are indeed a driving factor in the perception of atmosphere.

Table 10. Seating

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<thead>
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<th>Seating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Arrangement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
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<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortability</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Restaurant seating and organization was mentioned significantly in this method. Most often mentioned was the notion of how comfortable seating was, not necessarily regarding the materials or style, but the idea that the users felt comfortable where they had been placed. Seating in a restaurant setting is a crucial design factor to the success of a restaurant, and that was articulated in these results. Two users mentioned proxemics specifically, in terms of seating, as it pertains to the relationship to other programmed elements of the space. For example, when the bar itself comes too close to the dining room seating, it can often be uncomfortable for the users sitting at the table. First of all, they are at a different height than those sitting at the bar, and second it can be particularly loud near the bar. The appropriateness of seating arrangement is crucial. The type of seating was also mentioned as a key factor, and understandably so. Users mentioned that
based on the type of dining experience they are looking to have, the type of seating can make or break it for them. One user mentioned the potentials booth seating offers in a date scenario, and can make you feel as though you’ve claimed a small area for the evening compared to a stand-alone table, which is less intimate. Restaurants are very much aware of what type of seating they offer in a place based on the clients they are looking to attract. In Italian restaurants, for example, you often see small booths and large tables. This is because their main clients are usually couples or large family/friend gatherings. Their seating style compliments this.

Table 11. Visual Aesthetic

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<tr>
<th>Visual Aesthetic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trasby/Dumpy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality/Mood</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Recommendation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The way a place looks is one of the first, if not the first, thing we notice when entering a space. Each user mentioned how a “trashy” or “dumpy” place is immediately off-putting, as well as the potentials for a visual aesthetic to determine the quality or mood of the space. These findings weren’t groundbreaking or unexpected, however, an interesting finding in this category was mentioned by User B and that was how a verbal recommendation for a place based on its’ visual aesthetic was significant. This goes back to the idea of expectations again, however, personal views on aesthetics vary so drastically between people, there can often be a miscommunication between users.
Although perception of atmosphere is always subjective, this was an interesting observation on the user’s part.

Proxemic Zones

Zone 1: Intimate Distance (0 to 18 inches)

In terms of this study, the intimate zone was the most directly addressed considering the researched factors. Tabletop cooking environments are inherently intimate, both spatially and experientially. There is something particularly intimate about being part of the process of preparing your own food, hence the importance of cooking in the American home. In a restaurant setting, however, an intimate proxemic distance is intentionally created as a means of instigating that intimate experience. For example, the distance between chairs at the teppanyaki grill discussed in this study was approximately 5 inches, meaning users are automatically placed in an inherently intimate setting. Typically, as noted in Ickinger’s study, strangers are not allowed within this zone. This is interesting seeing as the basis for tabletop cooking restaurants is the notion of strangers coming together to be part of the food preparation process. Participants in this study mentioned frequently that the proxemic intimacy is what made this dining experience what is was. Without it, the resulting social dynamism would be significantly less substantial.

The intimate zone, based on proxemic theory, is to be shared only with those whom one wishes to share a significant amount of sensory stimuli with. Perhaps this amount of sensory stimuli shared with a particular group of people is what makes this experience particularly appealing, and what ultimately shapes the social dynamic that
promotes overall group cohesion. By intentionally placing users within the intimate zone, designers are forcing participants to let go of their social or micro-cultural tendencies, and immerses them in an environment where proxemic vulnerability has the potential to actually enhance their dining experience. In most cases, infiltrating one’s intimate space would be considered rude or aggressive, ultimately resulting in a negative response from the user. However, in this case, the context has been set in a way that it becomes the expectation, the norm, and one might argue this is why millennials are seeking this type of environment. Young people are constantly battling “appropriateness” in terms of spatial distance, and particularly for this group of individuals, one could see how an environment which has set proxemic standards could be both challenging and relieving simultaneously. For example, imagine a young couple going out on a date for the first time. They are given a booth against a wall in a conventional dining facility. Do they sit next to each other? Do they sit across from one another? How close do they sit? There is a never-ending list of questions begging to be answered, with nothing in the environment that suggests one move being more appropriate than the other. In a group tabletop dining facility, the answers are provided for you. The proxemic distance is already established. The proximity from one group to another has already been established. Again, going back to expectations discussed previously. There is a certain sense of comfort in that which has already been decided, and when considering something as intimate as this zone, it is easy to see why one might choose an environment which provides answers in a way that still maintains appropriateness.

A participant in this study mentioned “rubbing elbows” with the person sitting next to them during the systematic observation. Although they mentioned it was a bit
uncomfortable, they also recognized it was “just part of the gig”. It is part of the experience that comes with being positioned in a way that intimate space is now shared space. That in fact, your intimate zone overlaps with someone else’s. This has the potential to create issues but above everything else it is different than any other type of restaurant environment. Can you imagine if someone invaded your intimate space at somewhere like McDonalds? It would be seen as highly inappropriate. But in conditions set like the ones in this study, it is part of the culture that has been established as part of this restaurant typology. This is why one might argue that this close proxemic condition is actually integral to this particular dining experience as a designed move. It is not just a means of getting more people around the table, although this is an obvious benefit, it is creating and environment which promotes a certain type of activity. That activity is inherently intimate, something most other restaurants cannot offer without being viewed as inappropriate.

**Zone 2: Personal Distance (18 inches to 4 feet)**

The personal distance zone begins to have implications proxemically that might challenge conventional proxemic theory. Because of the nature of tabletop cooking facilities, many of the cooking devices themselves are located within this user zone. As discussed in the previous section, the relationship between individual users falls initially in the intimate zone, meaning the personal zone becomes, well, less personal.

The cooking devices themselves become and interesting addition to this notion of proxemic theory. Conventionally, proxemic theory involves the study of human behavior and interaction. But for the sake of this research, we will argue that isn’t always the case.
One could make an argument that the relationship between food and user, is equally as relevant as the relationship between user and user. Meaning, the preparation of the food itself becomes an additional proponent in analyzing proxemics in this environment. Just as a person exhibits a variety of sensory data, as does food preparation. Each of the senses are somehow expressed during the preparation of the food, from the sounds and smells of meat touching the grill, to the heat exuded after introducing oil to the flame. One could argue then, the food itself is just as much a proxemic factor as a person sitting at the table, expressing those same sensory outputs. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the designed condition of the food being present in the personal zone. This zone is often described at the “transition” zone, the space which allows for a range of contact with other people or objects. By introducing food preparation into this transitional space, it allows for that contact to be made between user and the food they will consume. This makes the experience personal. A relationship is then established between user and food because of the proxemic condition under which the two were presented to one another. It could be easy to evaluate proxemics solely based on the users being investigated, however, this is an important facet to note in terms of how a designed move it impacting human behavior.

The majority of typical daily conversation happens in the personal zone, meaning this is the distance at which users are accustomed to talking to others, particularly strangers. In a tabletop cooking scenario, this is often challenged in that conversations are occurring beyond this space. This means users must adjust the way they are used to having conversation. Not only is there potential for conversation to occur beyond the zone, it is very common that conversation will also occur within the zone. This offers and
entirely new set of conditions. Users must adjust how they are speaking, and the manner in which they choose to converse, in a condition that allows for both personal and social conversation. This might occur with one other person, up to everyone positioned at the table. This offers a wide variety of conversation potentials that are often not presented at conventional restaurants. Design implications to accommodate scenarios such as these will be discussed in the following section of the chapter.

Zone 3: Social Distance (4 to 10 feet)

The social distance zone lends itself to proxemic conditions that are, well, social. Typically in a restaurant environment, there are divisions of space that make this zone relatively irrelevant. This could include booth seating, interior walls, partitions, etcetera that divide the space in a way that the immediacy of your table and its surrounding environment is the focus. However, in large-scale tabletop cooking restaurants as seen in this study, the social distance zone encompasses the dining experience of many people. In terms of the Fuji Japanese Steakhouse used as the data collection location in this study, this would include everyone sitting at one teppanyaki grill. In terms of making this dining experience a social one, this design move to incorporate the entire seating arrangement for one table into the social distance zone undoubtedly supports their objectives.

Beyond the grill itself, the social distance begins to have other proxemic implications as well. For example, depending on the arrangement of individual tables in the facility, this distance could begin to include users seated at other tables or grills. This means that the actions of users not even associated with one’s group could begin to impact the experience of others. In the casual observation a note was made that when a
person gets up to use the bathroom or something of that sort, others made adjustments to their seating condition as well. Well, depending on the context and layout, that adjustment might begin to impact users at another table entirely. They might be distracted by the all the movement or resulting noise, or might even enter their personal or intimate space and end up completing an action that could be perceived as inappropriate. It is a spatial zone that is just small enough to be personal, yet extends far enough that it addresses a much higher social condition.

**Zone 4: Public Distance (10 feet to infinity)**

The public distance zone encompasses more than was addressed in this study, and begins to have implications far beyond what we could address in a single thesis research study, however, there are some proxemic implications worth discussing. First and foremost, it is important to address that the social dynamic established in tabletop cooking restaurant facilities is due, in large part, to the open layout involving a series of tables and/or cooking devices. The condition would be fundamentally different if there was only one table or grill present. It is the combination of several tables, placed in relatively close proximity, that establish a sense of atmosphere and social dynamism. There are multiple experiences happening simultaneously, each with their own culture and personality, yet their presence is integral to having the experience feel truly and authentically social. This is the proxemic condition that extends beyond the table itself, and begins to address the facility as a unified whole. Sure, proxemic variables are critical at the most intimate levels, but they are equally as essential in regards to the perception of the place as a whole; as a designed interior. There were moves made to ensure the level
of intimacy and spatial delineation remains, while also addressing the public issue of intentionally avoiding a sense of isolation.

Major Results Identified Across Methods

**Seating**

To no surprise, seating was a major theme identified amongst each of the five research methods. Both participants and the principle investigator noted that how and where one is seated in a tabletop cooking restaurant environment is a critical factor in the overall dining experience. However, the notion of “seating” goes far beyond what the booth or chair might look like, but also the context in which the chair is placed and how that placement might impact the culture of the social environment. As noted in the casual observation, systematic observation, and focus group, there is a certain etiquette to the way seating works in a restaurant environment. Millennial users are very much aware that this etiquette exists, yet it is clear that it has not be specifically defined. This is made most apparent when there is a variety of demographics present, and this seating etiquette is challenged. The seating arrangement was also discussed in several of the methods. This involves understanding that the way one person is seated, as critical as that might be, is equally impacted by their association with others who are seated around them.

**Spatial Arrangement**

Similar to how the seating arrangement impacts the overall dining experience, as does the spatial conditions and their relationships to one another. Throughout the various methods, indications that spatial context is fundamentally important to millennial users
was presented. Not only were they concerned with the spatial condition in which they were seated or placed during a meal, but also, the relationship that space had with adjacent spaces. Participants indicated spatial conditions involving private versus public issues, with cases presented for the existence of both. They noted the importance of spatial division, stating that there are times where a spatially divide condition might be appropriate, and other times when it is unnecessary or actually imposes on the dining experience. It was clear that users had an existing visual impression of what tabletop cooking restaurants typically look like, or at least were familiar with the conventional layout of this restaurant typology. However, they offered insight into how this arrangement might be challenged in the future to better accommodate their own needs, discussed further in the chapter.

People

There was an undeniable emphasis on the impact that other people have on a tabletop cooking restaurant experience. In a place that depends on social interaction as a means of instigating a dining experience, this came as no surprise. Users were very much aware of the impact that other people had on their own experience, and the potentials that leant in terms of either “making or breaking” their overall impression of the meal. Tabletop cooking as a restaurant typology is inherently social. Proxemic theory involves a fundamental knowledge of how people interact with one another. Millennial users are known for their social connectivity. Clearly, people play as enormous role in the relationship between the three overarching subjects of this study.
Expectations

Because tabletop cooking as a typology is highly experiential, there are certain expectations that must be met in order to set a restaurant of this nature apart from a more conventional American model. As both observed and mentioned by participants, there is a clear expectation of the user when they choose to dine at a facility of this sort. They are seeking something more than what they might receive at a conventional restaurant, they expect to be entertained, they expect a dynamic atmosphere, and they expect a performance. A performance not only out of the staff, but out of those actively participating in the preparation of the meal itself. They almost hold one another to a sort of standard, that by choosing this type of dining experience they are acknowledging that they will do their part, both socially and logistically, to make this meal and event for everyone involved. If these expectations are not met, users are typically disappointed in the meal as a whole. Regardless of their level of satisfaction with the food, which would be the typical standard of measurement for a restaurant, they are evaluating the experience as a whole. This not only speaks to the importance of expectations being met, but also, the importance of providing an interior condition that supports these expectations.

Noise/Sound

This particular theme that developed was not expected initially when developing this study. Although sound is undeniably a factor in restaurant atmosphere, it was not expected to be so closely related to both proxemic theory and millennial users. In almost every research method, sound or noise was addressed in a way that had direct
implications for design decisions as well as proxemic factors. This involved everything from conversation, to background music, to ancillary noise and sounds, to yelling, laughing, screaming, and crying. Not only did this heavily impact the atmospheric impression of the users, it was closely related to proxemic theory. In general, significant sound that was observed within the intimate or personal zones was considered to be negative; *noise*. However, sounds that were largely significant in the social and public zones were considered necessary elements of the restaurant’s atmosphere, and therefore were found to be positive; *sound*. 
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter aims to discuss the collected and analyzed data in a way that promotes a relevant discussion regarding the contents and context of this study. Being a fundamentally qualitative investigation, there is a significant amount of room for subjective comment. This chapter, from the perspective of the principle investigator, discusses implications for design practice, design guidelines, overall conclusions of the study, and finally recommendations for future research. This study hopes to start a discussion on relevant design aspects and applications that speak to designed restaurant interiors, proxemic theory, and millennial users.

Implications for Future Design

Seating

As mentioned previously, seating became a significant factor in each of the methods of this research study. As a result, there are design implications that associate themselves with the resulting data. Could there be a type of seating that maintains the current proxemic conditions that promote an intimate setting, while providing additional means of defining personal space and territoriality? This study indicates that users are content with the current proxemic conditions, however, issues arise in terms of defining and maintaining space as their own. Could there be a designed element that somehow allows users to define their own space, while remaining integrated into the overall dining
experience? There is a phrase that says “good design is design you don’t notice” and this could most definitely be applied to this scenario. If one were to implement a designed move that somehow allows users to define their personal space, it would need to be an element that is flawlessly integrated into the overall design, not something as simple as a name card. A move like this would increase both the comfort and control levels for the user, ideally enhancing the overall experience.

**Spatial Arrangement**

The arrangement of spaces is critical to both the experience and functionality of a tabletop cooking environment, and design decisions can help to inform both. First and foremost, this research showed that the open, large-scale dining room present in many tabletop cooking restaurants is critical to the overall design. Not only does it promote social dynamism, it creates a community feeling that enhances the overall dining experience. This implies minimal partitions or divisions, with visual access across the majority of the dining room. The arrangement of the cooking devices themselves, typically coordinated with a dining surface, is also crucial. This research indicates that the visual connection between tables/cooking devices is another essential element to the tabletop cooking dining experience. Users are involved with other table’s dining experiences because of their proximity, which increases the sensory output that makes this experiential dining venture unique.
Atmosphere

Tabletop cooking facilities need to promote a certain atmosphere in order to satisfy the “expectations” discussed previously in the study. There is an atmospheric quality that informs users they are in an environment unlike most other conventional restaurant types. The atmospheric condition is a very much intentionally designed move. As designers, we can think beyond the aesthetic of the place, even though it has significant importance, and look to other senses as a means of instigating a particular atmosphere. For example, the notion of noise or sound has come into play several times throughout this study, and could become a means of establishing atmosphere. Particularly when regarding an instance where users are placed mainly within the intimate and personal distance zones, noise and sound become major factors in sensory analysis. Could noise or sound begin to replace the thematic aesthetic that’s so commonly found in restaurants of this type? Could atmosphere be dictated by something other than a visual condition?

Technology

Up until now in this study, we’ve described proxemics as a mainly physical condition, meaning a condition that relates two people or food and a person. However, one could argue that proxemics might apply differently to the millennial demographic. Might technology become another integral factor in proxemic conditions of this generation? With the use of smartphone technology and apps, users can be connected through something other than physical space. At the click of a button, a person is able to see other users within a given radius from their current location. Could this type of
technology begin to assert itself into the holistic design of tabletop restaurants? Imagine if tables could interact with one another through technology, to only further establish the sense of social dynamism and community that exists currently. The aesthetic of the designed interior could become so minimal, so basic, that the aesthetic itself becomes the interaction of users within the environment. Restaurant technology is continually developing, to the point where dining surfaces are becoming interactive. This same technology could be used in an environment such as this to further enhance a user’s dining experience and ultimately rethink how a person interacts with food preparation and consumption.

Design Guidelines

1. Provide seating that allows the user to somehow define his or her personal space, which maintains a visual connection to the space as a social unit.

2. Although the table itself may be communal, seating should remain as individual components such as a chair or barstool in order to avoid communal seating such as booths or benches.

3. Maintain individual seating within the intimate zone (0 to 18 inches).

4. Maintain table arrangements within the personal and social zones (18 inches to 10 feet).

5. Create a hierarchy of both public and private spaces, however, spatially emphasize the importance of the social public spaces.

6. Maintain a general sense of openness, ensuring spatial dividers such as partitions or walls are used sparingly in the main dining space.
7. Ensure the space establishes a sense of place, where users feel as though they are inherently part of the dining experience. This means instilling a sense of continuity between tables or cooking elements that ensures users feel part of the restaurants social atmosphere.

8. Sound and noise are integral to designing for this restaurant. Introduce sound through music to establish placeness, and ensure conversation is encouraged through the designed elements for positive social noise.

9. Introduce technology where it has the potential to mitigate potential design issues, in addition to promoting positive social interaction.

10. Most importantly when designing, regard the food itself as being equally as important as the users. In both atmospheric and proxemic conditions, for this type of restaurant setting, the food becomes an integral component to the design as well as the experience.

Conclusions

This study began as an investigation into understanding tabletop cooking as an up and coming restaurant typology, in order to better understand how we as designers might accommodate the needs of a place of this nature. In order to do so, we need to somehow define this type of place. Through a series of five data collection methods, this study has outlined a framework for what a tabletop cooking facility might look like, what the current perceptions of that type of place are, why millennials are seeking this type of dining environment, and ultimately how proxemics are playing a role in the development of this new restaurant typology. A heuristic approach was used as a way of framing this
series of loosely defined terms; tabletop cooking, proxemics, and millennials. By defining for ourselves the nature of these terms, we were able to seek relationships between them that have the ability to inform future design decisions in the discipline of interior design.

In order to understand how to accommodate a user in a designed environment, we must first understand their behavior. Proxemic theory is fundamentally a study of human behavior, and thus was chosen as the catalyst for this study. By understanding how an interior environment has impacted a particular demographics behavior, we are then able to apply that information to future design ventures in hopes of bettering the user conditions and ultimately the human dining experience.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Expand the number of participants involved in the study in hopes of obtaining a more accurate representation of the demographic.

2. Implement the research methods in a variety of tabletop cooking facilities in order to understand the design nuances within the typology.

3. Implement the research methods in different geographic locations in order to compare with those collected here in the Midwest.

4. Investigate proxemic behavior at a range of scales, from the table itself to the restaurant as a whole with a large group of researchers and participants.

5. Research the relationship between proxemics and technology, and the potentials they hold for the millennial user.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

FUJI JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE
Systematic Observation

User ID:
☐ MALE  ☐ FEMALE

User Interaction
☐ TALKS TO PERSON SITTING DIRECTLY NEXT TO HIM/HER
☐ TALKS TO PERSON MORE THAN ONE PERSON AWAY
☐ YELLS TO PERSON SITTING DIRECTLY NEXT TO HIM/HER
☐ YELLS TO PERSON MORE THAN ONE PERSON AWAY
☐ INITIATES PERSONAL CONVERSATION
☐ INITIATES GROUP CONVERSATION
☐ ENGAGES WITH CELL PHONE

Proxemic Tendencies
☐ SHIFTS CHAIR FORWARD/BACKWARD
☐ SHIFTS CHAIR LEFT/RIGHT
☐ SHIFTS CLOSER TO ANOTHER PERSON
☐ SHIFTS AWAY FROM ANOTHER PERSON
☐ RELOCATES ENTIRELY
☐ RELOCATES TO CARRY ON CONVERSATION
☐ PLACES PERSONAL ITEM TO ESTABLISH PLACE
☐ ADJUSTS IN CHAIR

Response Behavior
☐ TALKS LOUDER/YELLS
☐ LEAVES TABLE
☐ MIMICS BODY MOVEMENT

Other:
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Joshua Kassing from Iowa State University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information for use in a Master of Fine Arts Thesis involving interior design and restaurant behavior. I will be one of approximately 15 people being studied for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher from Iowa State University. The dinner/focus group/interview/survey/discussion will vary in length, but will not exceed an hour and a half. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be make. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the time of data collection nor have access to raw notes taken. Identification numbers will be used to maintain anonymity. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects at Iowa State University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through Iowa State University directly.

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________ My Signature

_________________________________________ My Printed Name

For further information, please contact:
Joshua Kassing, MFA Candidate

_________________________________________ Date

_________________________________________ Signature of the Investigator
APPENDIX C

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

ID Number: ____________________________

For each of the following scenarios, then please rate how uncomfortable you might feel by placing an “x” under the appropriate category:

SLIGHTLY  A BIT  MODERATELY  VERY  EXTREMELY

You’re in an elevator with the only one other person and they’re standing directly over your shoulder.

A man asks if you might mind moving seats so him and his wife could sit next to one another.

You sit down on the bus and there’s only one other person sitting in the back quietly.

Someone you don’t know sits down and joins you at your dinner table.

You’re stuck on a four hour flight and the person sitting next to you is sleeping and leaning on you.

You look up from where you are and a stranger is staring at you.

Someone moves your coat from the back of your chair because it is resting on his or her own chair.

You’re driving and the person behind you is tailgating you.

There are multiple open seats in an area in which you are sitting, yet a couple decides to choose the two directly next to you.

You’re waiting in a line and the person behind you tries to engage in conversation.

Someone moves your personal items that you placed specifically in order to hold your spot.

You’re at a park and someone sits down on the park bench next to you.

Someone enters the room/group yet does not introduce himself or herself.

You’re put into a random group at work or in class.

Someone is talking very loudly next to you while you are trying to have a conversation.

An acquaintance hugs you.

A stranger on the street gives you a high five.
J: “I’m going to start off by reading you an introduction statement that will give you a little bit better of an idea about the research I’m doing and why I’ve asked you to do this phone interview. Before we start, do I officially have your permission to record this conversation?”

A: “Oh! Yeah for sure.”

J: “(Laughs) Okay perfect. Also, thank you for taking time to do this! I know you’re a busy lady.”

A: “No problem! Actually I’ve been really bored lately and I’m waiting for my dinner to cook anyways.”

J: “Even better! Okay so let’s start. I’m going to read you this introduction, and then we will carry on from there."
‘The purpose of this research study is to better understand what type of restaurant atmosphere recent college graduates are seeking when selecting a particular venue to dine at. The information you provide will be completely confidential, and feel free to include any information you consider valuable. The purpose of this study is not strictly designed based. I’m aware of your significant design background, but don’t feel restricted to only include design-based feedback. Ultimately, this information will be used to help compose a sort of perception of ‘culture’, based on our demographic, and cultures involve many elements beyond design. That being said, design elements are also crucial to the atmospheric conditions within a restaurant setting, so feel free to include comments regarding this as well.’

“I know this is pretty brief, but it’s meant to just give you and idea of the purpose of the study. Any questions for me right away?”

A: “I don’t think so! Actually this is funny because me and Zack (Interviewee A’s Fiance) were just talking about this the other day. Yay! I’m excited.”

J: “(Laughs) Okay awesome! So when you first here the words restaurant atmosphere, what are some things that come to mind?”

A: “Well when I hear atmosphere I immediately think about what kind of people are in a place. Like, I’m a big believer in the idea that people can make or break a certain place. Like me and Zack went to this super trashy, hole-in-the-wall restaurant last week to meet some friends and we were like, ‘What the f*** are we doing here’, but then once we started talking to the owners of the restaurant we found out it was actually really awesome. It was a super social restaurant. We ended up talking to the people sitting next to us which I thought was kind of weird. Like, that doesn’t happen in restaurants very often. Honestly I barely even remember the food because we were having such a good time talking to eachother and the people that we met.”
J: “So you would agree that people play a huge role in the overall impression of a restaurant’s atmosphere?”

A: “Oh absolutely. But, coming from a designers point of view it obviously isn’t the only thing.”

J: “What do you mean by that?”

A: “Well obviously ‘atmosphere’ like we talk about in architecture means a lot more than the people in a place. You have to actually get the people there first. I think it’s a combination of a lot of things. The light levels, materials, textures, noise levels, background music, and honestly just how the vibe feels. Sometimes you go into a restaurant and you just feel out of place, you know? Like you walk in and feel like you aren’t dressed appropriately or… I don’t know. I guess for me I can just tell when the atmosphere isn’t what I’m looking for. And it’s not that it’s not a nice place, I can just tell it’s not what I was expecting. I think that goes for a lot of places. If I’m not expecting the atmosphere that ends up showing up in a place, that throws me off, and again it’s not that I don’t like the place, it’s just not what I was expecting.”

J: “So having a certain expectation could actually impact your impression of a restaurant’s atmosphere?

A: “Definitely. It’s even more than that I think. I think with restaurants, we, we go online before we do anything else. That or we talk to people I guess, but like, I go right on my phone to see what a restaurant’s reviews are before I commit to going there. Especially the ones with pictures. But living in Seattle, I’ve learned not to look at the pictures so much because a lot of times they aren’t accurate. Some of my favorite places to eat have really sh***y pictures online. So I don’t know I guess I don’t follow my own advice sometimes. (laughs)”
J: “That’s a really interesting point that, actually, the online depiction of a place, even though it’s not ‘real’, can really impact the impression of a place, and I guess, impact it’s atmosphere too.”

A: “Yeah I mean if I see a photo online and it’s a bunch of old people sitting at a bar, I’m definitely not going to go there because I feel like I’d be out of place. But if I see a picture with a bunch of kids taking shots, I’d probably go there. Who am I kidding I would definitely go there (laughs). But it works the other way too. Like sometimes people market a restaurant for young people, but it’s in a neighborhood that is mainly 60+, and so only old people end up going there. Then we show up and it’s really awkward. I guess a lot of my impression of ‘atmosphere’ is decided because of what I hear or see from other people or online.”

J: “Okay so let’s say you and Zack are planning to go out on a date in Seattle, what do you look for in an interior atmosphere? Forget about what people have said or what you’ve read online, but if you had to imagine yourself going somewhere, even somewhere that doesn’t exist yet, what would it look and feel like.”

A: “Actually it’s funny you ask that because Zack and I were literally just talking about starting a restaurant and what we would want in it. Well first, it has to feel busy. I hate going to restaurants that feel dead because you kind of feel like a gold fish that everyone is staring at and that’s super awkward. A big part of that I think is the way the seating is laid out. I like booths, that’s just me. But sitting at a table with four chairs with two people is really awkward. I never know if I should sit across from him or next to him. I don’t know maybe I over think it but still, it’s weird. I think another big thing is lighting. If it’s too bright you feel like you’re in a cafeteria, or like a McDonald’s or something, but too dark and you can’t read the freaking menu. There is definitely a happy in between.”

J: “For sure. Do you think the food itself could play a role?”
A: “Yes! Oh my gosh yes. Like when you are waiting to be seated at a table and you see someone else’s food go by, it gets you even more excited for your food. And if it’s really well done, and like, plated beautifully, I think that is a huge factor in my impression of the place. I know we’ve talked about this in architecture, but like, the food itself in a restaurant actually can play a huge role in the interior design. It’s kind of like clothing in a retail space, without the clothing, the interior design isn’t anything crazy, a lot of times it just compliments the clothes. I think restaurants are similar. The food is the real star of the show and the interiors should just compliment it.”

J: “Yeah I completely agree with that one. Have you ever run into a time when the atmosphere was really negative? Or made you feel uncomfortable?”

A: “Oh my gosh yes. One time we were in a restaurant and the seats were so uncomfortable we couldn’t even finish out food. They were at like, a 90 degree angle and my butt hurt so bad we had to get up. I’m not really sure if that is ‘atmosphere’ but, well, yeah I guess it would be. I guess all of the interior design elements would be part of the atmosphere. Kind of like a church!”

J: “(Laughs) Yes! That is actually a lot of what my thesis about, like this idea that interior design plays a huge role into the social conditions of a restaurant.”

A: “That’s so cool! I didn’t know that’s what you were doing your thesis on. But yeah I mean there are so many factors that come into play when I’m deciding on a restaurant. Another big thing is that I want the atmosphere to match the price. I’m not sure if you want me to go into prices and stuff?”

J: “No continue! All of it’s important.”

A: “Okay awesome. Yeah but like I hate when I go to a restaurant and the décor, the seating, the lighting, everything is outdated or worn and then the prices of the food are ridiculously high. If I’m paying for an expensive meal, I want the environment to seem
like I should be paying for an expensive meal! I don’t know if everyone thinks that way, but as a designer, you better believe I’m paying attention to that stuff.”

J: “Have your opinions on restaurant atmosphere changed since graduating college and living in Seattle?”

A: “Umm…(laughs) that’s a good question. I guess I hadn’t really thought about it all that much yet. You know I think it just goes back to what I was saying before about what to expect. If I’m expecting to spend a lot, I’m okay with spending a lot and being at a nice restaurant. Now, I’m just eating out a lot more in general, and have more money to go to nicer places. It’s not that my opinions have changed really, it’s more that my expectations have.”

J: “Yeah it’s hard for me sometimes to think about that because I haven’t left [Ames] yet. What would be some of your requirements for a good restaurant atmosphere? Specifically.”

A: “Specifically? Umm. Good lighting for sure. Comfortable seats. I really like when you can tell that someone put effort into the design of the interior. Like when they’ve hired and interior designer who knows what they’re doing. A nice waiting area is a big one too. If you have to wait for a table and there isn’t a bar to sit at, it can be awkward when the restaurant only gave you one bench to sit on. If that’s full, then you just stand there. Especially at a nice restaurant I feel weird just standing there and I feel like I’m in everybody’s way. It just starts the night off on the wrong foot I think.”

J: “Anything else?”

A: “Noise is a huge thing too. Like I said before I want it to feel busy, but that doesn’t mean I don’t want it to sound like a bar. I’m out on a date, I want to be able to hear my fiancé. I really like when restaurants have background music. I think it takes away from potential awkward situations and it adds to the feeling of the restaurant seeming busy. It
also really sets the mood, as cheesy as it sounds. Sports bars seem more, like, energetic or something with Top 40’s are playing. Italian restaurants seem more authentic when Italian music is playing. It can be too quiet without music.”

J: “Yeah music can definitely play a huge role for sure. I did a project on that last semester.”

A: “Yeah? Sweet.”

J: “So you said you and Zack had talked about what you would do if you opened up a restaurant. What were some of the things you talked about? Do you think they applied to interior atmosphere?”

A: “Oh yeah definitely. Actually I’d say almost all of it did. But really, I would say everything in a restaurant plays into it’s atmosphere. We talk about that all the time at the firm. It’s not that we are providing an atmosphere; we’re providing a space that inspires people to do things. We can only really guide what people do, and I think a lot of that has to do with interior design.”

J: “So what were some of the things you guys talked about?”

A: “Oh! (Laughs) Right. Umm I have to think. Okay so we talked about the bar, and that the bar can’t be right around where everyone is sitting because it gets annoying when drunk people at the bar are screaming so loud you can’t hear your own voice. Also people at the bar get up a lot to go to the bathroom and whatever, and it gets annoying when people are constantly bumping into your chair walking by you all the time. We talked about good music. You have to have good music. Actually we were talking about like a chill restaurant that only played Red Hot Chili Peppers because we were at a restaurant that played them and it was actually really awesome. Umm yeah and like somewhere just just feels comfortable to be in. I guess trendy is a good thing too. There’s this new fad with reclaimed wood, and concrete, the like, industrial look. I’m not gonna say I’m
shallow enough to go somewhere just because it looks cool, but let's be honest, we all do it.”

J: “Look at your go *Interviewee A's name*! You’re on top of this stuff (laughs). Do you think, from a designer’s point of view, or I guess from any point of view really, that there are opportunities for developing restaurant atmospheres?”

A: “I think we just need to think about restaurants differently then we used to. Restaurants are changing, and I can see, especially in Seattle, that people are looking for like, more than just good food and a cool place to hang out. They want something they can do, like something that is interactive. Those restaurant/movie theatre’s are becoming really big. I know they did one of them in Des Moines. I guess that’s not really atmosphere as designers think about it, but we should start thinking about it that way. What people are doing while they’re eating can be really important when you’re talking about the like, vibe or feeling in a place. I guess that’s what we need to do. Designer’s are getting good about making interesting places to eat out, but we need to think more about the social aspects of restaurants. How are the designs we make like, affecting people, or I guess affecting the restaurants. We need to know what change our designs are having on people, and if we know that we can start to play around with it and see what happens.”

J: “Yeah definitely. Well you’ve been awesome! Thanks for taking the time to do this, I know you’re busy…..(Conversation continues but its irrelevant to research).
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW B

18 February 2016
6:45pm – 7:02 pm
Recorded Telephone Interview

(For Confidentiality Purposes Interviewee B)
Age: 24
Gender: Female
Current City: Austin, TX
Background: B. Arch Iowa State University 2014
Current Profession: Junior Designer

J: Joshua Kassing

B: Interviewee B

J: “Okay. So I’m going to start off by reading you an introduction statement that will give you a little bit better of an idea about the research I’m doing and why I’ve asked you to do this phone interview. Before we start, do I officially have your permission to record this conversation?”

B: “(Laughs) Sounds good!”

J: “Alrighty perfect! I just wanted to say, before we start too, that I really appreciate you taking the time to do this. It’s kind of awkward, I know, but I’m really liking the research I’m doing for my thesis so this will help me a lot!”

B: “Yeah it’s no problem at all. I did a phone interview like, last week sometime, for a guy that I used to work with at Iowa State. I can’t really remember exactly what it was for (laughs) but he’s moving to Austin to go to grad school for Community and Regional Planning… Anyways yeah sorry!”
J: “(Laughs) That’s awesome! Yeah this will be pretty laid back, I’ll just go ahead and read you this little introduction that I’ll read to everybody who does an interview with me…”

B: “Cool.”

J: “‘The purpose of this research study is to better understand what type of restaurant atmosphere recent college graduates are seeking when selecting a particular venue to dine at. The information you provide will be completely confidential, and feel free to include any information you consider valuable. The purpose of this study is not strictly designed based. I’m aware of your significant design background, but don’t feel restricted to only include design-based feedback. Ultimately, this information will be used to help compose a sort of perception of ‘culture’, based on our demographic, and cultures involve many elements beyond design. That being said, design elements are also crucial to the atmospheric conditions within a restaurant setting, so feel free to include comments regarding this as well.’

“So that’s what I’ve got for you. Any questions for me right away?”

B: “Nope. Sounds good to me.”

J: “Okay perfect. If you have any questions or need me to repeat something or anything, just let me know.”

B: “Will do.”

J: “So, we often hear the term ‘restaurant atmosphere’ thrown around in both our everyday lives and design. What are some of the things that come to mind when you hear ‘restaurant atmosphere’?”
B: “Well, as you know, I’m kind of obsessed with like food, and restaurants, and bars and all that stuff.”

J: “Yeah that’s why I asked you to do this!”

B: “(Laughs) Yeah so I guess it means a lot to me! In general, I would say the first thing that comes to mind is just how a place feels. How the people are acting, how they are interacting with the space, how they are interacting with each other, stuff like that. I know when my mom thinks of restaurant atmosphere, like she’s really big into how a restaurant looks and stuff, so I know atmosphere is really important to her. She is always looking at photos and stuff to see if she’ll like a place, so looks is really important to her. To me looks are really important too, but I also take the people into account for sure. I don’t know I guess it brings up a lot of things. I want to be somewhere that I feel welcomed, that I feel comfortable, that I was to spend time. And I guess not only spend time but spend money too. I kind of, like, tend to spend a lot on food and restaurants when I go out but that’s because I really enjoy it. I don’t spend money on other things like clothes, or, well that’s a bad example I definitely spend too much money on clothes, but you know what I mean. Like I don’t have many hobbies besides going out to eat and drinking. Wow. That sounded really bad.”

J: “(Laughs loudly) No! No not at all! That’s what is fun about these interviews is, I think we both learn a lot from it. It’s good that you’re answering honestly because that helps my research a lot.”

B: “(Laughs) Okay good! Wow okay yeah okay let’s keep going.”

J: “Perfect. Okay so you had mentioned people as being a big factor for you when you think of an ‘atmosphere’ of a restaurant.”

B: “Yes.”
J: “Why do you think that is? What is it about people that makes them the first thing you think of? As a designer I would have thought you’d start with something about the interior design or layout or something.”

B: “All of those things are really important, definitely. And actually I’m working on a restaurant project right now that’s been a lot of fun. But honestly, I could be in some dumpy, well I shouldn’t say that I hate dumpy restaurants, but like some restaurant that isn’t exactly beautiful, but if the people are having a good time so am I usually. Now that I think about it though, that is mainly the restaurants that have bars in them. Like I like to see people at the bar having a good time. I guess people sitting at the tables, like, I couldn’t care less.”

J: “Well that’s an important point though, is that you think having a bar could have an impact on the restaurant’s atmosphere?”

B: “Oh my god yeah. Like I’m legit bummed when I go out to eat and find out there’s no bar at a restaurant. I think it just adds something. Maybe it’s the alcohol, I don’t know, but I love it when I see an older couple, like my parents age, that obviously is running out of things to talk about, and they go to the bar and get a drink, and then it’s like they’re 21 again. They start talking and laughing, and that makes me happy. I guess that’s part of like, the ‘atmosphere’ too is seeing other people enjoy the place as much as you are.”

J: “And do you think that design plays a role in that then?”

B: “Oh, definitely. I mean, it plays a huge role! Designers have the chance to make that stuff happen. Depending on what the designer is picturing for a mood or something in the restaurant, they could make those little things happen. I mean you definitely have to know your audience, and a designer has to know that. You can’t open a random restaurant and expect everyone to love it. You have to be sort of specific, I guess, and design based on who you want to come into your restaurant.”
J: “I couldn’t agree more. I think that’s definitely something they drilled into our heads in our B. Arch.”

B: “(Laughs) That’s for sure.”

J: “So you said that your mom is really big into looking at pictures before she goes somewhere to eat. What does that mean?”

B: “Oh, like I mean she goes online and checks a place out before she actually goes there. Usually it’s like yelp or something, but she has a lot of websites she uses. I guess I do that too. I’m not so big into the pictures, but I like reading the reviews. I don’t always trust them because there are definitely places that I go to that still get bad reviews, but yeah I like to see what people think.”

J: “So in other words, you sort of prepare yourself for a restaurant before you go there?”

B: “Yeah I guess that would be a good way of saying it. I just don’t want to show up and be dressed wrong, or need a reservation, or something like that and be super embarrassed, you know? Like I just want to know what I’m getting myself into.”

J: “So maybe, having certain expectations?”

B: “Yeah you could say that. There are things I expect at every restaurant, and there are things I expect based on the ratings and reviews I see.”

J: “Yeah that’s really interesting. So what happens then, if things don’t meet your expectations? Like, for an atmosphere. We won’t get into service and stuff like that which obviously is a big part of it too”

B: “Yeah service definitely is, but so is the atmosphere. Like if I walk into a place that I know is expensive, and I don’t feel like I’m in an expensive restaurant, I get mad. Like I
told you before it’s not the money thing, like I’ll spend whatever money I have to, but I want it to be worth it, you know? I want to feel like the food is worth as much as the restaurant is. Otherwise I feel like I’m getting ripped off.”

J: “So you would say then, there is a relationship between the environment and cost of the food?”

B: “Yeah I’d say so. I mean if you go into a cheap place, like the food is cheap, and it looks nice too then you just got lucky I guess. But if you go into an expensive restaurant, you’d expect that it would look nice.”

J: “When you say ‘look nice’ what, specifically are you talking about? What makes an interior atmosphere desirable for you when you go out to eat?”

B: “Umm somewhere that is clean. That looks renovated or updated. I hate going into places that look out of date. I feel like I should be there with my grandma (laughs). Another thing that’s really important for me is the temperature. When restaurants are too cold and I have to put my coat on I just want to leave. We’re inside, like, turn the heat on. Ummm… what else? I’m trying to think.”

J: “Is sound an issue for you at all?”

B: “Oh yeah that’s a good point! I actually kind of like noisy restaurants. Not for like, a date, but when it’s too quiet it’s awkward.”

J: “What about background music?”

B: “Background music, yeah, it’s nice. It can definitely make or break a place though. If it’s too loud or too ‘moody’ I think it’s cheesy. I remember eating at Zombie Burger in Des Moines when I went to ISU and they always had really good music. Like it fit the
place. I don’t know how many places could get away with playing heavy metal at dinner time, but they did and it definitely worked.”

J: “That brings me to a good point actually, would you say, since moving to Austin your opinions about restaurant atmosphere has changed? Like, do you look for anything different of finding yourself seeking out different things?”

B: “Honestly, I don’t think so. I’ve always been so big into eating out and so is my family, so I was sort of brought up knowing a lot about restaurants and restaurant culture.”

J: “Ah! I’m going to stop you right there. You said ‘restaurant culture’. What do you mean by that?”

B: “Well there are certain types of like, people that go out to eat a lot or like really specific restaurants, or types of food. I think there is definitely a culture that grows around food and eating out and drinking. It sort of goes back to what you’re saying about atmosphere, like the people themselves and they way they act can definitely make an atmosphere and I think that’s part of culture. Just like the US has a culture I think restaurants do too.”

J: “Specific restaurants, or restaurants in general?”

B: “I think both. Some definitely have their loyal customers that come back again and again, like I have my local spots where the waiters know me, but also like Austin has a restaurant culture too which is different from when I lived in Ames.”

J: “How so?”

B: “I think the crowd here is just older and we have a lot more nicer restaurants. People go out to eat here like, all the time. I just feel like I didn’t so much when I was back in
Ames. Maybe that’s because we were all poor college students, but still, it just feels different here sometimes. I’m also making a lot more money now so maybe I just didn’t notice it before.”

J: “That’s funny you say that because I was just talking with (a mutual friend) about how much more we go out to eat now that we aren’t in our undergrad. It’s like my only social events.”

B: “Yeah! Like I only go out to eat now, I barely ever go to the bars to have fun. I like it though going out to eat has become kind of an adventure.”

J: “What are your thoughts about seating in a restaurant?”

B: “Oh my god yeah I guess we haven’t really talked about that yet. Seating is a huge deal to me. I don’t like tables that you have to share with other people, like at Fuji or something. People say it makes you meet people, but most of the time when I go out to eat the goal isn’t to meet people. I’d go to a bar if I wanted that. I like sitting in booths most of the time, unless you’re with a fat person then that can get weird. I guess in general I just like feeling like I have my own space. It doesn’t have to be secluded really, just divided enough that I don’t feel like people are staring at me.”

J: “So people seeing you could become an issue?”

B: “I mean, I don’t mind being seen at a restaurant I guess (laughs). It’s fun to be the center of attention sometimes. But, I don’t know. I guess it’s mainly the staff. I don’t want to feel like the staff is watching me the whole time or anything. Or like, kids banging on the back of the booth that gets really annoying too.”

J: “Okay well this has been really good. I don’t want to keep you too long, but thanks again for doing this!”
“(Laughs) For sure, no problem!.... (Conversation continues irrelevant to research).
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW C

19 February 2016
10:32am – 10:47am
Recorded Telephone Interview

(For Confidentiality Purposes Interviewee C)
Age: 23
Gender: Male
Current City: New York City, NY
Background: B. Arch Iowa State University 2014
Current Profession: Visualization Graphics Specialist

J: Joshua Kassing
C: Interviewee C

J: “Alright my man, this is going to be pretty casual and laid back. What I’m going to do is just go ahead and start by reading a little introduction that I’ve been reading to everyone who’s agreed to do this study. It’ll just give you a little background information on things before we get going. Sound good?”

C: “Sounds good, boss.”

J: “Perfect. Before we start, just so I have it on record, do I officially have permission to record this conversation for research purposes?”

C: “You got it, sir.”

J: “You’re the best. Okay so I’ll go ahead and read you this intro then.”

‘The purpose of this research study is to better understand what type of restaurant atmosphere recent college graduates are seeking when selecting a particular venue to dine at. The information you provide will be completely confidential, and feel free to
include any information you consider valuable. The purpose of this study is not strictly
designed based. I’m aware of your significant design background, but don’t feel
restricted to only include design-based feedback. Ultimately, this information will be
used to help compose a sort of perception of ‘culture’, based on our demographic, and
cultures involve many elements beyond design. That being said, design elements are also
crucial to the atmospheric conditions within a restaurant setting, so feel free to include
comments regarding this as well.’

“I know it’s pretty brief but I don’t want to affect your answers too much. Any questions
for me right away?”

C: “I don’t think so.”

J: “Alright sounds good. Well let’s just start with a more general question. We hear the
word ‘restaurant atmosphere’ thrown around a lot, when you hear ‘restaurant atmosphere’
what are the first things that come to mind?”

C: “Oh man. Okay, well I guess the first thing would be like, “looks of a place”. The
colors and the lights, what the walls look like, the floors. Tables and chairs. If there is
like, a piano playing in the background or something. I guess it could be how the workers
talk to. You can tell how fancy a place is a lot of times by how they greet you when you
come in.”

J: “Okay so visual aesthetics, music quality, and staff presence are the first things that
come to mind. Okay good. So if you had to say that one of those three were the most
important to you, personally, which would it be?”

C: “Like out of aesthetics, music, and what was the third one?”

J: “We’ll call it ‘staff presence’.”
C: “Oh yeah. Umm, well I would say the aesthetics honestly. I’m a designer so obviously those things are important to me, but they’re important to my girlfriend too and she’s usually the one I’m going out to eat with.”

J: “So the majority of your time eating out is for dates, then?”

C: “Yeah I would say so.”

J: “Do you think your girlfriend’s opinions have changed what you look for in a restaurant atmosphere or setting.”

C: “Definitely. Definitely. I really couldn’t care less where we go out to eat as long as I’m with her.”

J: “Dawwwwwhh.”

C: “Shut up. But yeah like before I met her I wasn’t used to going to all these fancy restaurants and ordering nice bottles of wine. I was cool with just going to Buffalo Wild Wings.”

J: “Okay so when you say “fancy restaurant’, there are definitely some implications in terms of atmosphere. What would you look for in a ‘fancy restaurant’ atmosphere? If you were going out to eat with your girlfriend let’s say. I haven’t met her so I’m not sure what she considers fancy.”

C: (Laughs) No, no I got you. Well I guess I’d look for a place that looks nice from the outside, has a well designed interior, you know, low lighting, soft music in the background, good fabrics, maybe some nice wall art. Damn this is actually kind of hard to think about. Ummm…. oh like tables that are kind of tucked away so you don’t feel like you’re out in the middle of the room. Somewhere intimate. Intimate is a good word I think. I like being somewhere that feels almost private.”
J: “What about when you aren’t on a date, then what type of place are you looking for in terms of atmosphere?”

C: “I think it’s actually a lot of the same types of things, just maybe less formal. Like I still want good seating, good lighting, good aesthetic appeal, but just not so fancy. Like when I go out to eat with my parents it always pisses me off when they get out their phones to read the menu. That means the lights are too low if people can’t read the freaking menu. I guess I just have to be prepared for whatever type of place I’m going to go eat at.”

J: “Okay so when you say prepared, what do you mean?”

C: “Like just knowing what to expect I guess. My parent’s are really good at that. They always know what they should be wearing and things to go out to a restaurant, while I’m always the one that just shows up looking like a total dickhead.”

J: (Laughs) “I’m sure it doesn’t happen that often. Okay but this is good though. So you would say that preparing yourself to go out to eat can impact your dining experience?”

C: “Yeah, definitely.”

J: “Are there things that really bother you if they aren’t at a restaurant? Things the restaurant could add that would make you more apt to go there, I guess.”

C: “Alcohol. Plain and simple. Not even for dates, but just in general. I don’t usually go out to eat during the work week like I did in college, so now when I’m going out I generally want to kick back and have a drink because it’s the weekend. I’m always bummed when I get to a place and they don’t have a bar or at least serve some alcohol.”
J: “Okay so you said ‘like I did’ in college, this is a good point to ask this question I think. So since you’ve moved to New York City, have your opinions of restaurant atmosphere changed at all?”

C: “You know, I actually think they have. In New York we have such a big range of restaurants and bars, and like, they offer more than just eating or drinking they’re actually an experience.”

J: “Do you think that experience is impacted by the atmosphere?”

C: “Oh yeah. Like a couple weeks ago we drove outside the city to go to a restaurant with my parents, it was built in like a renovated mine or something, and it was underground. Honestly I don’t think we even looked at what kind of food they served, we were just interested in the experience of it all. I guess they got our business just because of the location and setting.”

J: “Hmmm interesting, interesting. Anything else changed?”

C: “I don’t want this to sound cocky at all, but like, I’m definitely making a lot more money now than I did in college and so I can afford to go to nicer places. I know nicer doesn’t always mean awesome, but a lot of times, especially in New York, it does. We have a really harsh crowd to please in the city because everyone knows that if one restaurant doesn’t deliver, there are ten more waiting in line to take its’ place. It’s a pretty cool position to be in for the people who are going out to eat, because we know shitty places won’t last long, but I guess it would suck for the restaurant owners because they really only get one shot at it.”

J: “How do you think technology places a role in the actual perception of restaurant atmospheres? Like online rating sites and such.”
C: “Well I guess I’m not sure how they effect the atmosphere, but they definitely help me decide whether or not I’m going to try a place out, and that, well, that I guess means more or less people in a restaurant and nobody wants and empty restaurant.”

J: “Interesting, why do you say that?”

C: “Because quiet restaurants are awkward. They’re just boring.”

J: “What makes them boring?”

C: “Damn dude you’re drilling me on these!” *(laughs)*

J: *(Laughs)* “It’s all for the research!”

C: “It’s just quiet, I don’t know. Being in a place that sounds dead just isn’t a fun environment to be in.”

J: “Okay, so noise! Noise levels make a big difference for you.”

C: “I guess that would be the case, yeah! *(Laughs)* Because quiet restaurants aren’t so awkward without background music sometimes. Especially if the conversation dies it’s nice to have that playing in the background.”

J: “Yes I would definitely have to agree on that one.”

C: “Hey man, like I said I have a meeting 11:00 so I have to get going, was this what you needed?”

J: “Yes definitely! Thank you for your help I really appreciate it…. *(Conversation ends irrelevant to research)*
### APPENDIX G
### SURVEY RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>A Bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You're in an elevator with the only one other person and they're standing directly over your shoulder.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man asks if you might mind moving seats so him and his wife could sit next to one another.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You sit down on the bus and there's only one other person sitting in the back quietly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone you don't know sits down and joins you at your dinner table.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're stuck on a four hour flight and the person sitting next to you is sleeping and leaning on you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You look up from where you are and a stranger is staring at you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone moves your coat from the back of your chair because it is resting on his or her own chair.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're driving and the person behind you is tailgating you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are multiple open seats in an area in which you are sitting, yet a couple decides to choose the two directly next to you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're waiting in a line and the person behind you tries to engage in conversation.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone moves your personal items that you placed specifically in order to hold your spot.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're at a park and someone sits down on the park bench next to you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone enters the room/group yet does not introduce himself/ herself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're put into a random group at work or in class.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone is talking very loudly next to you while you are trying to have a conversation.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An acquaintance hugs you.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A stranger on the street gives you a high five.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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APPENDIX H

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

Saturday, January 20th, 2018
8:45pm – 9:40 pm
College of Design – Iowa State University
Ames, IA

PI – Principal Investigator (me)
00X – Participant Identification Number

(Casual conversation occurs. Unrelated to research.)

(Survey is distributed and time is allotted for survey completion and submittal.)

PI: “I’d like to thank everybody, again, for coming here and agreeing to do this. I’m really passionate about my research topic and you being here means a lot to me. So, again, thank you! Okay before we start I’d just like to ask anyone if they have any intial questions. We can get those out of the way before we get going. Oh! And also. If you need to get up and go to the bathroom or take a phone call or whatever, please feel free to do so. This is meant to be an informal discussion so feel free to make yourself comfortable and what not. I do ask though that your cell phones are either on silent or vibrate just so they don’t interrupt conversation. Okay any questions right away?”

(No answer.)

(Inaudible)
PI: “Alright perfect. Well if any do come up just feel free to shout them out. I didn’t figure there would be many but I’m just putting that out there. Okay so I’m going to go ahead and get the conversation started. I’m not sure if many of you have participated in a focus group before or not but they are actually pretty simple. Essentially we are just going to have a discussion regarding your experience tonight and information that you find relevant. I’d like to say too that nothing is a stupid answer. Okay that didn’t make that much sense but what I mean is anything you have to contribute to the conversation is worth saying. Honestly, what you don’t say says just as much as what you do say so please feel free to discuss anything that comes to mind. Alright, so I’ll start it off with a broad question, when I says “tabletop cooking” what is the first thing that comes to mind?”

002: “Well obviously like where we were tonight. That’s something I would consider tabletop cooking. I don’t know I guess it depends because are we talking about like restaurants or anything?”

PI: “That’s an interesting point to bring up actually. Doesn’t matter you decide. Whatever comes to mind when I say “tabletop cooking”.

002: “Okay because honestly that word kind of reminds me of my grandma’s house. Like when all the kids would come over and she has like this big island in the middle of here kitchen and we would all sit around it and watch her cook. Or help her cook too, I don’t know, I mean I never helped but that island sort of felt like a table sometimes. Or even when you make sandwiches at the dinner table. I guess that’s not really “cooking” but that’s what first comes to mind. I don’t know maybe that sounds dumb.”

PI: “No not at all! Nothing is dumb (laughs). Okay anyone agree or disagree?”

006: “I would say when you say that word the first thing I think about is restaurants. I don’t know, but like a kitchen in a house is not something I would think when I consider
tabletop. For me it means like the tabletop does the cooking. Like tonight we had a, I don’t know what do you call that? A like, griddle?”

(Group murmers)

(Inaudible)

006: “Anyways yeah like I think about it being a grill, or a griddle, or something that you can actually cook on. You know they have those fire pits now that have the grill grates over them? I guess it’s not a table but I could see that being part of it. Or even fondu…”

001: “That’s exactly what I was going to say. Yeah like tonight definitely we had our food made at a tabletop but I remember my family and us used to do fondu just at the kitchen table at home. That was super fun. But I’d have to agree that I think immediately to restaurants. Honestly, like Asian restaurants are the first thing to come to mind. We have a lot of restaurants like sushi back where I’m from. We just got a new one actually, but yeah I don’t know that I’ve really heard that term before so it’s hard for me to say exactly.”

PI: “Is there anyone here that has heard the term “tabletop cooking before”?

(2 raise their hands)

(Inaudible)

PI: “Okay where have you heard it?”

004: “Honestly I don’t know I just feel like I’ve heard it (laughs) maybe on TV or something? Maybe it just makes sense to me.”
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011: “Yeah I mean I’ve been in the service industry for a long time so it’s pretty easy to hear lingo like that thrown around. I’d agree I don’t know where I’ve heard it but I definitely have.”

PI: “Okay, perfect. That’s interesting. So other opinions on tabletop cooking?”

(Inaudible)

010: “Yeah this might sound bad but the first thing I think about is a hibachi grill. Like a place where you go for a special event and sit around a table and an Asian guy comes out to make food for you. There’s like fire and tricks and stuff, and everybody just watches him. It sounds bad when I say it like that but honestly that’s how I feel. I guess there are other restaurants too where you can cook at your table but I don’t see them as much. Like there is a place in Seattle I think where you can go and cook your own marshmallows? And I’ve been to a place in Chicago where you go and cook your own steak around a grill that’s at your table. It’s pretty cool actually they bring out hot coals and put them right on your table and then you cook your steak. But then sometimes I think, why am I literally paying money to come to a place to cook my own food? Like why didn’t I just do this at home, you know? These kind of restaurants are always pretty expensive too, I guess you’re paying for the experience but that’s why I only go for special occasions.”

PI: “Okay wow yes you just brought up a lot of things I want to talk about tonight (laughs) but we will get there in a bit. Okay so anything else?”

005: “I pretty much agree with everything that’s been said, but there’s something too that I wanna mention which is I feel like I don’t consider “tabletop cooking” to be a thing until there is a group around. Like someone had mentioned the use of a grill, but if I’m grilling by myself I definitely wouldn’t consider it tabletop cooking. I’d just say I was grilling you know? Maybe that’s part of this whole experience thing but I think of it being around a group of people, like a big room.”
PI: “So does that mean the people you’re talking about have to know each other.”

(Group shakes heads with verbal no’s heard.)

002: “No, no definitely not. Well like for tonight for example, we didn’t all know each other but ended up sitting at the same table? That happens a lot especially at places like Fuji. There’s tons of times I don’t know the people I’m sitting with.”

PI: “Okay good I’m actually going to come back to that because that’s more along the lines of a conversation we will have in a bit. But okay back to tabletop cooking. So some of you have mentioned different types of tabletop cooking environments like grills or fondu and things like that, but if I asked you what these places looked like, what would you say?

007: “Well like she said a lot of times its like a group of people that are surrounding a table and someone comes and makes food for you so like there has to be a table, and chairs, and like a place to make food. Usually you see those like grill vent hood things that go above the tables too to catch the steam or whatever. But usually in a big room too…”

(Inaudible)

002: “Yeah it seems like every hibachi place I go to has a big huge room with a ton of tables in them. My family is really into going to them when we go home, like we go for my sister’s birthday every single year. She loves it. But yeah I think it’s really important that people can sit together when they go. Obviously watching the people cooking your food is a huge part of it but now I feel like I’m kind of over that? And I am more interested in the fact that a big group of people can go out to eat at a place like we did tonight and all sit at the same table and see each other. Like since the table wraps around the edges its nice that I can be with all my friends at one table. One of my sorority sisters had like twenty people out to eat there one time because it was the only place that she
could go that everyone can fit. And it’s awkward if you invite people out to dinner and then don’t even end up sitting with them or can’t even see them you know? So yeah I think just the number of people the places sit is huge. But I’ve also seen some that are super like sectioned off and those are nice too. Like you can rent a private room with a grill in it and those make you feel super VIP.”

PI: “Has anyone else had an experience where they weren’t in a large room in a place like this?”

(About 7 hands rise)

(Inaudible)

012: “Yeah we have one in my home town that does that.”

PI: “Any thoughts on it?”

012: “I mean I agree that like it makes you feel more special but a lot of times its for family gatherings or something with people that I don’t necessarily know that well so it can be awkward if the conversation dies and the guy isn’t cooking food then you don’t know what to do. I think that’s why I like being in the big rooms more is like the noise factor.”

PI: “So noise is a factor in how the place feels?”

012: “Oh for sure. Like people always say, “you want to be where everybody else is” or something like that and I think that makes for a fun dinner is when it’s loud and you can hear the banging of the grills and stuff. It definitely makes it less awkward.”

PI: “So lets talk about that for a second then. How does noise play into how this place feels?”
002: “For me personally I don’t really like it. I hate having to scream over people and it’s already loud enough in such a big room. So yeah like I guess if it’s too loud I don’t want to be there. I’m usually drunk when I’m at Fuji though so….”

*(Group laughs)*

*(Inaudible)*

012: “I mean yeah I can see that too but I feel like when you go to a place like Fuji you know that it’s going to be loud, like that’s part of the experience. If you want a quiet meal go to somewhere like a nice Italian restaurant or something. Maybe that’s just me.”

003: “Yeah it’s loud usually but I don’t really mind that as much. I feel like I’m more annoyed when people I don’t know are being super loud. If it’s my group I definitely don’t care at all (laughs) but if someone else is pissing me off it pisses me off.”

PI: “Okay so in terms of what the seating arrangements typically look like, what are your thoughts on that?”

005: “Well it’s usually like a table with chairs all around in and then the griddle thing in the middle. Everybody just kind of its around it.”

PI: “Do most people agree with that statement?”

*(Group shakes head yes.)*

*(Inaudible)*

PI: “Does anybody disagree?”
PI: “Wow so that’s interesting, so people have the same general idea of what these types of places look like?”

009: “Well no like that one guy, sorry I don’t know your name, talked about grilling a steak at a grill at your table and that was probably only for a couple people?”

004: “No I’ve been to places like that too and it totally depends. Like there is one where there is just one grill in the center of the restaurant and you just bring your stuff up to grill it there. Everybody just goes back to your table then when you’re done so I guess that isn’t always the case. But yeah when I FIRST think about it I think about a group setting I suppose.”

PI: “Okay interesting. So lets umm change gears here a little bit, if you were to start up your own tabletop cooking restaurant, what would it look like. And why I guess?”

(Silence.)

PI: “Okay that might have been too broad of a question. If you were to redo the restaurant that we were in tonight, what would you do and why?”

002: “Get rid of the pond.”

(Group laughs.)

002: “But seriously its like really obnoxious.”

003: “Yeah I think it would have to do with the décor definitely. It looks kind of tacky and honestly a lot of times we are going there for birthdays and stuff so its weird to have
such an ugly building when we are trying to like dress up and go out and have fun and stuff. Its all just really red and like so Asian.”

009: “It’s an Asian restaurant!”

003: “I know but like come on. They can do better than that.”

(Inaudible)

PI: “Okay so besides the décor, what other changes would you make?”

006: “Maybe have more of the rooms you can rent out? Like the personal ones because I would definitely do that. Before tonight I didn’t even know you could do that but I could see for graduation or something like renting that out and making it a good time for the whole family to come for.”

(Inaudible)

011: “Yeah I think I would divide that main large room a little more. Like the noise is fine but I feel like everyone is watching each other all the time. Like tonight the table next to us this dude kept staring at me and it just made me feel weird like come on, I’m with my boyfriend obviously. Back off.”

(Group laughs)

PI: “Others?”

004: “I’d agree with the like dividers or whatever. I mean they already have those screens in-between the hibachi room and the normal restaurant so they could definitely just use those again. It seems like there are already so many people at your table that having it open to the whole room is umm annoying.”
008: “I think that’s true too but for me it’s about the seating.”

PI: “Okay so what about the seating.”

008: “I don’t know I feel like the whole thing is just weird. First off you come into the restaurant with someone, or tonight I didn’t I guess but still, and then they just sit you down at a table where you don’t know if you’re going to be put with someone you don’t know or not. And then the group you get put with ends up having like a thousand people in their party so then you have to move. It just makes the whole thing super awkward. When the guy finally comes over to make food I get like actually relieved because it means people aren’t going to be moving around a lot.”

PI: “Okay this is perfect so how did you guys feel about this type of stuff happening tonight? Did it happen like that?”

004: “I mean honestly like yes (laughs) it was actually really awkward. Like, I don’t know these people and then we are expected to come up with like a seating arrangement when you just walk over to a table and there are thirty seats open it’s awkward. I was one of the first people there and it was especially awkward because I didn’t know what the hell was going on. I didn’t know how many people were coming, or even what group I was a part of. Like yeah that is a super huge problem for me, and honestly why I don’t go to places like Fuji unless I’m with a group of people. I feel like it’s so awkward if just a bunch of couples are put together at the same table and are like ‘hey you guys should get along’ you know?

001: “Oh my god I totally agree. That happens literally every time I go. I just pray people don’t have to sit with me.”

PI: “Would you guys say you feel the same way?”
(Lots of nodding heads)

(Inaudible)

PI: “Interesting. So the original issue brought up here was seating, does someone wanna talk about that at all? I noticed some interesting things in the way you all sat tonight and I’m just wondering what your impressions were.”

006: “Well first off the seats are way too close! I was basically rubbing elbows with the dude next to me, sorry this is awkward that I’m bringing this up but it’s true! I didn’t know these people and I feel like I had to be best friends with them just because of the way we were sitting at the table.”

007: “Yeah I noticed that conversations were kind of being cut off around the table because of the way we sat. Like those two girls ended up knowing each other but were then set super far across the table so they couldn’t really talk. I kind of wanted to get up and ask them if they wanted to trade seats honestly.”

002: “Did you guys notice that the chairs felt super low too? Or maybe the table was just high I’m not sure but it was sort of hard to eat. When you’re eating your elbows like flail out to the side but when you’re so close to the person next to you it can be hard to eat, especially when you’re that low. I don’t know I thought it was pretty awkward actually.”

PI: “Did other people feel like that too?”

(Lots of nods.)

012: “The chairs just weren’t that comfortable in general. They were really heavy and hard to move which was awkward when all of us were sitting down or if someone had to go to the bathroom or something.”
005: “Yeah they were really heavy. It was nice that they didn’t’ have arms though because we were so close.”

012: “That’s true.”

005: “I kept hitting my knee on the lip of the table too. I know that’s not the chairs fault but yeah that was kind of weird. More just annoying.”

PI: “Okay I’m going to be super blunt with this next question, who here enjoyed themselves tonight? If you were to like give an overall impression of your evening at Fuji, how many of you said you enjoyed it?”

(All twelve raises hands.)

(Inaudible)

PI: “Really?! That is shocking to me! I thought for sure there would be one of you that was like nah man this was bs. Okay wow interesting. Okay next question that follows that up. Why? Why do you like going to restaurants like Fuji?”

008: “Because it’s fun. It’s different. It’s not like a lot of the other restaurants we get around here.”

002: “Yeah its just nice to change things up a bit. I mean yeah it’s expensive, but sometimes it can be worth it. I feel like I always have a good time, the food is really good, and its fun and different.”

007: “I think part of it probably is that it challenges us, you know? We get used to the normal restaurant where you just sit in a booth, order food, get drunk and go home. Fuji is almost like going to dinner and a movie or something where it’s like you’re doing something while you’re eating.”
PI: “Would you guys say that what was just said is a big part of it? That having something besides eating to do is actually really important?”

007: “Yeah I mean definitely. Meals can be so awkward but if you have something to watch or something to do it makes it that much better. I guess you could compare it to like a sports bar where people go to drink and watch the game. The game is probably more important than the food, honestly. Probably not the beer. But it’s about the atmosphere than makes it fun. Alright you guys are probably going to hate me for this, but I don’t think Fuji’s food is even that good. But I guess I go like pretty frequently so obviously it’s not just the food that matters it’s about more than just that. I have fun when I go there so I want to go back.”

(Inaudible)

005: “To kindof stem from that I think that it’s almost like going to a concert, but we can’t afford to go to concerts all the time so we just go to Fuji! (laughs) Like I can’t get to Des Moines because my car would probably break on the way but I definitely will risk it to go to Fuji because it’s still fun and it’s close. It’s also cheaper than like a concert or an expensive dinner in Des Moines but it’s still fun and something to do.”

009: “So this one time a bunch of my high school friends came to Ames to visit me, back when I was like a freshman, and they wanted to all do dinner and do something fun but I was nervous because we had probably eight or nine people, but Fuji was the perfect place because we all fit and it was something fun for all of us to do. If conversation lulled we kind of just watched the guy at the table do his thing and everything was fine. Since we were all facing each other we were kind of all in one conversation. It ended up that the girls actually had a really good time and that was awesome for because I was kinda freaking out. I thought since they didn’t know each other it would be weird but it was totally fine.”

(Silence for a bit.)

011: “Yeah they definitely hit in on the head. There is an experience part of it that’s awesome, it’s convenient, it’s fun. I feel like recently it's been expected of us that we have fun things to do when you go on dates versus simply being able to go have fun with the person or people I want to spend time with. I guess this applies more to when I’m going on dates, I feel like I always think about going to a grill like this when I’m going somewhere that I was with somebody that I want to impress but I guess there’s other times and maybe that’s not the most appropriate. OK, never mind I didn’t make very much sense. I’ll say that again. I think it’s college students, it’s often expected that we have something to do during the date versus just talking. Unfortunately, I’m kind of an awkward kid and that doesn’t always work out the best for me. I think that’s why don’t go on very many dates anymore. Places like Fuji take some of the pressure off of having to coordinate on a date. I know I'm going to have a good time. I know there's going to be other people at the restaurant. I know that no matter what I won’t be alone in awkward situation. It’s easy for me to get out of something like this even if the date is going poorly. I guess I’m not the type of person who would bring my family to a restaurant like this, it seems more like a date location for me, I don’t know. I’ve had it happen a couple times where our tables filled with random couples at first it seemed kind of awkward, but then eventually as we get to be friends we understand this is actually good thing. We get to know each other and we could understand that all of us are kind of an awkward situation, so we can all be awkward together.”

PI: “Does it being a particularly public place have an impact on you?”

011: “Oh, definitely. A bad date is bad, but going on a bad date when you’re all by yourself is even worse. I think it’s a lot easier to be around other people and have background noise and things instead of being locked into a booth especially if you don’t know how the other person is feeling. I’m definitely more comfortable in public, and it
takes a lot of the pressure off me. I know I keep talking about pressure, it makes me feel really lame. But that’s what it is. I guess I’m just a lame person. Just kidding, but a restaurant like this does help with a lot of things. Every time I go out on a date I try to make sure that I have something planned to do beyond just eating, otherwise it just ends up sitting there staring at our food, and looking each other in the eye very awkwardly.”

PI: “This is super interesting. The idea of a date isn’t something we’ve really talked about yet, but it’s important to discuss too so thank you. Why do you think places like this are popping up all around the country?”

006: “I think a big part of it has to do with the fact that we can’t just eat food anymore, there has to be more to the experience. It goes along with everything that we do. A cell phone isn’t just a cell phone anymore, it has to be filled with all these apps and all these gadgets in order for us be satisfied. Restaurants work the same way. The more experiences a restaurant offers you the more willing I am to spend money on it. I hate that it comes down to money, but a lot of times it does. As a college student I only have so much money and honestly if I can get double for my buck, I’m going to take it. A lot of my friends ask me, hey want to go out for a movie? Most of the time I have to say no because a movie is too expensive. I would what rather just wait for it to come out on Netflix. If they asked me to go to Fuji, or a restaurant that offers me something more than just food, I’m probably going to take it. When I say that out loud, it actually sounds pretty stupid. But that’s the way I think I guess.”

008: “Actually, no. I totally agree with that statement. The more bang for your buck as a college student is exactly the point. I do that all the time. There has even been a time when I went to McDonald’s before I went to restaurant just make sure I got full. It’s embarrassing and I would never tell my parents, but it’s true. Somewhere like Fuji is expensive, yes, but because it’s more than just food and I know I’m going to have a good time with my friends, it’s definitely worth it.”

PI: “Would you guys consider Fuji to be expensive?”
(Some shake head yes, some no.)

(Inaudible)

PI: “Okay, There seems to be a discrepancy between who thinks Fuji is expensive and who doesn’t? What makes a restaurant expensive?”

001: “I guess it depends on the restaurant. There’s definitely restaurant that I’m willing to spend more money on because the food is really good, or because it’s just going to be really fun. We’re also living in Ames Iowa, and that makes for an entirely different conversation. When I go to Chicago I probably double my dinner budget, In Ames, I probably won’t want to spend over $15 otherwise I consider it a waste of my money. I would say a lot of my friends have more expensive taste than I do, they’re eating at restaurants all the time that I could never afford. That makes it really hard for me because I want enjoy dinner with them but I can’t afford it.”

010: “Yeah I would say that I definitely spend way too much money on food. Every week I probably spend about $100 eating out because my parents give me money for food, but I know that I need to change this because as soon as I get a job in the real world there’s nowhere to be able to afford to spend that much. I’m basically living off my parents right now.”

006: “For me it totally depends on the time of year too. Like around Christmas, I ended up spending way more money than I normally would. When I go home for the holidays and I want to see my friends, of course I go to a place like Fuji and spend a bunch of money. But if it’s the beginning of the semester and I just got done buying textbooks, I’m definitely going to save my money and not go to an expensive place like that.”
002: “Have you guys seen on the show Parks and Recreation when they have a day called treat yourself? That’s how I feel when I go out to eat an expensive restaurant. They say that it’s worth it because the day is called treat yourself, I think of it like, the same way.”

PI: “You guys are cracking me up. And yes, I love Parks and Rec. Okay so back to something we talked about a while back, how do you think it impacted your meal since you guys didn’t really know each other?”

003: “I think it was actually pretty typical for a restaurant like Fuji. Most of the time when I go there, I don't know a lot of the people that I'm sitting with. Sometimes I going to groups but usually not. Last time I went we actually ended up sitting by ourselves, which was really, really awkward. I actually wanted to just leave because it was so awkward. I don’t mind having other people at the table. I guess it’s something that I expect when I go to Fuji too. This might be too much information, but if I’m on my period, the last thing I want to be doing is hanging out with a bunch of people I don’t know. Obviously, I’m not going to go to Fuji if that’s the case. If I want to play meal by myself, I'll stay at home. You don’t go to Fuji if you don’t want to be around other people.”

005: “Yeah, I don't know who would ever go to Fuji and think they can get a table by themselves. Especially the hibachi grills. At the front of the restaurant there's just a few tables and those fill up really fast around dinner. Most of people that I know who want to go to Fuji don’t go to have a sit down meal, but because they want to watch the show that happens at the hibachi grill.”

007: “Yeah, unless it’s your first time at a place like that, I don’t think anyone would expect a quiet evening by themselves. Part of the charm about this whole place is that you meet new people. You get to meet your friends. This can also be kind of awkward, like last time I went I ran into my chemistry teacher. It wasn’t horrible, it made him seem like a real person. But still, it was kind of awkward for me.”
PI: “I want to bring up something that is very important to recognize, and that we should discuss here to. Fuji is a Japanese restaurant, meaning it’s Japanese influenced in terms of food, décor, etc. Do you feel you’re experiencing an authentic Japanese dinner when you eat there”

(Group laughs)

001: “I think we can all agree that the experience at Fuji is anything but authentic. That’s actually just a joke. Nothing about it seems authentic to me, it seems like a totally Americanized version of something that maybe someone in Asia would do. Actually, not even that. It seems like a spectacle. It seems really overworked, and I think that’s why Americans probably like it. It seems like American restaurant are starting to be over-the-top. There is that new restaurant that the servers are paid to be mean to you? That’s just ridiculous to me. I would never pay to have someone being mean to me. But she goes to show how Americans need more than just food supply to them they need to be entertained constantly. Even our political ads are turning into entertainment now. You can’t make it through commercial without seeing a political ad recently, and honestly they’re pretty entertaining. Especially from the Republican side. All the candidates are just bickering back and forth and it’s funny to watch because actually retaining. I feel like just in general as Americans we need to be entertained all the time it’s why people call us the babies of the world. Were like little toddlers running around looking to bump into food. That was a meme my saw the other day. (laughs).”

007: “Yeah I just seems tacky. Right from when you walk in the door you greeted by a pond, like who has a pond in the restaurant? It just seems over-the-top. It seems like whoever built this place was trying to convince us that this is what Japanese people wanted us to see, or thought that we would like.”

009: “Even the outfits of the chefs were wearing we’re kind of ridiculous. It looked like some kind of combination of the chef and a karate kid. Like I don’t know anything about Japanese culture, but I definitely know that’s not what their chefs wear. It’s almost a little
bit like a theme park. You walk into this over-the-top place, and I have an over-the-top experience, paying over the top prices, for an over-the-top experience. Damn, that’s really crazy to think about.”

003: “That’s really funny that you did say that cause I was just thinking the same thing. It’s like going to Disney World.”

(Inaudible)

007: “It’s interesting, because the chef is so close to you, it’s almost like they’re your tour guide. They’re kind of guiding you through the evening, and the kind of chef you have can totally make or break your experience.”

PI: “So what if you were all allowed to sit next to each other, but the chef prepared the food somewhere else? Would it be the same?”

008: “No! It’s fun to be close to the fire in the smells and stuff. The chef will even flip food in your mouth sometimes, it’s definitely something you have to be close for. Plus seen the steam rise, and all the stuff flying everywhere, it’s a really fun for the kids too. That’s why my brother and sister like going so much.”

004: “Yeah, I would have to agree. You definitely former relationship with the chef that you’re given. It’s kind of like the same luck that you have when you get sat with somebody that you get along with, it can either make the experience awesome or really suck. I’ve had it before right get that with somebody that I absolutely hate and it really ruined my dinner, I guess it’s just luck of the draw. That’s the thing about it, you never know how your experience will pan out. I think that’s what keeps it interesting.”

009: “It’s almost like you’re going to a new restaurant every time you go. There’s so many variables to make it a fun night, that if the stars don’t align, it can really throw off your expectations. But I think that’s why this kind of restaurant is successful. Just the
way it’s laid out can impact whether you like it or not. Like, just the arrangement of the tables. If you next to a bunch of sorority girls, sorry if any of you are in sororities, they can be so annoying that it kind of just ruins the dinner. Or you could get next to a hilarious group of drunk parents, and it could be the best night ever. I know we talked about this before, but I think that’s why it’s important that everything is in one room. You’re exposed to a bunch of different people, having different types of experiences, but that’s what makes it fun.”

PI: “Okay awesome. By the way, I’m not going to interject my opinions into this because I don’t want to persuade you, but I think it’s really hilarious the points that you’re bringing up and how they relate to the research I’m trying to do. This is awesome. Okay, so Fuji is clearly an Asian inspired restaurant, could you see a tabletop restaurant working with other different types of restaurants, like barbecue maybe? What if they smoke the meat right in front of your eyes would that work? Would you go?”

(Group laughs)

006: “Hell yes I would! If a restaurant came into my town I was crazy enough to smoke me in front of my face, You better be there. Just because it’s something to do. It’s like if a new movie came out. I would definitely go just because its a new kind of restaurant. Honestly anybody who cooks in front of me I’d probably go to. We don’t have enough of those kind of restaurants I don’t think, it’s always just Asian restaurants. Maybe I should quit college, and just start a bunch of my own restaurants where they cook right in front of you. Obviously people love that shit.”

009: “Well, I was just thinking about at Mexican restaurants when they bring out fajitas? You know it’s like, sizzling, and loud, and everybody in the restaurant watches the server bring it out, it’s kind of the same thing. There’s something about watching the waiter walk past you with the big plate of food that gets you excited. Have you guys ever heard of the sushi bars we’re the sushi goes around on the conveyor belt and you just take what
you want? Those are so awesome to me. We need one of those names. Oh my gosh, it’d be like a Fuji but better! A lot of airports have them now.”

PI: “Okay, now I’m going to just throw a bunch of random questions that you. We’ve gone over most of the things that I was looking to discuss, and you guys have added even more than I could’ve asked for. So again, thank you. Okay so random stuff, what do you want to see in the future of tabletop cooking restaurants like Fuji?”

(Long pause)

002: “I feel like at this point, we just need to see something that’s different than Asian food. Obviously this kind of restaurant is working. People always want to go there in the food isn’t even that good, so there must be something more to it. I think other restaurants could even have sections of the restaurant that are just made for tabletop cooking, just so you had your choice kind of like Fuji does. I’m not going to lie, Japanese steak houses are good, but I’m ready for something different to. That probably will never happen, because I’m sure these kinds of restaurants have flooded the market, but it would be interesting to see more like fondue restaurants or something, I don’t know. Maybe something we don’t even have yet. They’re really fun, we just need more of them.”

005: “Yeah, I would agree with that. It’s hard to say, because besides Asian restaurants, I haven’t really been too many tabletop cooking restaurants. I would totally go if there was one close, does anybody know if there is one? It’s just a really good time.”

001: “Not that I know of, but who knows there could be one in Des Moines. You guys should definitely let me know if you find one.”

(Inaudible)
007: “For me, I just want to see a restaurant like this that is less tacky. It’s like everything is working, and I like going there, but it’s just so tacky I can’t take it seriously. I would never go there on a date, like some of you have said. I would be too embarrassed. But if there was one that was nicer, maybe like a more formal place, then I would probably go more often.”

012: “That’s pretty much what I would say too. I don’t usually care about stuff like that, but this place is just too much. It even smells weird in there. The experience is cool, it’s just a little too much to handle sometimes.”

PI: “Okay another random one, what is your reaction if you as a young person, were sat at a table of a bunch of adults? How does that make you feel?”

003: “I wouldn’t care. Actually a lot of times I would rather speak with adults and people my age, they’re less annoying. Also they buy the expensive stuff at the table which is fun to watch.”

005: “Yeah I was going to say, it’s a lot more fun usually with them. It’s actually the most fun when it’s a mix of young people and older people. If you get next to a really old couple that doesn’t talk at all, that can be super awkward, But that usually doesn’t happen. Like we were talking about before, it seems like people know what they’re getting into when you decide to come to dinner.”

008: “I wouldn’t even think twice about it. Seems totally normal. I’m not going to lie, I get excited when we have a whole table to ourselves, but like somebody said before that can also be really awkward. It’s more fun when the experience is shared with a bunch of people.”

PI: “In terms of your experience tonight, and other experiences you’ve had with tabletop restaurants, how would you say personal space works into that? Do you ever feel as though your personal space is being invaded because you’re so close? Or do you feel as
though that sort of breach of personal space is necessary to gain the experience that we’ve been talking about so far?”

006: “For me, it goes back to what we’re talking about before with expectations. If you going to a restaurant like this thinking that you can have your own table, and someone else joins you, without you knowing, that’s probably going to piss you off. I mean, I would be pissed off. But for most of us, we’ve grown up with these kinds of restaurants and understand that sharing is part of the experience.”

012: “I would say that my personal space has definitely been questioned at restaurants like this. Especially if a group that sits down with you ends up being a larger than your group. Sometimes I feel like they take over the table then.”

006: “Oh yeah that’s a good point.”

007: “Yeah, or in the person next you keeps moving around so much that they’re bumping into you when you were trying to eat, that gets really annoying. I’m like, dude back off.”

002: “What really makes me mad, is when you come and sit down, And then another group shows up and asks if you can move because their group needs to fit in the seats as well. Like, I understand that you need to fit at the table, but we’ve been sitting here for 20 minutes already and we don’t want to move anymore. We already have drinks, we’ve already put our coats down, just let us sit here.”

005: “It can actually be really cutthroat trying to save spots at a table like that, like I remember I was waiting for a bunch of my friends for one of my other friends birthday parties and some of the girls wanted to make sure that they were sitting next to each other, the guys didn’t really care that much, it was like actually a big deal. I guess that’s not really my personal space, because I don’t own the restaurant, but I feel like when I sit down, since we’re sharing a table, I’ve committed to that spot and I want to stay there.
Sometimes people get up and move around during the meal, like we kind of did that tonight, and that’s fine, but it’s more frustrating when people feel like they take priority over you like where they should sit the table. I got some of us moved around the meal tonight, but that’s because we found out that we have mutual friends or actually knew each other, which isn’t a big deal, and it also helps that we’re the same age too. Like if somebody my parents age would’ve come up and asked me to move I probably would have just because they’re older and I’m scared like that but if it was someone my age I probably would’ve told them no because I feel comfortable saying no to them.”

001: “I feel like it’s what happens when you’re on an airplane, when people are preserved certain seats then you ask them to move up. Most of the time people are like, no absolutely not. We worked hard to get the seeds. Which I understand to some extent, but at the same time sometimes you need to be willing to work with other people. I don’t know I guess for me it’s just if I’ve committed to a spot I want to stay in that spot, and if somebody wants to make me move I’ll probably do it, I just won’t be too happy about it. I just feel more comfortable when I’m in a spot I’ve committed to. I’m saying this because you asked the question I had time to think about it, but I would bet that if this happen in real life I would just smile and go along with it because I’m too awkward to confront it. It’s just a comfort thing I guess.”

008: “Here’s the deal, I don’t think many of us think that it’s that big of a deal to move seats are change spots or whatever, it’s just more annoying. But I think that goes for anything, just like a does in the classroom. When you’ve been sitting the same spot all semester and then one day some bitch shows up and she’s sitting in your seat? Nuh uh. Nope. Get out move. I do normal restaurant you don’t really have to worry about this, because the tables yours until you pay the bill. A table like at Fuji you never know who is going to be added to your table or how many more people are coming. I think we probably make sure we let everyone know where are spot is just make sure someone doesn’t come in and screw everything up. I think somebody said it before, but how people are sitting at the table is really important to how successful your night is, so you want to make sure that things just make sense.”
IP: “Perfect. Alright we’ll we’ve already kind of gone over the amount of time that I initially had said we be doing for the focus group, so I just want to say thank you to everyone who participated today. This is been fantastic and honestly you guys have given me so much to work with in terms of my research that I can’t say thank you enough. Like I told you several times, everything will remain completely anonymous. From this point on all the information that you have given will be only associated with a identification number which is in no way linked or associated with your name or any pictures of you either. So no worries about that. Again, I’m sorry I can’t tell you exactly what the research is surrounding on but I think actually you probably have a good idea based on the questions that we’ve asked and the discussion that has been had…..” *(conversation continues irrelevant to research)*
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Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Joshua Kassing successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 09/03/2014.

Certification Number: 1538533.
APPENDIX K
IRB APPROVAL FORM

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 12/16/2015

To: Joshua Edward Kassing
2724 Stange Rd Apt 6
Ames, IA 50010

CC: Dr. Lori Brunner Stone
158 Design

Dr. Fred Matven
283 Design

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: An Application of Proxemics to Restaurant Interiors: Tabletop-Cooking and Its Implications for the Millenial User

IRB ID: 15-718

Study Review Date: 12/15/2015

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.

- You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
APPENDIX L

FOCUS GROUP CONTENT ANALYSIS