

A Table for One or Many: Social Connection and Psychological Restoration in Amman, Jordan, Third Places

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Abstract: This study aims to understand cafes as third places in Amman, Jordan, and their psychological effect on patrons. Through its examination of cafe patron comfort, relaxation, and social connection, and their perception of the environment around them, this research connects psychology, sociology, and environmental psychology. This work studies the cultural values of community and belonging as a mechanism for amplifying the effect of cafes on well-being. By doing so, this research addresses a regional and contextual gap in the literature that is formed by the limited works studying cafes and third places in eastern contexts. As well as the scarce studies exploring the role of culture in enhancing the psychological benefits of third places. This study's foundation is built on theoretical works supporting the understanding of the importance of third places, such as Third Place Theory, Attention Restoration Theory, and the Stress Buffering Hypothesis. A mixed-methods approach was used in data collection to ensure a holistic understanding of the topic and achieve the study's objective. A survey was used to measure participants' emotional experiences and perceptions of cafe environments, addressing both the physical and social factors. Structured cafe observations were conducted to document an objective understanding of each cafe's social dynamics and physical environment. Combining both data points allowed for deducing patterns between patrons' perceptions, self-reported well-being, and the physical attributes of cafes. The findings suggest that cafes function as third places in Jordan. Overall, this work highlights the importance of informal social environments as third places in shaping the everyday psychological experiences of their patrons. Moreover, it addresses a gap in understanding how culture may affect the psychological benefits of well-established psychological theories and understandings. The findings also provide insight for urban planners by contributing to the understanding of how physical features of communal spaces affect their users.

Keywords: Third places, Attention restoration theory, Stress reduction theory, Weak ties

1. Background and Context

Urban life is often thought to be defined by formal institutions and design plans. However, the informal aspects of urban life are the most important. Places like cafes, malls, and parks that individuals actively seek out in their free time. The environments where they form memories, connections, and social activity. The most prominent of these environments in Jordan is cafes. Cafes have emerged as prominent social settings across many different societies. While they may be thought of as simply food and beverage consumption settings, similar to restaurants, cafes play a vital role in Jordanian society that is distinct from the beverages consumed within cafe settings. Cafes function as third places where individuals study, work, socialize, or spend time in the presence of others, fulfilling their need for social connection and reducing loneliness. Accordingly, cafes have developed a role beyond that of a commercial space. The theoretical framework explaining why cafe environments influence the psychological well-being of their users is thorough and is based primarily on four perspectives. Ray Oldenburg's Third Place Theory (1999) describes the informal spaces that exist outside of the home and the workplace. Oldenburg explained that third places provide opportunities for social interaction and community connection, and therefore are beneficial to their users. The Attention Restoration Theory (1995) explained that certain environments reduce cognitive fatigue and restore mental focus. Similarly, the Stress Buffering Hypothesis (1985) proposed that social environments reduce the psychological effects of stress. Additionally, Granovetter's theory of weak ties (1973) highlights the importance of casual social interactions that may occur in public gathering spaces. Combined, these works highlight the importance of spaces similar to cafes in promoting well-being and positive psychological experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Social Ties, Social Capital, and Community*

Understanding the connection between mental well-being and third places begins with exploring the existing scholarly work. Prior research surrounding this topic spans across many disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and environmental studies. A prominent focus within this literature is on social connection, informal interactions, and community structure. Within sociology, Granovetter's theory of weak ties stands out as foundational work (Granovetter, 1973). In his theory, Granovetter explained that weak ties (acquaintances) provide a vital social purpose distinct from that of strong ties (close friends or family).

Similarly, Putnam's work defined social capital as referring to networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, R. D., 2000). His work reframes social capital into a measurable phenomenon, which can be empirically tested. The work focused on what Putnam calls the "collapse of the American community". Putnam discussed that the erosion of social connections weakens democracy, social well-being, and

civic life. While earlier research documented the decline of traditional community structures, more recent works have examined how social connections are formed in contemporary conditions. In Hampton & Wellman's work (2003), the idea of networked individualism within a modern society is extensively explored (Hampton & Wellman, 2003). Networked individualism refers to a pattern of social organization characterized by flexible and personalized ties distributed across multiple social contexts rather than fixed membership in one local community. Hampton & Wellman's work complements Putnam's, exploring how society adapted to his observation of "bowling alone" by creating new patterns in a modern, internet-facing society (Putnam, 2000). Hampton & Wellman emphasized the change in social patterns that happened after the phenomenon of declining civic engagement that Putnam witnessed. In the frame of Hampton & Wellman's work on the restructured social landscape, community is no longer sustained through fixed membership in a place-bound group; it is maintained through repeated, informal interaction within the everyday context across multiple groups.

2.2 Social Support and Stress Buffering

Building on sociological accounts of social connection, psychological research explores the mechanisms through which social connection affects well-being, most notably in the work of Sheldon Cohen and Thomas A. Wills (Cohen & Wills, 1984). In Cohen and Wills' work, two concepts were established: First, the Main Effect Model, which covers the importance of social support for all people regardless of mental state. Cohen and Wills' first model explained that people who feel socially connected maintain better physical and mental health and have a better overall mood.

Further, it is important to note that Cohen and Wills provided specific definitions for social connection and support within their work. They identified four forms of social support:

1. Emotional support, the feeling of being cared for, valued, or understood
2. Informational support, receiving guidance or support.
3. Instrumental support, practical help.
4. Appraisal support, which refers to feedback that helps one interpret a situation.

However, Cohen and Wills stressed that perceived support matters more than actual support. And by extension, they emphasized that social connection is a psychological state, not a behavior. Their logic allows for the benefits of social connection and support to extend to individuals who receive no direct social support and only perceived support. The second model presented by Cohen & Wills is The Buffering hypothesis. The Buffering hypothesis is built on the Main Effect Model (MEM) in that it describes how the benefits of social support intensify

when stress is present. True to its name, the buffering hypothesis explained that social connection and support act as a buffer in high-stress situations. The hypothesis delineated that when stress is present, be it from work overload, family pressure, or emotional distress, perceived social support acts as a cushion that dilutes the effects of stress. While the stress remains present, its psychological impact is greatly softened. Cohen & Wills' work is especially important because it established that social support can be perceived rather than explicitly received, while still retaining measurable psychological benefits. Extending the theories of social support into real-world environments is the empirical work of Rosenbaum et al. (2007), which explored how commercial spaces may present as an application for the psychological theories surrounding social support (Rosenbaum et al, 2007). Their article "A Cup of Coffee with a Dash of Love: An Investigation of Commercial Social Support," examines how cafe environments can provide social support despite the absence of deep or meaningful interaction. Key findings of the study showed recurring patterns of emotional comfort. Participants often described cafes as safe, familiar, comforting, and emotionally regulating places. Participants openly stated that they would visit cafes when they feel stressed, lonely, emotionally overwhelmed, or in need of routine. A second key finding supported the previous belief that social support did not necessarily require intimate interaction. Many participants said that although they did not actively socialize, they felt recognized, valued, and less alone. They reported that the main reasons for these feelings included being in places that felt socially alive and being greeted by staff. Finally, the research established a third understanding that regularity was more important than intimacy. Social connection builds up through repeated visits, consistent environments, and predictable interaction rather than emotional disclosure or intimacy. This finding is consistent with the previously discussed theory of Weak Ties, by emphasizing that a place could remain relaxing and maintain all the benefits of social connection even in the absence of close ties. Rosenbaum et al.'s work serves as the empirical validation of the psychological theories surrounding social support, providing empirical evidence studying how these theories are valid not only in real-world situations but equally in commercial spaces that mainly offer weak ties. This connects many psychological and sociological theories to a tested, empirical work

2.3 Physical Environment and Psychological Restoration

To fully understand how cafes affect the emotional state of those within them, the body of literature examining how the physical environment can independently affect emotional well-being and influence psychological restoration and stress reduction is examined. Notably, Roger S. Ulrich's Stress Reduction Theory is a foundational pillar in understanding how physical environments affect stress and well-being (Ulrich, 1983). The Stress Reduction Theory mainly argued that humans have an effective and automatic response to physical environments. Further, Ulrich explained that certain environmental factors trigger rapid stress reduction, a response that is entirely psychological and emotional rather than cognitive. Ulrich characterizes stress reduction as lowered physiological arousal, improved mood, reduced

anxiety or tension, and faster emotional recovery after stress. He noted that the stress reduction referred to in his work is not one related to long-term therapy, identity, or big psychological change. Within his work, he emphasized which environments trigger rapid stress reduction; he described these environments as non-threatening, often natural, and visually coherent. He stated that these environments should feel safe, predictable, and aesthetically pleasing. Ulrich stressed that the stress reduction is subconscious and automatic, noting that one does not have to actively think an environment is relaxing to trigger the rapid stress reduction. Only a few years later, Ulrich worked on an experiment that provided the empirical proof to his theory through a controlled lab experiment whose findings supported Ulrich's original hypothesis (Ulrich et al., 1991). Ulrich's work is undoubtedly foundational in environmental psychology as it widens the understanding of what provokes stress depletion while still connecting to previous theories claiming that solitude and psychological rest are not mutually exclusive. Another framework that is foundational to the understanding of how environments affect mental well-being is Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (1995). Kaplan explained that natural and soft-fascinating environments promote restoring cognitive fatigue by engaging involuntary attention. Kaplan explained that the environment must meet certain requirements in order to allow for restoration. These requirements include: being away, compatibility, and fascination. Oftentimes, cafes fulfill all of these requirements.

2.4 Research Objective & Question

This study aims to explore cafes as third places in Jordan. Specifically, it aims to understand and investigate how spending time in cafés influences Jordanians' self-reported stress, mood, and social connection, and how the culturally rooted values of belonging and community amplify cafés' role in psychological wellbeing. This goal is guided by the following question: How does spending time in cafés influence Jordanians self-reported stress, mood, and social connection, and how might the culturally rooted values of belonging and community amplify cafés' role in psychological wellbeing?

2.5 Hypothesis

More frequent cafe visits are expected to correlate with positive immediate psychological changes. Such as lowered perceived stress, improved mood, and an increased sense of social connection. Additionally, cafes that provide adequate privacy, a suitable noise level, and elements of nature are predicted to elicit higher self-reported comfort among patrons. Further, it is assumed that patrons who report feeling a connection to the broader Jordanian community while at a cafe will report a greater positive psychological impact of a cafe visit than those who do not, suggesting that culturally rooted values of community may reinforce the psychological benefits of café experiences. Finally, it is expected that cafes will meet the psychological benefits of third places outlined in Oldenburg's theory of third places.

2.6 Gaps Recognized

While the scholarly body on third places and well-being is large and well-versed, it still leaves a large conceptual gap that this work addresses. Specifically, the conceptual gap is broadly divided into two parts:

1. Geographically, most social and environmental psychology research surrounding this topic is done in Western contexts. Research that tests these theories and concepts in an Eastern setting is highly limited.
2. Cultural framing: Within the research presented, cultural demands, expectations, and values are often placed in the background due to their insignificance in Western daily life. However, in contexts similar to that of Jordan's, culture is at the forefront of daily life and greatly contributes to the needs of the Jordanian people, such as the need for community and belonging.

3. Methodology

3.1 Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, multiple steps were taken in order to ensure the body of research was wholly ethical.

1. The researcher underwent OHRP research training and received certification as a researcher.
2. The researcher referred to the psychological experts during the process of methodology drafting and creation to ensure that all actions and practices adhered to the ethical standards involving humans in research.
3. All research practices, survey questions, interview scripts, and behaviors surrounding the body of work were overseen and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher's school.

During the data collection, ethical considerations were heavily involved. Consent was collected before the survey, both verbally when suggesting the survey be completed, and at the beginning of the survey, before any questions were presented or answered.

Participants were not asked to describe any personal experiences or provide any identifying data. Participants were also thoroughly briefed about the purpose of the study, as well as how their data would be used and handled. By completing the survey, participants provided informed consent for their anonymous responses to be used for research purposes.

3.2 Methodology Overview

This paper employs a cross-sectional, mixed-methods approach. This was done by combining field data, structured observations of the cafes, and the survey results, with expert interviews. This methodology was used to best encapsulate the nuanced topic at hand and ensure both scientific and theoretical alignment with the study's goals. Both parts of the field data worked together in order to document both the psychological experiences of cafe patrons and the environment in which these experiences occurred.

Two expert interviews were conducted, both with experts in psychology.

- a. Expert one: A BPS-chartered Clinical Psychologist who specializes in emotional regulation, community mental health, and psychological flexibility.

“In my clinical work, I specialize in psychological flexibility, emotional regulation, and evidence-based interventions that support individual and community mental health. Alongside therapy, a significant part of my academic focus involves understanding how environments and social structures influence psychological well-being. This includes population-level mental health promotion, mental health literacy, and community-based support. That creates accessible pathways to wellbeing outside formal clinical care. I'm particularly interested in how everyday public spaces can function as an informal mental health regulator.” (Expert 1, personal communication, 2026)

This expert's questions mainly focused on validating the theoretical framework and understanding the psychological function of communal spaces.

- b. Expert two: A general practitioner with clinical specialization in Cognitive Analytical Therapy (CAT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT).

This interview analyzed cafe experience in terms of emotional regulation as well as the specific mental health challenges of young adults and how culture affects them.

Both interviews were tailored to fit the expertise of each interviewee. Interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Once the expert interviews were completed and the scientific basis of the study was established, the collection of the on-ground data began. The field data collection process was split into two sections: observation and questionnaire. This was done to achieve a holistic

understanding of cafes as third places in Jordan, and to ensure that environmental factors within specific cafes could be tied to the psychological effects they provided.

a. Cafe Selection and Typological Diversity:

The research conducted field work in five cafes, each representative of a different range of cafes, to ensure all differences among cafes are accounted for. The five cafes selected were as follows:

I. Al-Ameed Community Cafe: A large-scale community chain that provides both indoor and outdoor seating and is embedded in the neighbourhood it was named after, and was designed around communal gathering. Al-Ameed Community Cafe was the largest one observed, as well as the one with the most facilities. It includes two tennis courts, a playground, and a small walking trail that follows the natural layout of the cafe.

II. Fanak Specialty Coffee: Fanak was the smallest of the cafes observed. It is a small neighbourhood cafe with 2 consistent staff members, regular clientele, and overall has the most intimate environment.

III. Bon Appétit: A destination cafe in a high-traffic area with a diverse clientele. Bon Appétit is the only food-focused cafe observed.

IV. Melange Cafe: The only work /productivity-focused cafe of the five, with a professional atmosphere and the most functionally serious cafe.

V. Manara Cafe: Located in an arts and culture center, Manara is the second-largest cafe observed. Notably, Manara is the most cosmopolitan of the five cafes, with both local and foreign visitors.

b. The Observation:

Upon arrival at the cafe, the researcher completed an observation sheet assessing the physical environment and occupancy of the cafe. The observation sheet, found in Appendix B, sought to describe the physical factors that patrons would be questioned about during the questionnaire to aid with the analysis of the data and guide the linking process between physical environment and patrons' answers, both regarding self-reported psychological well-being and rating of privacy, seating arrangement, and noise level. In the observation sheet, noise level was measured through a dB meter app for a total of one minute. The mean noise level was then documented.

c. The Questionnaire:

The questionnaire consisted of 4 major themes, which are further discussed in the survey findings section. The questionnaire employed multiple question formats, including the Likert scale. The question formation process considered the psychological nature of the study by utilizing psychological question methods, such as the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). PANAS questions were merged with the Likert scale format. Questions were presented thematically to simplify the analysis process. The survey was created using the Google Forms software and was distributed in person via QR code. In order to ensure privacy and complete anonymity, no identifying data was collected, and participants were **not** asked to sign in using their emails. Participants were also asked to include the name of the cafe they were in to allow for cross-comparison with observation sheets.

4. Findings

4.1 Survey Findings

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, excluding demographics, divided into three major themes.

Figure 1

THEME	ASSESSING	QUESTION NUMBER
Cafe Usage Habits	- Usage Habits	1-3
Psychological Wellbeing and Emotional State	- Changes in mood during/after cafe visit - Positive/Negative emotions invoked by the visit	4-10 assessing mood and stress, 19-20 assessing overall psychological wellbeing
Environmental and Physical Features of the Café	- Privacy - Comfort - Noise level	16-18
Belonging and Social Connection	- Feelings of belonging/connection to the broader community during stay	11-14
Demographics	- Age - Gender - Current cafe	21-23

4.2 Cafe Usage Habits

Of the participants of the survey, most rated themselves as frequent cafe visitors. 8.1% said they always visit cafés, 36.5% said usually, 11.5% said sometimes, and only 3.8% said rarely. Placing 84.6% as frequent café-goers. This confirms the assumption that cafes are frequently used by Jordanians and are a part of everyday life. As for the reason for visitation, 53.8% of participants placed socialization as the reason for their visit, followed closely by working or studying at 44.2%. Notably, only 1.9% pointed to relaxation/personal escape as the primary reason for their visit. Therefore, cafes in Jordan's primary function is socializing, followed closely by productivity.

Supporting this understanding are the percentages shown below.

Figure 2

Companionship	Percentage
Visiting alone	23.1%
With a small group	42.3%
With one other person	34.6%

4.3 Demographics

The survey sample was representative of the people present in the cafes, meaning that it is skewed in both age and gender. In regard to age, 36.5% of respondents are aged 18 to 24, and 34.6% are between the ages of 25 and 34. With gender, 61.5% were female, leaving only 38.5% male participants. However, the male skew may be slightly more exaggerated than the actual percentage because men regularly refused to participate in the study.

Overall Findings by survey item:

A. Mean, Positive, Neutral, and Negative Percentages of survey items

Figure 3

Survey item	Mean	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %
Feel comfortable	3.88	73.1	19.2	7.7
Feel better after the visit	3.87	65.4	28.8	5.8
Less anxious during visit	3.83	73.1	15.4	11.5
Mood was uplifting	3.77	65.4	26.9	7.7
Feel relaxed	3.75	65.4	26.9	7.7
Primary venue for meeting friends/family	3.67	63.5	17.3	19.2
Less overwhelmed during visit	3.62	65.4	9.6	25.0
Noise level suited to the activity	3.62	53.8	36.5	9.6
Sense of belonging	3.48	48.1	36.5	15.4
Use the café as a break/escape	3.44	51.9	25.0	23.1
Seating was comfortable	3.42	50.0	32.7	17.3
Staff welcoming / positive environment	3.38	51.9	19.2	28.8
Lower stress after the visit	3.19	34.6	50.0	15.4
Connected to broader Jordanian community	3.19	44.2	21.2	34.6
The physical arrangement provided privacy	3.13	36.5	42.3	21.2

B. The Psychological Cluster:

A clear pattern emerges when studying the four highest-scoring items:

Figure 4

Item	Mean	Positive Answer %
Comfort	3.88 /5	73.1%
Feeling better after visit	3.87 /5	65.4%
Mood uplifting	3.77 /5	65.4%
Relaxation	3.75 /5	65.4%

* The “Positive Answer %” refers to the percentage of respondents selecting 4 or 5 on the Likert scale. Thus, some items may share the same percentage, but due to the distribution of 4s and 5s, the mean can differ slightly.

Cafes produce immediate emotional ease consistently and reliably among all participants. Beyond improving positive emotional experiences, cafes also decrease negative psychological states:

- 73.1% of respondents reported low anxiety while in a cafe
- 65.4% reported low feelings of overwhelm

This double-sided pattern of improved positive affect alongside decreased negative experience suggests that cafes produce a real shift in psychological state.

However, it is important to note that stress reduction (Q5) was the lowest-scoring psychological item, with a mean of 3.19/5 and a positive response percentage of only 34.6%. This sits as a clear contrast to the positive cluster.

Due to this, a meaningful distinction appears between comfort and ease, which were reliably produced, and active stress relief, which did not occur. Therefore, it is understood that cafes in Amman soften emotional tone rather than regulate stress.

Supporting this is Q19, the item questioning well-being immediately after a visit. 65.4% of respondents stated their psychological well-being was highest directly after a visit. This reinforces the understanding that, despite little effect in stress relief, cafes still produce positive emotional outcomes.

C. Social Connection and Belonging

In terms of social purpose, the strongest finding is that 63.4% of participants cited cafes as their primary venue for meeting friends. Another notable finding is that belonging (M=3.8 /5) scored higher than the community connection (M=3.19) item, which poses an interesting conflict.

Through these findings, it is understood that cafes help patrons feel connected to the immediate social environment rather than the broader Jordanian community.

Interestingly, the belonging item posed as the strongest prediction of patrons feeling better after their visit ($r=0.45$). Further, respondents who scored higher on the belonging item (4-5) had a higher mean of stress reduction than those who scored lower.

Figure 5

Score on Belonging Item	Stress Reduction Mean
≥ 4	3.20 /5
≤ 3	3.00 /5

When belonging is felt, it meaningfully amplifies all psychological benefits of the cafe environment.

D. General Patterns:

1. Cafés are most strongly associated with comfort, reduced anxiety, emotional ease, and uplifted mood rather than with major stress reduction. Since only 34.6% of answers to the corresponding item were positive, with 50.0% being neutral, it is logical to conclude that cafes provide mild restoration and emotional ease rather than dramatic stress relief.
2. The social function of cafés is stronger than the “escape” function. 63.5% reported cafés as a primary venue for meeting friends and family, whereas only 1.9% reported using café visits as a break or escape. Combined with the fact that most respondents came for socializing or studying, this supports the idea that cafés in Jordan operate more as everyday social and functional third places than as private retreat spaces and that their psychological benefit does not stem from their use as an escape but from the social interactions within them.
3. The privacy item was rated lower across all 5 cafes. Signaling that patrons did not view these spaces as providing adequate privacy. However, overall comfort remained high even in the cafes with the least perceived privacy. Further consolidating the understanding that the psychological benefits of cafes stem entirely from their function as social support spaces.

5. Discussion.

5.1 Attention Restoration and Stress Buffering

The findings of this research suggest that the role cafes in Amman play in psychological well-being is more rooted in comfort than stress relief. Their function is more aligned with the Attention Restoration Theory (1995) than the Stress Buffering Hypothesis (1985). The survey item regarding comfort reached a mean score of 3.75 on the five-point Likert scale, noticeably lower than the stress item, which has a mean score of 3.19. While Cohen and Wills (1985) predicted that third places induce active stress reduction, the findings only loosely support that. However, it is important to note that the low stress reduction rate may not entirely be due to an inapplicability of Cohen and Wills’s work, but rather of low stress levels upon entering the cafe environment, thereby leaving little space for stress reduction. By contrast, the findings align well with Kaplan’s (1995) Attention Restoration Theory (ART), which predicted gentle, involuntary restoration and relaxation, which perfectly matches the survey items’ results. These findings allow for the deduction that cafes in Amman do not serve as a space for stress buffering, but almost entirely derive their psychological benefits from attention restoration. Significantly, when comparing the observation sheets and patron responses, a disconnect between the physical characteristics associated with attention restoration and the psychological restoration occurring. The most ART-compatible cafe, Melange, scored notably lower in items related to restoration when compared to other cafes. This gap can be attributed to the social function of the cafe. Melange’s patrons primarily used it as a productivity space. When compared to other cafes that may lack some ART-compliant features, but were used for socialization, Melange falls short on restoration. Therefore, it is logical to deduce that ART’s mechanism relies more heavily on emotional disengagement than on the physical attributes of the environment. While patrons in Melange were physically away, they had brought their responsibilities with them. This prevented

any restoration from occurring.

5.2 Physical Environment and Social Factors

When comparing patron responses across survey items, the relationship between each item becomes apparent and reveals patterns. To best understand how certain survey items interact and affect one another, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated.

The strongest predictors for patrons feeling better directly after their visit were social factors. Primarily, comfort ($r=0.61$), followed by mood uplift ($r=0.47$) and belonging ($r=0.45$). Notably, the physical environment items acted as very weak predictors: privacy ($r=0.33$), and noise suitability ($r=-0.04$). This reinforces the understanding that the cafes function primarily as social environments and that their restorative attributes are connected to their social purpose rather than their physical characteristics. However, this observation does not deny the interaction of physical environment and social factors within these cafes. Interestingly, in the case of Al-Ameed cafe, the low staff warmth was compensated for by a strong physical environment. Similarly, Fanak's objectively high noise level (72 dB) had little effect on patrons due to the high level of social warmth in the cafe. Although no set of factors can independently predict psychological outcome, when physical and social factors conflict, the social factors tend to dominate. This understanding directly mirrors that of Cohen and Wills (1985) of the importance of perceived support.

5.3 Cultural Hypothesis

Due to the belonging and community items receiving lower scores than expected, the cultural hypothesis could only be partially supported by the research findings. The belonging item had a mean of 3.48 on the five-point Likert scale, and the community belonging item received a mean of 3.19. However, the belonging item was correlated with patrons feeling better directly after their visit ($r=0.45$). So while cafes may not directly produce a sense of belonging among Jordanians in Amman, when belonging is felt, it directly affects the emotional experience of patrons and amplifies well-being outcomes. The hypothesised cultural amplification is conditional, not absolute. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that culture as a whole is very nuanced, and its effects on individuals cannot be measured solely by direct questioning, as a big part of culture is subconscious.

5.4 Cafes as Third Places

The findings broadly support Third Place Theory's (1999) characteristics; cafes in Amman do function as neutral ground used for non-obligatory time that facilitates social connection. 65% of participants reported feeling better directly after their time in a cafe, furthering the understanding that cafes function as third places in Amman and that they support psychological well-being as such.

However, Oldenburg described cafes as communal and inter-group, meaning that strangers

from different groups interact within them. Observation data showed that inter-group interaction was consistently absent from all 5 cafes, with their rating consistently falling between 0-2 /5. Patrons visited cafes to be near other people rather than to interact with them. The psychological benefit of cafes lies in the sense of social presence rather than conversation on display. The distinction between presence without interaction and the inter-group setting that Oldenburg theorized is precisely what Cohen and Wills (1985) discussed in their perceived support model. The mechanism through which Third Places provide their psychological benefit lies in perceived connection rather than actual connection.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Limitations of the Study

Some external limitations were faced during the data collection. Most notably, the demographics were skewed despite the best efforts of the researcher. Cafes in Amman are dominated by young patrons, which made it difficult to find older people to participate in the study. Moreover, men generally refused to partake in the survey, which led to the data being more skewed towards women. Ultimately, the demographics lean heavily towards young women due to the circumstances. However, the data remains proportional to the real cafe environment, with any imbalance lying in the hands of the environment. Another limitation of this study stems from the nature of its methodology. Due to its non-experimental nature, this study cannot determine causation. While correlation is prevalent in the findings. An experimental work is required to infer causation. Further, the small sample size poses a challenge to generalizability. Finally, the straightforward nature of the study does not fully encapsulate the nuance of culture and its effect on individuals, as culture is largely subconscious.

6.2 Future Recommendations

This study advances the empirical work surrounding third places in Eastern societies, their function as everyday social environments, as well as their relationship to wellbeing. Using the combination of survey responses and direct cafe observations, the findings highlight how environmental qualities and patterns of use shape individuals' experiences in cafes with regard to cultural values of belonging and community. The results of this study suggest that cafes can support aspects of psychological well-being by providing accessible third-place environments that facilitate social interaction, support, and comfortable engagement with the surrounding community.

Future research can expand on this work by examining a larger sample of cafes and participants, as well as investigating why certain demographics may be more prominent in cafe environments. Further, recreating the study across different cities and cultural contexts could allow for a more holistic understanding. Future research could also explore different methods of data collection. Adopting an experimental nature would allow for causation to be inferred, thereby better grasping the effect of individual attributes of a cafe. Similarly, a longitudinal approach would allow

for the evaluation of how repeated exposure may affect well-being over time.

6.3 Concluding Statement

Cafes in Amman, Jordan, serve a consistent and meaningful role for their patrons. They reliably provide comfort and ease for their users and suppress negative effects. Though they do not provide active stress relief, as in Western contexts, they ease negative experiences through reliable comfort, ease, and social warmth. Cultural values of belonging and community conditionally amplify these benefits. When belonging is felt, the effects of the cafe increase; however, the cafe environment does not guarantee feelings of belonging. Cafes in Amman, Jordan, are spaces in which restoration, work, and socialization interact in a way that Western frameworks did not predict.

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Appendices.

Appendix A: Survey Questions.

I. Cafe Usage Habits (Frequency)

These questions establish the respondent's baseline behavior related to cafe visits. II.

How often do you visit a cafe?

- A. (1) Never
- B. (2) 1-3 times per month
- C. (3) about once or twice a week
- D. (4) multiple times a week (8-15 times per month)
- E. (5) daily or almost daily

III. What is your primary reason for visiting a cafe in Jordan? (Select one) A. (1)

Socializing with friends/family

- B. (2) Working or studying
- C. (3) Relaxation or "alone time."
- D. (4) Enjoying coffee/shisha/food/ambiance

IV. Which type of cafe setting do you visit most often? (Select one)

- A. (1) Traditional/local 'Qahwa' or shisha cafe
- B. (2) Modern, international chain (e.g., Starbucks)
- C. (3) Local, chain modern cafe/specialty coffee shop (e.g., Coffee Bean, Qahwa BLK) D.
- (4) No preference / Varies greatly

V. When you visit a cafe, are you typically?

- A. (1) Alone
- B. (2) With one other person
- C. (3) With a small group (3-4 people)
- D. (4) With a large group (5+ people)

II. Stress and Mood

These questions use a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) to assess the impact on stress and mood.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
5. I often visit a cafe specifically to reduce my stress level.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I use cafe visits as a "break" or escape from daily worries/responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The environment in this cafe helps me feel less anxious than when I am home.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel better after spending time at this cafe.	1	2	3	4	5

III. Social Connection in Cafes

These questions explore the role of cafes in fostering and maintaining social ties, using the same 5-point Likert scale.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
9. Cafes in Jordan are my primary venue for meeting up with friends and family.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Spending time in cafes helps me feel less alone than I would otherwise be.	1	2	3	4	5
11. When I visit a cafe alone, I still feel a connection to the community around me.	1	2	3	4	5

IV. Cultural Value of Belonging & Community

These questions aim to capture the perceived influence of the Jordanian cultural emphasis on belonging and community on the cafe experience, using the 5-point Likert scale.

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
12. The Jordanian value of hospitality (Karam) is clearly reflected in the atmosphere of local cafes.	1	2	3	4	5

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
13. Spending time in this café makes me feel like I belong to a community.					
14. I feel as though cafés bring the community together.					
15. I feel like I have something in common with the people in the café.					

V. Overall Psychological Well-being

These questions synthesize the reported psychological effects and link the experience to overall well-being.

4. Compared to the rest of the week, I would rate my overall psychological well-being as highest immediately after a cafe visit.

- (a) Yes, definitely
- (b) Yes, somewhat

- (c) No difference
- (d) No, somewhat lower
- (e) No, significantly lower

5. How would you describe the main function of cafes in terms of Jordanian social life? (Select one)

- a. (a) Primarily for consumption (food/drinks)
- b. (b) Primarily for personal work/study
- c. (c) Primarily for private social gatherings
- d. (d) Primarily as a general community gathering space
- e. (e) A balance of all the above

VI. Physical Environment & Atmosphere

Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The lighting, music, and overall atmosphere in this café make me feel relaxed and comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5
The design, furniture, and cleanliness of the café influence how much I enjoy spending time here.	1	2	3	4	5
The physical layout (seating arrangement, openness, or privacy) allows me to feel at ease and focus on myself or others.	1	2	3	4	5

VII. Demographics

9. What is your age group?

- (a) Under 18
- (b) 18–24
- (c) 25–34
- (d) 35–44
- (e) 45 and above

10. What is your gender?

- (a) Female
- (b) Male

11. What area of Amman do you live in?

- (a) West Amman
- (b) East Amman
- (c) Outside of Amman

Open-ended (free response)

24. Which café are you currently in while filling out this survey? (Please write the name of the café.)

Appendix B: Observation Sheet Template.

I. Cafe and Time Context

Variable	Coding / Measurement	Answer
Observation Date	[YYYY-MM-DD]	
Observation Time	[HH:MM] to [HH:MM] (Record start and end time)	
Cafe Name	[Name of Cafe]	
Cafe Type	(1) Local/Independent (2) International Chain (3) Local Modern Shop	
Primary Activity	Dominant patron behavior (e.g., Socializing, Studying, Solo Leisure)	
Seating Capacity	Total number of seats available	
Occupancy Rate	(Estimated occupied seats / Total seats) $\times 100$: []%	

II. Environmental Features (Testing ART)

Use 5-Point Rating Scale: 1 = Low/Poor/Unsuitable | 5 = High/Excellent/Highly Suitable

Variable	Description / Coding Notes	Rating (1-5)
Noise Level (Objective)	Use a simple dB meter app (1=Too loud for conversation, 5=Perfectly suitable for quiet work)	
Privacy (Spatial Configuration)	Extent of visual and auditory barriers (e.g., booths, partitions, distance between tables). (1=Open hall, 5=Highly segmented, many private areas)	
Lighting Quality	Suitability of lighting for reading/working and relaxation. (1=Too dim/harsh, 5=Ideal mix of ambient/task lighting)	
Restorative View	Presence of nature/art/interesting features outside or inside (a focus for Kaplan's ART). (1=Blank wall, 5=Pleasant view or stimulating visual interest)	
Cleanliness / Maintenance	Overall tidiness, organization, and maintenance of furniture/space.	

III. Patron Demographics and Interaction Patterns

Variable	Description / Coding Notes	Count / Rating
Count: Solo Customers	Tally of individuals sitting alone (studying, working, or leisure).	Count: []
Count: Dyads/Pairs	Tally of groups consisting of exactly two people.	Count: []
Count: Small Groups	Tally of groups consisting of 3 to 4 people.	Count: []
Count: Large Groups	Tally of groups consisting of 5 or more people.	Count: []
Observed Social Engagement	Frequency of active, verbal interaction between patrons. (1=Silent, working/phone use only, 5=Constant, energetic conversation across most groups)	Rating (1-5)
Observed Emotional Intensity	Conversations with visible signs of deep, potentially emotional/serious conversation (e.g., intense focus, physical comforting, hand gestures).	Count: []
Observed Inter-Group Interaction	Frequency of patrons interacting across <i>different</i> groups (e.g., greeting, brief chat with neighbor). (1=No interaction, 5=Frequent interaction/communal feel)	Rating (1-5)
Tech Usage Rate	Estimated percentage of patrons actively using a laptop or phone for work/study.	Est. %: []

IV. Social & Staff Features (Third Place / H3)

Variable	Description / Coding Notes	Rating (1-5)
Staff Presence	How visible and accessible are staff members for assistance? (1=Rarely seen, 5=Highly visible and available)	
Perceived Staff Friendliness	Based on visible interactions (e.g., smiles, proactive check-ins). (1=Cold/Transactional, 5=Warm/Welcoming/Engaging)	
Seating Adaptability	Ease with which seating can be rearranged for different group sizes. (1=Fixed/Rigid, 5=Highly flexible tables/chairs)	
Mix of Activity	Diversity of patron activity observed (e.g., solo study, group meeting, family, leisure). (1=Uniform activity, 5=Diverse mix of activities)	

V. Qualitative Notes

Focus Area	Notes	Answer
Third Place Qualities	Note any unique features that promote belonging or community (e.g., communal tables, notice boards, local art).	
Acoustics/Music	Note the type of music/sound environment (e.g., loud Arabic pop, soft jazz, silent).	
Other Notable Factors		

Appendix C: Expert Interview Questions.

Interview I: Clinical Psychologist (Expert 1)

Interviewee: Clinical Psychologist specializing in mental health promotion and community well-being (BPS Chartered, Clinical/Neuroscience focus).

Interview Goal: To validate the theoretical framework of stress mitigation (ART/Social Support) and the psychological function of community spaces.

I. Introduction and Background

- VI. Please briefly describe your clinical practice and your academic focus regarding mental well-being at a community or population level.
- VII. How does your understanding of Clinical Psychology inform your view on the importance of informal, accessible public spaces (like local cafes) for the overall mental health of a city's residents?

II. Theoretical Grounding: Restoration and Stress Mitigation

- Given your background in Neuroscience and Clinical Psychology, can you discuss the neural or cognitive mechanisms behind the Attention Restoration Theory (ART)? How does an environment like a cafe allow the brain to recover from directed attention fatigue?
- My survey measures a comparative reduction in stress after a cafe visit. From a clinical perspective, what elements of the cafe experience (e.g., sensory environment, lack of obligation) might trigger a rapid, measurable stress-mitigating response?
- How might the sensory environment (e.g., ambient sound, subtle aromas) of a Third Place be used as a tool for mood regulation or as a form of behavioral activation in individuals experiencing mild depression or anxiety?

III. Social Connection and Community Well-being

- In a culture with strong family ties like Jordan, how do "weak ties" formed in a Third Place¹ contribute to an individual's psychological resilience and sense of belonging?
- How can the concept of community well-being (a core part of your expertise) be promoted simply through the existence and use of supportive, non-commercial gathering spaces?
- How does a person's perception of a space's authenticity or cultural identity influence their sense of psychological comfort and belonging within that environment?

¹ The phrase "Third Place" refers to a psychological theory established by Ray Oldenburg which states need 3 kinds of spaces; Home, Work, and Third Places. Third Places strengthen social connectedness as well as lessen isolation.

Interview II: General Practitioner (Expert 2)

Interviewee: Medical Doctor and Clinical Psychologist specializing in CBT/DBT/CAT, focusing on anxiety, depression, and emotional regulation.

Interview Goal: To frame the cafe experience within practical emotional regulation strategies and the specific mental health challenges of young adults.

I. Introduction and Background

- c. Given your background in Medicine and Clinical Psychology (CBT/DBT), how do you view the relationship between an individual's immediate physical environment and their ability to manage anxiety or regulate intense emotions?
- d. In your work with children and adolescents, how frequently do environmental or social isolation factors contribute to issues such as anxiety, depression, or emotional dysregulation?

II. Applied Clinical Frameworks: Emotional Regulation

- 12. The cafe environment is often used as a form of "escape." Drawing on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) principles, would you classify a cafe visit as a form of distress tolerance or self-soothing? How could a relaxed public space support these emotional regulation skills?
- 13. My research looks at social connection. How does visiting a cafe with others (social support) act as a specific, evidence-based intervention against feelings of isolation or loneliness, particularly for young adults?
- 14. In the context of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a cafe could be considered a safe, neutral ground for exposure. How might the act of simply being present and engaging in routine social behavior in this space help mitigate social anxiety symptoms?

III. Third Place and Cultural Context

- Do you observe any cultural factors specific to Jordanian society that might make the cafe a more necessary or intense source of social support and autonomy compared to Western cultures? (Consider the pressure on young adults or specific social expectations.)
- The cafe environment facilitates brief, low-stakes social exchanges (e.g., with baristas or nodding to a regular customer). What role do these "weak ties" play in preventing the cycle of social withdrawal often seen in anxiety and depression?
- From a clinical perspective, what is the perceived friendliness and welcome from staff that makes space feel safe enough to relax and engage in restorative behavior, truly?

Appendix D: Expert Interview Transcripts.

a. Interview 1, Clinical Psychologist.

Researcher: First, at the beginning of the recording, I'd like to confirm that I have your permission to record

Interviewee: 100%.

Researcher: Okay, perfect. So let's start our interview number one. Can you please briefly state your clinical practice and academic focus regarding mental well-being at a community or population level?

Interviewee: Of course. So in my clinical work, I specialize in psychological flexibility, emotional regulation, and evidence-based interventions that support individual and community mental health. Alongside therapy, a significant part of my academic focus involves understanding how environments and social structures influence psychological well-being.

This includes population-level mental health promotion, mental health literacy, and community-based support. That creates accessible pathways to wellbeing outside formal clinical care. I'm particularly interested in how everyday public spaces can function as an informal mental health regulator.

Researcher: How does your understanding of clinical psychology inform your view on the importance of informal accessible public spaces or the overall mental health of a city's residents?

Interviewee: From a clinical perspective, mental health is not shaped solely by internal psychological processes, but also by the environment people inhabit. Informal and accessible spaces, such as local cafes, function as low-barrier regulators: places where people naturally decompress, experience autonomy, and engage in low-effort, social interactions.

These elements help buffer stress, reduce loneliness, and support mood regulation. Clinically, we see that many people benefit from structured engagement, like behavioral activation. In environments that are predictable, safe, and socially, even when they are not seeking formal mental health support. So cafes often fulfill that role within a community.

Researcher: Thank you. Given your background in neuroscience and clinical psychology, can you discuss the neural or cognitive mechanisms behind the attention restoration theory? How does an environment like a cafe allow the brain to recover from directed attention? Fatigue.

Interviewee: So the ART Attention Restorative Restoration Theory aligns with what we know in cognitive neuroscience.

Prolonged directed attention exhausts the prefrontal cortex, which leads to cognitive fatigue, irritability, and decreased emotional regulation. Restrictive environments allow the brain to shift into. Effortless attention, which reduces the prefrontal cortex load. And this enables the default mode network, DMN, associated with reflection, creativity, and emotional processing, to re-engage the combination of reduced cognitive demand and gentle sensory engagement, facilitating psychological recovery cafes.

Especially when designed with natural light, predictable noise levels, and comfort, as aesthetics naturally support these cognitive transitions.

Researcher: My survey measures a comparative reduction in stress after a cafe visit. From a clinical perspective, what elements of a cafe experience might trigger a rapid, measurable stress-mitigating response?

Interviewee: So several components contribute to a quick stress-mitigating response, to begin with, predictability. So familiar routine, sitting in the same spot. Ordering a known drink increases psychological safety. Number two, decentralized attention, ambient noise, and background activity, draw attention outward, reducing internal rumination.

A third aspect is autonomy, the lack of obligation. So there's no required interaction, no pressure, and this creates a sense of control, which is a core variable in stress reduction. As well as sensory grounding. So with the warm lighting, moderate noise, human presence, and comforting aromas not really activate the parasympathetic nervous system and helps regulate the stress response. So even a brief visit can create a shift in psychological or physiological arousal, which is why many people report immediate relief or clarity after spending time in such places.

Researcher: How might the sensory environment of a third space be? Be used as a tool for mood regulation or as a form of behavioral activation in individuals experiencing mild depression or anxiety.

Interviewee: This is a really interesting question because the sensory qualities of a third place often serve as a subtle tool, therapeutically. To begin with, ambient. Sounds can provide gentle sensory input that prevents overthinking. Aromas, such as coffee or baked goods, often function as grounding cues that evoke comfort or familiarity.

Warm colors, natural textures, or greenery help the brain shift towards relaxation and emotional openness. And behavioral activation for individuals with mild depression or anxiety. Simply leaving the house and entering a stimulating, socially rich environment interrupts withdrawal patterns. The cafe becomes a structured positive activity that increases mood-enhancing experiences.

So these elements contribute to immediate emotional shifts and long-term coping patterns. So this

really just focuses on mostly on mindfulness interventions. And how integrating your senses in the present moment can disrupt such negative patterns.

Researcher: Okay, thank you. In a culture with strong family ties like Jordan, how do weak ties formed in a third, in a third place contribute to an individual's psychological resilience and sense of belonging in collect, in collectivistic culture like Jordan? Strong family [00:05:00] ties coexist with an increasing need for new, neutral, pressure-free, social spaces.

Interviewee: So weak ties, such as brief interactions with familiars, strangers, baristas, or regulars, provide a sense of being noticed without being evaluated. social predictability, micro moments of affirmation and relief from the expectation of family or workloads. These interactions enhance psychological resilience by increasing perceived social support and reducing, known.

So weak ties, especially, are powerful in social situations where people may hesitate to discuss mental health; openly, light social contact often becomes a subtle emotional buffer.

Researcher: Okay. How can the concept of community wellbeing, a core part of your expertise, be promoted simply through the existence and use of supportive non-commercial gathering spaces?

Interviewee: Community wellbeing is strengthened when people have access to environments that feel safe and welcoming. Allow them to regulate emotions without cost or stigma. support informal social interactions and provide a sense of identity and continuity. So such places foster a sense of coherence.

The belief that life is manageable, meaningful, and connected, even when cafes are commercial, their function as third places can provide community-level mental health benefits by reducing isolation, enhancing belonging, and creating shared cultural rhyme.

Researcher: Perfect. How does a person's perception of spaces on authenticity or cultural identity influence their sense of belonging, comfort, or emotional connection within it?

Interviewee: So a person's emotional response to a space is shaped by how, inherently, it aligns with their cultural expectations, values, and identity. In Jordan, spaces that reflect local hospitality, warmth, and communal energy tend to feel more psychologically safe and familiar.

When a cafe incorporates cultural cues, welcoming staff, familiar rituals, and local design elements, individuals experience a deeper sense of belonging. This also amplifies the restorative and social benefit of the space, making it more than just a venue for consumption, but a meaningful extension of community life and increasing their sense of belonging.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you so much.

Interviewee: Thank you for choosing me to be a part of this interview.

b. Interview 2, Medical Doctor

Interviewee: Hi.

Researcher: Hi, Dr. Before we start, I'd like to confirm that I have your consent to record this.

Interviewee: Mhm

Researcher: Perfect.

Interviewee: You, do you have my consent, a more full verbal consent? Yes, you do.

Researcher: Perfect. Let's start with the questions.

Interviewee: Okay. Go ahead.

Researcher: So, given your background in medicine and clinical psychology, specifically CBT and DBT, yeah. How do you view the relationship between an individual's immediate physical environment and their ability to manage anxiety or regulate intense emotions?

Interviewee: I think there's definitely a correlation between both. So if we have an environment that's very calm and relaxing, then a person would be able to reflect that external environment within them. And if it's a bit more chaotic on the outside, then they can also, it'll also be reflected on the inside. Yeah. And then I also think, in terms of, let's say specifically with anxiety, having that calm, familiar environment on the outside can really help reduce that anxiety, 'cause a lot of the time that anxiety comes from the unknown. And unpredictable situations. So if you already know what this is, what the environment is going to look like, and you can already predict how it'll be, then that also reduces the unrest, maybe that you could feel from anxiety. In terms of regulating intense emotions. I think it does help having an environment where you might see familiar faces, you might see people in similar situations. So being in that environment can make you feel like, "Oh, okay. I'm not alone." So it does help with those emotions, too. And you can form those relationships within that environment, which can also help with sharing those emotions and trying to, and realizing you're not really alone in all of that.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you. In your work with children and adolescents, how frequently do you do environmental or social isolation factors contribute to issues such as anxiety, depression, or emotional dysregulation?

Interviewee: I think it's very frequent. We don't realize, so what we believe over here is that who you are, you're made up of your genetics and your memories. And your memories are formed through those through the external environment. Yeah. So basically, it's your genetics

and your external environment. And a lot of the time we have people who... yes, there can be a genetic pre disposition for anxiety or depression, ADHD, or whatever it is.

And sometimes they might not have that genetic predisposition. But it's the environment that really does influence how they end up feeling. Because if you're unable to have a good support system, then you're unable to express yourself in certain ways, and then you feel a lot more alone, and feeling alone makes you have a lower mood.

Lower mood comes, makes you basically want to, we're going down that path of depression. Yeah. We're going down that path of anxiety because we feel like we're alone. We start to think a lot. So it's definitely there is a big correlation, especially I think in our own society where there's that there's, that there's a big social pressure on kids these days that they need to be engaged in the world. especially with how social media is like 20 years ago, we weren't as connected as we are now. And so there, I don't think there was as much pressure maybe 20, 30 years ago, the way that there is now. Because everyone is trying to form connections with each other. So if that connection doesn't happen, then. Then someone goes, " Okay, but what if it's me. Rather than what if I haven't found my community? It's more of, okay, what if the problem is with me? Yeah. So it does cause those issues.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay. The environment, the cafe environment, is often used as a form of escape. Okay. Drawing on dialectical behavior and behavior therapy principles. Would you classify a cafe visit as a form of distress, tolerance, or self-soothing? How could a relaxed public [00:04:00] space support these emotional regulation skills?

Interviewee: I think it could be more of self-soothing. because when you're in that area, yeah. Distress tolerance, maybe not. It could, but I think it's more self-soothing because you're able to activate your senses. You're able to feel a bit more grounded. Yeah.

You're able to have that. I'm not alone. Sensation. Yeah. And I think it really does support that. It really does make a person feel like, I'm not physically alone. Yes. And it gives that sense of community, which makes you feel a lot calmer. I think it. We, I think it would be more self-soothing in a sense.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you. My research looks at social connection. How does visiting a cafe with others, so social support, act as a specific evidence-based intervention against feelings of isolation or loneliness, particularly for young adults?

Interviewee: So, evidence-based intervention, this and visiting these cafes would definitely be behavioral activation. One of the things that we focus on in CBT and cognitive behavioral therapy is behavioral activation. Okay. And in behavioral activation, we try to find something that a person can do to make sure that they're getting out of their comfort zones in a way. In a progressive manner. And also making sure that they're doing things they actually do want to do. So there are a lot of people who do want to go out to these places. They do want to have those experiences with others. They don't wanna feel as lonely. And the opposite of being lonely or isolated is being in a crowd, being with people, right? And having those interactions. So we try and, like, within a session, we can then try and figure out, okay, so if we don't wanna be lonely, we don't wanna be isolated, then what are the things that we can do that are something that's not too stressful. Yes. So it's not okay, go and talk to someone, right? The cafe is a very calm

environment. What do we think about having that slow exposure, let's say, into the social environment by being in those areas and [00:06:00] having something to do, let's say, studying, working, whatever it is, it keeps you busy, but then it also keeps you, it makes sure that you're actually doing something.

Because behavioral activation, at some point, is mainly about. When you're doing therapy, it's about you wanna change certain things in your life. And we can change certain thoughts, we can change certain perceptions that we have. But also, we can help with changing physical things. Things that a person can say, I physically change these things. Rather than staying home alone, I've decided, I started telling myself, okay, I need...

Researcher: Sotangible?

Interviewee: Thank you. That's the exact word I was looking for. So a tangible change, yeah. That they can evaluate too. My thoughts have changed, and I cannot evaluate that easily, but then they can actually tangibly evaluate that, okay, I started going out more.

Yeah. They feel better about themselves. They can see the differences. So, definitely behavioral activation does help with that.

Researcher: Okay. In the context of cognitive behavior and therapy. A cafe would be considered a safe, neutral ground for exposure. How might the act of simply being present and engaging in routine social behaviors in the space help mitigate social anxiety symptoms?

Interviewee: So, we're gonna go into graded exposure at this point. So when we're talking about social anxiety, it's that nervousness that you feel when you're, when you need to speak to someone or when you want to interact with any human. You freak out, simply put. When you go to a cafe, your interactions are quite limited. You, the first thing that you're doing is you're talking to the person at the cash, just ordering, and then you go, and you sit down. And it can help because it's those limited, those small, minor interactions.

That's the graded exposure, that's putting yourself. Taking yourself outside of your comfort zone. And then sitting down in that environment can also help because when it comes to feeling that anxiety, that social anxiety can be felt by a lot of people. It can be felt by people with anxiety.

It can be felt by people with ADHD. It can be felt by people with a lot of things. [00:08:00] It doesn't have to necessarily be a diagnosis, let's say. And having that environment where you can see other people doing the same thing that you're doing, it's something called body doubling. So, body doubling basically, it gives that sense of calm.

That someone is also doing something that you are doing at the same time. And that's like sitting down, having a coffee, whatever it is. So not only is the cafe like a good, let's say, place where you're able to have that graded exposure of an interaction. But then also you're staying in an environment that can cause anxiety, but seeing other people doing the same in that body doubling sense reduces that anxiety for you. And the more and more you have, those experiences, those interactions, the more comfortable you become. And the fewer those symptoms, or the less difficult those symptoms become. Or the less difficult they are to handle, let's say. And then suddenly it becomes more of a familiar environment.

You can then up the dose, let's say of interactions, and you can speak to other people, and it helps with that social anxiety feeling.

Researcher: So, going back to what you just said about the small interactions in cafes, yeah. Would you say that aligns with the concept of weak-tie social support?

Interviewee: I wanna say yes. Yes, absolutely. Because it's those little interactions that make a person not completely isolated. It's those little interactions where... It's that good morning. How are you? It's that little small talk that you have with those people, like with the baristas with those people. It's those little interactions that make us, because people are still having those interactions. You make sure that these ties are still happening, this connection is still happening. We make sure that we're not allowing someone to completely self-isolate. Because when you're put in a scenario that you have to go into a cafe, you're gonna need to order something. Yeah. And I know some cafes now have, you don't need to order at all. Like [00:10:00] from a human, you can just scan a photo or whatever. But there is still that "Oh, thank you." Still, those words that are being exchanged and that is a form of connection in the end of the day that we want to keep having. And so it does play a role, and it is an important role because it is simple graded exposure. That keeps the communication and connection between people that we want. So, in short, the interactions in the cafe would align with the concept of sweet ties. Yeah. Okay. Absolutely. Thank you. Moving on to the next question. Do you observe any cultural factors specific to Jordanian society that might make the cafe a more necessary or intense social source of social support and autonomy compared to Western cultures?

Feel free to consider the pressure on young adults or specific social expectations. I think yes to a certain extent because. A cafe is a very controlled environment. Yes. Yeah. It's not something that any Jordanian parent would be scared to send their kid there. Yeah. And I think in Western cultures it's a bit different, because kids in school ages, let's say teenagers they not necessarily hang out at cafes. They'll be hanging out in different places, maybe. If our own cultures were to look at it, they'd be like, okay, maybe that's dangerous. Yeah. That's not, that doesn't align with our own values.

And they're just not environments that we would expect teenagers to be. Maybe older people. Yeah. But even then, it doesn't really align with our own values. And also, if we're looking at it in terms of space in Jordan, it's not like we have that much space. People, maybe teenagers outside, can hang out in parks.

It's not like we have. Or maybe we do, it's just easier, you're not money parts. Yeah. And it's not very accessible as it is in Western UMS countries. Yeah. Yeah. But I think cafes are quite acceptable over here. Yes. It creates a sense of safety and security for not only the kids but also the parents.

Yeah. And we know that in our own culture, parents' approval is usually what. What everyone looks for. And so if the parents are okay with it, we're all okay with it. It becomes that thing where it's you know what we're, we wanna hang out at a cafe, and the parents are obviously gonna say yes. So it is definitely important.

Researcher: Okay. So would you say that cafes would act as a replacement for other third places

that we might find in Western countries here in Jordan?

Interviewee: Yeah, probably. Because it is one of those places... It's always packed on a Thursday night in Jordan cafes are all packed. Absolutely. Yeah, I do think so.

Researcher: Okay. The cafe environment facilitates brief, low-stakes social exchanges. For example, with baristas or nodding to a regular customer. What role do these weak ties play in preventing the cycle of social withdrawal often seen in anxiety and depression?

Interviewee: I think it goes back to the fact that we're doing that graded exposure. We're making sure that people aren't really.... because sometimes we have that thought of "I'm alone". And our thoughts are so strong that they can influence how we feel and then influence how we act. So if our thought is we're alone, there's no one to interact with, we might feel like we're incompetent in a way... That we're unable to have interactions or those interactions. And then, therefore, we self-isolate even more. So if we have those interactions and our brain remembers those interactions as good interactions. So then that means that the memories we have become good memories of interaction with others. Then we want to repeat those interactions. And therefore, we continue trying to go for those interactions themselves. And it's just a simple, "Hey, I'd like this coffee, or I'd like that". Or "what do you have?" So instead of it gives that it's a controlled conversation. You're not trying to make small talk, as in what's the weather like? But instead of it becoming, okay, I'd like this, it can then turn into what do you have to offer. So it can gradually become more; there can be more of an exchange that happens between two people.

Yeah. With those in that scenario, and then it just becomes something where the person can work on those social skills, and we make sure that person doesn't really self-isolate completely.

Researcher: From a clinical perspective, to what extent is the perceived friendliness and welcome from staff important in making a space feel safe enough to truly relax and engage in restorative behavior?

Interviewee: Clinically? Very important. Because if the staff is welcoming, then you already feel calm. Your first interaction is with the staff. You already feel calm. Mind you, there are some people who may not like a friendly staff.

Researcher: Really?

Interviewee: Yeah. Because they prefer not to engage from the start. So they might find it to be a bit anxiety-inducing. But in general, if we look at it from a clinical perspective, it does help make a person feel a lot more relaxed. And when you're relaxed, you're not in stress mode, your body is not feeling stressed. If it's not feeling stressed, then it can have that restorative behavior that you're talking about.

So there's no fight or flight. If there's no fight or flight, then I can relax. I can feel better. I'm making good memories. Everything is much better. I think the reason why I am emphasizing that friendliness and that welcoming are so important is because it's something that we also ensure is done over here.

In our clinic, our administrative staff was not welcoming, and they were not friendly. Then it would be more of a hostile environment. You'd have people being uncomfortable, you'd have a lot more complaints. It just wouldn't, it would be more stressful. People would walk into sessions, and they'd be stressed out anyway. From an interaction that happened outside. Sometimes, and that's why it's important for us, that our staff is also friendly because when they are friendly, sometimes, even if they're coming in and they're angry, they can come in after having that nice simple interaction with someone from the administrative team, they calm down, they walk in and they're calm. I've heard I had a bad day, but the person outside was so nice, and now I feel better. So it's those little interactions that make you realize how important it is to be friendly, to be welcoming as staff,^f because it really does calm a person down. And make sure we're not in that stress flight, fight or flight type of mode, de and really make sure that the person is able to just be relaxed.

Researcher: Okay. Just before we wrap up, I wanted to refer to a concept you referred to multiple times in your answers. Graded exposure. Can you please elaborate on that a little further?

Interviewee: Graded exposure is basically if we have an issue with a certain social situation that we're scared of or ... let's stick to social situations, 'cause social situations are quite common. What we do is we try and, in graded exposure, we try and make sure that we create, let's say, maybe a bunch of situations, and we see which one is the least anxiety-provoking situation for the person. And then we slowly start going through each of those steps. Yeah. And we need to make sure that a person, when they're going through that graded exposure,^e the reason why we're doing it is that we want to get to the point where they feel zero. Anxiety when they're in that situation, when they're in that social situation.

Tell me, go ahead.

Researcher: So it goes from lowest anxiety-inducing to highest.

Interviewee: Exactly. So usually the highest is going to be that social situation, right? We don't wanna throw them into that because it's terrifying, and we don't know what the outcomes can be, right?

So we wanna make sure that it's a slow exposure to that situation because it's not just. I'm scared of going to the dentist, let's say. There are so many other things that get to that point where I'm scared of going to the dentist. Or I'm scared of going out with friends. There are so many other things.

There can be, I'm scared of saying the wrong thing, I'm scared of this, I'm scared of that. And then it creates this massive situation that you're scared of. So we start working on those little things, making sure that we expose a person to those little things while also teaching them grounding techniques or breathing techniques. Or breathing exercises to make sure that they have that safety. If they feel the anxiety coming on a bit too strongly. Then they're able to go back and be like, okay, no, I'm still present. I'm here. You are engaging in your five senses. Maybe doing progressive muscle relaxation.

One of the techniques that we have to make, remind ourselves that we're not really in our brain and thinking too much. We're actually in the present, in the here and now. 'Cause that's what happens when you've got that anxiety. You start thinking a bit too much. So we wanna bring you back into the present, and graded exposure helps us.

In a very controlled way and in a very safe way. Make sure that we're able to address that fear head-on. But slowly. And we need to make sure that each stage is done completely, they are completely fine with it before we move on to the next stage, because we don't want it to be a thing where we've moved on to the next stage a bit too quickly.

And then they are like, " No. A bad experience, I'm back to square one. So it has to be something that's a bit slower, and it depends on the person, too. Some people it's a bit quicker than others in terms of timeline, and some people it's a bit slower, but in the end of the day, they're doing the brave thing, and they're actually facing it head on.

Whether it's little microdoses of it or really big things of it.

Researcher: Okay. Thank you so much for your time. I very much appreciate it.

Interviewee: Thank you.