Eating Out

– A constructionist take on understanding a
consumption phenomenon

Mohamed Zeyad Murad

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the processes that occur before eating out at a restaurant or a café, in order to shed more light on the complexities of consumption behaviour. The dissertation utilizes symbolic interactionism and other social constructionist theories to understand how participants in three different focus groups make sense of processes prior to eating out and the meanings associated within these processes. Three themes of discussion were prominent during the discussions, and the findings reveal an emergent pattern of processes the participants expressed with each other. Processes that have emerged seem to depend on other processes, which sheds light on reasons behind consumption behaviour and motivation. Also, other/internal-perspectives emerged based on the language the participants used reveal the construction of their reality toward the subject of eating out, and thus, could be helpful to consider when studying other consumption phenomenon.

Keywords: Eating Out, Processes, Making Sense, Sensemaking, Meaning, Symbolic Interactionism, Social Construction

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, the number of food choices a person has has increased and thus, the options and possibilities to eat outside of the home has also increased. A person may be able to start the day with an English breakfast, indulge in an American style BBQ for lunch and end the night with Japanese sushi; the options are bountiful. 'Eating out' is a practice that happens individually, or in a group, with motivational factors ranging from wanting an "exciting experience[s], escape from routine[s], health concern[s], learning knowledge, authentic experience[s], togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal, and physical environment.", or reasons such as "pleasure, celebratory and business" (Kim *et al.* 2009, Edwards 2013). But there is more to eating out than just the food. According to (Fox 2014), eating out is a ceremonial practice because going to a restaurant requires a person to prepare accordingly for a public event. With that in mind, I believe the experiences and the stories of people eating in a restaurant is just the tip of the iceberg of understanding food consumption and consumption decision making. Each individual in a restaurant goes through multiple processes prior to sitting down and eating, and many of these processes that lead up to consuming food outside of the home have nothing to do with food. I believe multiple external and internal factors influence us in the way we behave when it comes to eating out, and to be able to understand what individuals go through might shed light into the complexities of consumption.

There has been numerous research over the topics of consumption, to name a few: over-consumption (Kjellberg 2008), obesity (Mancini *et al.* 2017; Holsten 2008), nutrition (Worsley 2002; Freedman & Connors 2010; Morse & Driskell 2009;), sustainable consumption (Connolly & Prothero 2003, 2008; Heiskanen & Pantzar 1997; Shove and Pantzar, 2005; Hargreaves, 2011), semiotics focused on consumption (Mick 1986; Rossolatos 2015; Mick *et al.* 2004), effects of material possessions on people (Belk 1988; Oropesa 1995; Ciarrochi & Forgas 2000), wasteful consumption (Hamilton *et al.* 2005; Myers 1997), ethical consumption (Arli *et al.* 2016), how consumers consume (Holt 1995), and how consumers use products (Solomon 1983). Despite this extensive research, I have found it challenging to come across work that focuses on the process an individual goes through, prior to eating out, and furthermore, on the meanings these processes have that could affect a person to act in a certain way. How do friends communicate with one another? What type of clothes are suitable for the outing? Where would they

like to eat? How should they get there? etc... To picture this visually, the timeline starts from the moment the initial idea to eat out is born and ends at the point of reaching the restaurant's door, and in this timeline, there exists multiple processes one goes through. Within each process, e.g., deciding if one wants to wear jeans or a skirt, exists feelings that one experiences, outside forces that shape one's decision, memories that influence a perception of a given place, etc... These are processes one accounts for when deciding on what to do.

Consumption is a complex social phenomenon which is generally regarded as a means to appease the needs and wants beyond consumer's 'basic use-value' (Firat *et al.* 2013). It is argued that fulfilling the 'need' to consume will result in the sense of pleasure, but being unable to fulfil this 'need', will results in "pain" (Dolu, 1993: 21). Keeping in mind essential and non-essential material that we consume, Firate *et al.* (2003) explains that consumption is "an "interpretat[ive] and communicati[ve] process in addition to a tool for people to position themselves." (p. 184); and thus, as the concept of consumption evolved, so did our consumption behaviour. At face value, consumption can be perceived as the simple practice of satisfying your needs and wants; however, the concept of consumption is socially constructed, inherent in social status, social welfare, competition, and hedonism (ibid). Thus, revealing the complexity and ever-evolving manifestation of consumption.

In modern consumer culture, our social life revolves around consumption (Firat and Venkatesh 1994; Slater 1997; Giddens 1991, as cited in Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2005), and so are the meanings we give to material resources and how they affect our practices. Material objects encompass meanings that we give to them, which then we use to communicate and convey with others (Dittmar 1992; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Gabriel and Lang 1995; McCracken 1988a, as cited in Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2005), but we also avoid some consumption behaviours and practices so that one may maintain, advance, and create the Self (Gould *et al.* 1997; Hogg and Michell 1996). These are choices that we 'free-willingly' choose to shape our "Self" to be whom we want to be. Thus, we are continually looking for symbolic resources or material to adjust our meanings in our consumption (Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2005, p. 180). Concerning the Self, Giddens (1991) explains that in post-modern society the individual is threatened by the "dilemma of the self" and the "looming threat of personal meaninglessness" (p. 201). So, with the ever-rising choices and development in our modern age, people tend to fulfil 'an ego-ideal which commands the respect of others and inspires self-love" (Gabriel and Lang, 1995, p 98) through consumption behaviour.

Herbert Blumer argues that over-consumption of products is not because of class differentiation, but what matters for consumers is to blend in rather than distancing themselves from others. In other words, Jeremy Schulz (2006) described Blumer's stance as, "In these accounts of contemporary brand-oriented consumerism what

matters is the consumers' image in the eyes of other 'with it' consumers, rather than their relative rank in a hierarchical ordering of social classes defined apart from consumption practices." (p. 60). When it comes to consumption, social eating norms, establishes a correct way of consuming. These norms are unwritten rules that we as participants follow; for these reasons, people conform to these norms, because it increases the chance of being liked by the group members and teaches you how to act correctly. This behaviour is shaped by social appraisement or by social disapproval, and thus by following the norms, you are reinforcing your group belonging (Higgs 2015).

2. Objectives

2.1. Aim and Research Question

Since I will only be looking at a niche aspect of a consumption phenomenon. This project aims to explore the phenomenon of eating-out, by exploring processes people undertake prior to eating out; and the meanings associated within these processes that motivates a person to act prior to eating-out.

2.2. Research Question:

How are the participants collectively making sense of different processes associated prior to eating out, and what are the meanings associated within these processes?

3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

To be able to understand the meanings of processes people place, and to understand how people make sense of eating out and the preparatory procedures that precede eating out, we need theories which link motivation and action with sensemaking. Symbolic interactionism is such a theoretical approach which in this study, in combination with ideas from other social constructionism theory, was used as guidance both when designing the study and when analysing the data.

3.1. 3.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism revolves around the idea that humans act towards reality on the basis of the meanings they give to it, and this meaning is constructed in social interaction by words, gestures, and symbols and that each of these factors that contribute to the construction of our subjective reality has meaning. Symbolic interactionism will help me understand the meanings the participants associate within these processes and how they collectively make sense of different processes since the theory focuses on subjective viewpoints and how they make sense of reality.

"Central to symbolic interactionist thought is the idea that individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others" (Carter & Fuller 2015, p. 1). There are four basic tenets, Carter & Fuller (2015) summarised and they are that: "(1) individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them; (2) interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects, as well as situations, must be defined or categorised based on … meanings; (3) meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society; and (4) meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others." (p. 1-2). Thus, "symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact." (Blumer 1969, p. 5)

There exists a duality in the construction of our reality; called 'dialectical movement' where reciprocating interactions with one another create social order, while at the same time this social order structures "individuals' experiences and

subjectivities" (Inglis 2019 p.99). And with these structures created and organised by interactions, symbolic interactionism will also aid in understanding the structures that are created by these people, since these structures are results from actions of individuals (ibid). All of this is achievable because of language, George Herbert Mead emphasised the importance of language since language has symbols and has signs, which people are able to create and indicate meaning (ibid).

Self-indication is an important concept as it includes the communication and feedback of the I and the Me and the Generalised Other. It allows people to grant meaning towards things, and thus acts to be made, or changed. Thus, a behaviour - of a person - is not because of the object itself. It is because of the interpretation the person had made through the process of self-indication (Blumer, 1969; Inglis, 2019) that allowed him to act and make the choice.

The Self refers to a process, "the *process* of reflexivity which emanates from the dialectic between the "I" and "Me"... the Self is a reflexive phenomenon that develops in social interaction and is based on the social character of human language" (Gecas 1982 p. 3). The self-concept is a central concept within Symbolic Interactionism, what differs the self-concept and the Self is that the former is a "*product* of this reflexive activity. It is the concept the individual has of himself as a physical, social, and spiritual or moral being" (ibid). Self-conception includes identity and would be considered an important aspect to bring up because identity "focuses on the meanings comprising the self as an object, gives structure and content to self-concept, and anchors the self to social systems" (ibid). Using Cooley's (1902) concept of the "looking-glass self" and Mead's theory (1934) of The Self, the self-concept is also reflected from the perceptions, reflections, role-taking and appraisals of those others around us is the "cornerstone of the symbolic interactionist perspective on self-concept formation" (ibid).

Identity plays an essential role in eating out because when we leave the privacy of our homes, we enter the public social sphere, where we present ourselves to others and with this presentation comes identity. Goffman (1959: 32) employed the dramaturgical metaphor which means that people perform - theatrically - to influence one another (Inglis 2019, p. 133-144). Goffman's view was that people portray themselves in a favourable light to others; thus, playing 'roles' or 'performances', much like in a theatre where there are actors, there also exists an audience, to which then expectations arise from performances which 'ensures predictability over time (ibid). Furthermore, to add to the theatrics of our daily lives, identity, and the preservation of our identity, plays a crucial role in preventing stigma. Goffman (1964) says that stigma threatens self-identity, "it alludes to some aspects of the self that breaches the rules of social interaction" (Inglis 2019, p. 114). Goffman raises two central concepts that help in understanding how stigma arises. He explains that there exists the "virtual" and the "actual" social identity. The virtual identity is the identity you give yourself when you are in public, and the

actual identity is when you are in private. When these two identities are not able to differentiate and be maintained, stigma arises; thus, we rely on different plans and strategies to not be stigmatised (ibid).

3.2 Social Constructionism

For reasons to understand how procedures, skills, motivation, and action emerge in and from meaning constructions and to understand how participants make sense of eating out I believe Social Constructionism would help me in analysing and understanding my data. Giddens provides an important aspect about structuration in relation to practice which that 'society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do' (Giddens and Pierson, 1998: 77, as cited in Inglis 2019 p. 214). I will be using a few concepts in social constructionism to help me in my analysis.

Practices are usually done by agents, i.e. skilled performers, which involves taken-for-granted thoughts that usually the agents themselves do not really talk about, and in which it has not been thought of self-consciously. This is done through the level of practical consciousness. Though sometimes skilled agents go through 'discursive consciousness', this is a procedure where the skilled agent tries to explain their practice in words, with discursive consciousness agents might find it hard to explain and reflect on the practice they are skilled in (Inglis, 2019 p. 214).

'Mutual knowledge' is the shared knowledge - rules - that the agents take-for-granted when performing certain practices. This knowledge works in practical consciousness, where the agents mutually just know how to do certain practices; these 'rules' allow the agents to define what is right from wrong, what should and should not be done; these 'rules' exist over long periods of time and through many people 'because they are planted in agent's heads, in 'memory traces'" (Giddens 1979: 64 as cited by Inglis 2019, p. 214-215).

To summarize, symbolic interactionism and social constructionism suggest that the motivation of individuals is socially constructed in social interaction and includes processes of reflection. Reflection is mediated by communication with others as well as with the self, this reflection process is social, also when it is performed by a lone individual, since in order to reflect about the future the individual has to imagine themself from an other-position, thus take the perspective of the generalised other and look at their (future) self. The other-perspective on self comes through using language for reflection, and language is per definition social: what makes symbols, symbols, is that they are assumed to mean something for me and the other, they are intersubjective. Symbolic interactionism and social constructionism suggest that what is involved is a social process of reflection, and this process can become present for observation and interpretation when actors speak with each other about their experiences of eating out and when preparing to

eat out. The theory suggests when analysing these conversations, we should pay specific attention to descriptions and what language the participants use when talking about in these moments of reflection.

4. Methodology

4.1. Methodological Approach

This study is done through qualitative research that takes on a constructivism stance. The constructivism approach will examine the perspectives of individuals in a collective setting to understand what processes people take and what are the meanings behind these processes, and how it propels them to act in a certain way. To do so I contacted people who eat out together or usually just like to eat out and invited them to a group discussion where they discussed their processes. I then identified how they were sense-making different processes, and to use the data gathered to understand the meaning within these processes to understand how the participants constructed their reality.

4.2. Finding Participants and Creating Groups

Since my research focuses on eating out, I found it important to study people who share experiences of eating out together. Therefore, I searched in my own network of distant friends to find groups of individuals who sometimes eat out together. I made contact via text with a total of 23 people to be a part of a group discussion, 12 of which were able to be present: three females and nine males ranging from the age of 25-26. In the text, I explained that the subject of the discussion would be about consumption, but I did not tell them precisely the details of the discussion to avoid the participants having conversations about the topic with one another prior to the meeting, this was to avoid that the topic was exhausted prior to the observation.

After I got confirmation from the participants, we agreed on a time and date where they can attend the discussion. The discussion location was at my home, since public venues are usually noisy and crowded, and private areas were expensive to rent.

I ended up having three groups. The first group (G1) consists of friends that know each other but do not usually go out together a lot. The second group (G2)

consists of people who somewhat know each other and do not go out with each other. The third group (G3) consists of people who know each other and often go out with each other. I consider the difference between the three focus groups to be an opportunity to understand different aspects of eating out.

4.3. Focus Group

To be able to answer my aim, the group's discussions were conducted using semi-structured interviews to allow the participants to talk about the subject freely, while I, the researcher, was still able to ask questions related to the subject in case the participants got side-tracked or if the topic of the discussion started to slow down or come to a halt.

I chose to do a focus group because it allowed me to study the interactions of people who are taking part in collective sense-making (Wibeck et al. 2007), which also offers the opportunity to observe the 'co-construction of meaning in action', and to be able to conceptualise the group as 'a thinking society in miniature' (Wilkinson, 1998b:338; Jovchelovitch, 2001: 2, as cited in Wibeck *et al.* 2007, p.250).

The focus groups consisted of homogeneous groups, because I found it to be the most useful way to obtain data, and that "the more the participants share similarities before they even start the discussion, the less they will have to explain themselves to each other and the easier it will be to react appropriately to what others say" (Morgan 2012, p. 168). There has been some debate about whether the participants in the focus group should be homogeneous or heterogeneous. For homogeneous groups individuals that have a common background are likely to encourage one another to dive deep into thoughts and develop arguments with one another, while also are more willing to discuss and share with one another; though with heterogeneous groups this might not be the case, but it can also be illuminating (Jarrett, 1993; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999, as cited in Wibeck *et al.* 2007).

I decided to do three groups and set the limit to five participants in each group. This is to maximise interaction; to foster a range of perspectives, a relatively small group is desirable. Wibeck *et al.* (2007) refers to Wilerson (1996) who refers to Hare (1962) 'that proposes five as the optimal number of participants to promote small group discussion (Wibeck *et al.* 2007, p. 260).

4.4. Data Interpretation

All discussion groups were recorded and transcribed, the interview of G1 and G2 lasted around 1 hour and 20 min and G3 lasted around 2 hours. I studied my data as a conversation, meaning I did not pick specific singular quotes that are said by

the participants alone, but I picked conversations, as a whole, said by multiple participants. Since the group's discussions were lively, many participants went back and forth with each other, thus singling out single quotations from the participants in the results section would not give justice to understanding the process of sense-making the group was collectively participating in.

4.4.1. Processes

When analysing the transcripts from the focus groups I discovered that when talking about the process of collectively considering to eat out, the participants in the focus group placed the reasons for why/why not eating out both internal in themselves, e.g. what they felt, thought, wished, hoped, feared etc and external e.g. aspects of the situation. When looking closer at these different motivating objects, I identified 13 different types of reasons: 1) Emotional process: when the participants convey emotions toward a process, such as processes that evoke feelings or sentiment. 2) Structural process: is when the participant describes their process in a structural way towards other participants, almost like a guideline or a list. 3) Organisational process: is when the participant talks about how they organise themselves. 4) Expectational process: is when the participant talks about what it is to be expected from them, and also future implications would fall under the process expectation since expecting something is geared toward thinking about the future. 5) Cultural process: is when the participants bring up culture when talking about processes. 6) Social process: is when the participants talk about the people they will interact with. 7) Time process: is when the participants talk about time, e.g. time to get ready. 8) Motivational process: is when the participants reveal what will motivate them to do something. 9) Geographic process: is when the participants talk about foreign countries that are not their home country as a means to describe their processes. 10) Food consideration processes: is when the participants talk about how considering the type of food plays a role in their processes. 11) Preparational process: is when the participants talk about getting prepared for the outing. 12) Location dependant process: is when the participants talk about a location or place that factors into their processes that is within their home country. 13) Identity process: is when the participants implicitly talk about their qualities and beliefs.

These processes showcase underlying factors that hide under the surface of explicit processes. In my analysis I have noticed a pattern that exists when the participants interacted with one another, this pattern consists of different ways participants communicate to each other. I use these processes to understand how participants collectively make-sense of different processes and I further use these processes to understand the meanings within these processes. The processes that I have found is through the researcher's interpretation when analysing what the participants have said during the discussions.

Sense-making is "about labelling and categorizing to stabilize the streaming of experience." (Weick *et al.* 2005), and that "sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk (or in other media such as graphics) symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances." and that sensemaking "involves translating experience into language through the production of texts, spoken or written." (Taylor and Van Every 2000 p. 58).

4.5. Reflection on Methodology

As a facilitator, I should point out how my role played a part in the focus group. Since I know the participants, and the participants know each other, there were pre-existing power relations in the group, between the participants themselves and between the participants and I. As a researcher I did to the best of my ability to distance my relationship with the participants during the discussion to dampen any sort of pre-existing relationship, it should be noted that this is not to say that the participants did the same for the researcher. In G2, the participants did not know each other as well as other group participants, so I sometimes intervened more than often to keep the discussion flowing.

It is important to point out that during the group discussion I presented to the participants a definition of eating out which was "eating out to a restaurant or to a cafe" this is to limit the discussion to what my research is about. I do acknowledge that as a researcher imposing a definition onto the participants may hinder or influence how participants sense-make eating out; though, I believe that by providing them with such a definition is acceptable in these circumstances since I am not investigating what they think eating out is, but the processes they take prior to eating out to a restaurant or cafe. Thus, by providing them with a definition it will allow the participants to have clear transparency on my intentions for this study, and to allow the discussion to revolve around the topic.

5. Results and Discussion

In my result and discussion section I will showcase my findings and then proceed to answer the following research question:

How are the participants collectively making sense of different processes associated prior to eating out, and what are the meanings associated within these processes? During the focus groups, three themes became especially prominent during the discussions: 1) Attire, 2) Ambience and Social Interaction and 3) Eating Alone. Attire focuses on the clothing aspect of what the participants discuss. In regard to Ambience and Social Interaction, the theme focuses on the general whereabouts, the desire for food and interaction with people, these aspects are closely intertwined when discussed by the participants, thus I found it suitable to make it into one theme. The third theme Eating Alone focuses on the discussions where participants talk about eating out individually, without the company of others.

Each relevant finding will first be introduced with a title, followed by a description of the finding, followed by an analysis of how the participants collectively make sense of different processes associated prior to eating out. At the end of each theme/section I will end with an interpretation of the meanings associated within these processes using the theoretical approaches mentioned above to illustrate my point. I believe this method of showcasing my results and answering my research question in the same section will be most appropriate.

Please note, I will exclude some interjections made by the participants and instead describe the interjection meaning.

Key: Group 1 (G1), Group 2 (G2), Group 3 (G3)

5.1. Theme: Attire

Getting Ready

AM:

Yeah you kinda have an idea when you pick a restaurant but like... well it's a broad idea but like the day off I'm like 'oh… I'm feeling these jeans, I'm gonna wear those jeans' like you make that decision.

NM:

Based on how casual, that would be the first thing that would come into my head

AM:

If you're XXXX 'what car am I going to drive?' *group laughter*

ES:

The first thing that comes into my head is what time do I have to start getting ready-

DJ, NM, acknowledges and AM realises ES's point.

ES:

That's it, then I think like which category clothes I have to wear, so like is it casual? Is it sweats? Is it smart casual? And then that's the only three casual categories I have and then I don't think about what I'm gonna wear until like I have to get ready and then like I take a shower whatever then I open the cupboard-

DJ:

And then you have to leave? Or did you make the decision before you start changing?

ES:

Like once I decide like I open the cupboard and I'm like 'oh I like this shirt, I like these pants', so I put it on-

DJ:

Ok

ES:

And then I go. yeah, it's very comfortable process

RESEARCHER:

Does the location matter?

ES:

Yea yeah it does-

NM:

It dictates what-

ES:

Yeah yeah, I have shirt restaurants, *group laughs* sweatpants restaurants and yeah, that's pretty much it *group laughs*

DJ:

Thobe?

ES:

Yeah ok thobe falls under shirt

DJ:

Oh

HF:

Formal

ES:

Yeah

DJ:

But it can be both

NM:

Yeah

ES:

No no I'm not going to a sweatpants restaurant with a thobe

DJ:

Ok fine

NM:

But you can

ES:

But if I can wear sweatpants to a place, I'm going with sweatpants

NM:

Ok

ES:

Yea

NM:

I feel like we think about that stuff-

DJ:

Earlier!

NM:

Yeah as soon 'ohh I'm going to Mirai so 'I have to wear this' and then 'oh is it gonna be cold', 'oh is it gonna be warm, okay hmm' like that. It's a different process for us, like we have to think-

DJ:

Also, I physically try them on, I do that every day-

5.1.1. Finding Description:

AM starts by explaining that he makes a decision on what to wear when he knows what the restaurant is and NM adds to that thought that if the restaurant is considered a casual restaurant that will help her in her decision to pick an attire. ES on the other hand, makes his decision based on the time he takes to get ready, which could suggest preparations to be made. He then goes on to explain that AM's and NM's process comes after he know how much time he has to prepare and describes his processes of getting ready. DJ then asks a question to make sense of what ES does after getting ready and ES then explains his process to her and calls it comfortable. Here we see the participants understanding, acknowledging and questioning each other's processes. I then proceeded to ask if the location matters, ES and NM verbally agreed, so I do not assume the other participants agreeing or disagreeing to this question. DJ then asks ES if he would wear a thobe, a traditional Arabian attire worn by men, ES agreed by saying that a thobe would fall under the category of formal wear. DJ suggests it could be both, NM agrees, but ES opposes that idea as he prefers to wear sweatpants for casual venues. When the idea of the thobe was brought up, ES, DJ, and NM were collectively participating in a discussion on how casual a thobe is. Since DJ and NM do not wear a thobe the participants would not succumb to a detailed discussion. So then DJ and NM talk about their processes when having to pick an attire to wear, which is that they start much earlier in deciding what to wear which includes physically trying-on their attire beforehand.

5.1.2. Sense-Making Process:

AM and ES describe an emotional process, "I'm feeling those jeans, I'm gonna wear those jeans", and "'oh I like this shirt, I like these pants' so I put it on" as an indication of how they decide on choosing their attire, here AM is describing the feelings he receives from jeans, that possibly these jeans will make him feel better emotionally. ES goes further in describing his structural and organisational process of eating out as a "very comfortable process", by categorising his attire for the occasion, and performing certain practices such as bathing, ES has a set up that would allow him to easily identify the suitable attire for the outing. DJ and NM also describe an organisational and time processes. NM says, "I feel like we think about that stuff-", then DJ says, "earlier!". We see NM and DJ both understand each other and comparing it to AM's and ES's. For NM and DJ preparations for the outing are considered vital for them, different to ES's organisational processes, NM's and DJ's process is emphasised by the time they start organising themselves.

What You Wear Depends on The Place

RESEARCHER:
All right let's just jump right at it. Why is it important what you wear when you eat out?
AN:
Why?
RESEARCHER:
Yeah
AN:
It isn't.
HK:
I agree with him
RESEARCHER:
It isn't important what you wear when you go out?
HK:
Like that's the thing most of the days I would not give a fuck. But like most of the days it doesn't matter what the fuck you're gonna wear but if you're going to a restaurant which requires you to wear something appropriate, then you will have to, most of the time I don't give fuck what I'm gonna wear.
TA:
So, it depends on the place.
AA:
It depends on the place
AN:
Because the place is the one that has-
HK:
Requirements
AN:
The requirement, not because, like, you're going because the place is amazing, like, you can't go into like sweatpants in most of Adliya

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TA:

So, the place defines your style. Not you defining your own style.

AN:

Yeah, yeah-

HK:

Because the place requires-

AN:

Because the place requires it-

AA:

You dress accordingly to the place you're going to.

HK:

To be fair though if you are going out on a very fancy date or a fancy dinner with someone then you would also, because that is the requirement for this specific social gathering or that, but most days it wouldn't matter to me what I dress.

TA:

It feels weird that technically you're not choosing. You don't have a choice in what to wear. The place itself is forcing you, forcing your outfit

5.1.3. Finding Description:

In the following conversation I asked G3 why it is important what they wear when they eat out, to understand more about the idea of attire from the participants. At first, they said it wasn't important but when I tried clarifying their answer, HK replied that most of the time it does not matter to him, though in some circumstances it does matter what he wears. Then the topic of the conversation geared toward how it depends on the location and who you are going with. In this discussion we are able to see how TA makes sense of the situation of how what you wear is dependent on the place you're going to be in.

5.1.4. Sense-Making Process:

During this discussion, the group was collectively sense-making how what you wear is dependent on the place you are going. During the conversation we see TA actively materialising the meaning toward how the place is influencing the attire someone wears, thus, TA is describing at the moment an expectational and locational dependant process where the place that you are going to expects you to wear a particular type of attire, 1) "So it depends on the place.", 2) "so the place defines your style. Not you defining your own style.", and finally 3) "It feels weird that technically you're not choosing. You don't have a choice in what to wear. The place itself is forcing you, forcing your outfit." between each of TA's developments in understanding how a person's choice in attire is influenced by the place, the other participants participate in adding their reasonings toward the subject; thus the participants collectively sense-make different processes that revolve around attire.

AA:

In the context of eating out. When it's done, you know, as a leisure activity, to feel better about yourself. I have to note that if I dress better, I will most probably have a more enjoyable experience just because I look better. So, I will feel better. Under the, if I'm eating out because I need to feel better, or just I want to maximise my enjoyment of the experience I would enjoy it more, if I was dressed nicer. Not adhering to a certain dress code, but just to have nice clothes will enhance the experience for me.

TA:

I agree.

AA:

But in most cases, I don't give a fuck,

HK:

Thing like there are circumstances in-

RESEARCHER:

In most cases, that means like every time you go out you go to a place that's casual?

HK:

No, even if I like… even if we go to Adliya if we go to Meat Co, I'm still gonna wear a T shirt jeans and my sneakers regardless but like let's say we're going, I'm going out on a date. And with the intent of going out on this date, we're going out to eat fancy, I'm doing it for the experience where it comes where we are both dress nice, we're going out to eat something nice like that. But generally, when I go out to eat, no matter where it, t-shirts, jeans and sneakers

5.1.5. Finding Description:

AA says that what he wears is for himself to better enhance the experience of going out, and not really follow the restaurant's rules for attire, TA agrees, but then AA says he does not really care what he wears usually. HK talked about that he dresses based on circumstances. I implicitly asked if it was the case that he would mostly go out to casual places since requirements aren't usually an important matter which makes the circumstances to get into the restaurant regardless of your attire. HK then brings up Adliya, a tourist location known for different kinds of restaurants and street art and argues that he is still going to wear what he feels he should wear regardless of where he is going. Though, when going out on a date, he argues he is going to wear clothes that are considered 'nice'. This is due to, as AA mentioned earlier, to enhance the experience of the outing.

5.1.6. Sense-Making Process:

AA describes an emotional process when he is dressing to go out. He uses the choice of attire as a mechanism to better enhance his experience and to feel better about himself when going out. He uses his attire to "maximise" the enjoyment he will get to experience. As AA says this, we see TA agreeing to his statements; thus, we can assume TA feels the same. HK then brings in a scenario that describes an expectational process; when he goes on a date and is intending to "eat fancy", he

links dressing nicely with the experience it will provide. This is an expectational process because both he and his date are expecting each other to dress nicely to create the expected experience of romance. Here we see the group collectively sense-making that the process of picking out their clothes and wearing the clothes they intend to wear correlates with the experience they intend to have in the outing.

Is This Appropriate?

YA:

Well, for me as a girl, it's a matter of like, a dress code. No, actually not dress code. It's like if we're eating out in Saar. I know that I can wear less conservative clothes. Like I can wear sleeveless. Maybe my jeans can be a bit tighter because I have lots of loose pants. But like if I'm eating somewhere like Adliya, I have to dress more conservatively because there are so many creeps there. So, these are like cultural things I think about before I go out based on where we're going to eat. So, location for example, Saar, sometimes it's not location, it's the restaurant itself.

AS:

And the type of people that are around

YA:

Exactly, yeah. And who I'm going out with, I guess matters, right?

RESEARCHER:

Yeah

YA:

Let's say I'm going somewhere in Saar. It's a food place, yeah, but I'm going out with two conservative people. Obviously, I'm not gonna dress, I'm not going to wear anything sleeveless for example. Another thing is, you were saying that your parents don't get this culture of going out. I had the same issue growing up. But for me, it was more 'it's wrong that you're always seen out.' You know, my mom would say that 'you have to stay at home you're girl' she wouldn't say that directly but she, you know, implied it many times. So, dressing appropriately according to the location, restaurants and who I'm with, and reputation I guess

5.1.7. Finding Description:

Here we see YA explaining that the location, the restaurant, the person she is with, and her reputation plays a role in deciding on what to wear when she eats out. She explains that depending on the place, she accordingly chooses the attire most suited. AS acknowledges what YA is saying and understands how other influences affect attire. Saar represents a more liberal area to YA and thus is able to wear clothing that she might not wear elsewhere. In Adliya, she associates that location with 'creeps', and thus wearing conservative clothing is a mechanism that will shield her from unwanted interaction. She then goes to reveal how her mother lectures her on not leaving the house a lot. YA's mom implying her to 'stay at home you're girl' and that 'it's wrong that you're always seen out' also introduces a cultural dimension into the processes that she would have to consider. We see then YA

listing the things (location, restaurants, the person she is going to meet, and her reputation) she has to consider when dressing to go out.

5.1.8. Sense-Making Process:

YA describes an expectational process and cultural process. Depending on the place she is going, she wears a specific type of clothing that accommodates her needs or desires. Saar represents a more liberal area compared to Adliya, thus having some influence over her choice of clothing; furthermore, the people that will be in the area and the people she will be with during her outing has more considerable influence over what she decides to wear than the place itself. In terms of the cultural processes, parental influence plays a role in limiting the occurrences that would allow YA to leave the house, the implication of gender roles and how it is related to reputation has an influence over YA when it has to do with leaving the house when she was younger.

5.1.9. Meanings Associated Within These Processes

When the participants spoke about clothing I noticed that material objects such as clothing affected the participants emotionally, as there is a bond between the material of clothing and deciding what to wear with the overall emotional feelings the participant will get from set clothing. Furthermore, they look for clothes to suit the occasion they intend to have e.g., a casual outing, or a romantic experience; also, that others influence the way they should look e.g. going out with a conservative person will influence your decision to wear conservative clothing, the dramaturgy (Goffman 1959), in which reveals the experiences and subjectivities that constructs the participants reality. We are able to see that certain routines the participants take when trying to get ready, which would indicate that practical consciousness (Inglis 2019) plays an essential role in understanding how people create their own understanding of how their relationship with attire is, which then proceeds to create their own unique structure and meaning toward how processes that includes attire plays a role to them. Since some participants agree with one another on certain processes such as getting ready earlier and that wearing clothes that look good enhances the experience, this could mean that mutual knowledge (Giddens 1979, p. 64 as cited in Inglis 2019, p. 214-215) on processes exists between different participants. When a person decides on what to wear they also visualise themself on how they will appear - you become a product from a reflexive activity-, thus, during these processes the participants reflects between the "I" and the "Me" i.e., The Self, to then conceptualise themselves, i.e. self-concept, on their appearance depending on the reflexivity and reasoning they had during the process (Gecas 1982), the other-perspective.

5.2. Theme: Ambience and Social Interaction

Considerations

AA:

For me personally, it boils down to two specific things. The first thing I consider is the company I'm keeping, whether it be my own company if I'm going out by myself, or the people I'm going out with.

RESEARCHER:

What's important about the company that you're with?

AA:

The company determines what needs I need satisfying, so if I need to eat out, because I crave social interaction, the company is going to be the prime thing, I need the people that I want. If going out to satisfy a food craving, and it would be the food quality it's where I'm eating out. Now, the third very specific thing that I consider is the actual comfort and atmosphere of where I'm eating out. So, the quality of the chairs for me is prime. When deciding where I want to go where I want to eat out.

HK:

I agree with that because like I would not go to Meat Co. Because-

AA:

You sit on a little piece of metal

HK:

Not just that but like let's say when we go to Meat Co., weekend or not if we should, I would like... I like sitting outdoors, so if I sit outdoors in Meet Co. all I get is loud DJ music and-

AA:

So, atmosphere

HK:

It's not something that I would like to, or I would not enjoy, so atmosphere would be something also

AA:

Atmosphere is a prime consideration

HK:

If, if and that's a very big if, if I'm going strictly based on food and comfort. We go, when we went to Meat Co., I wanted to go out to the guys like you said

AA:

So that was company.

HK:

I didn't mind going to Meet Co., I didn't eat anything, I just sat there with the guys and I had a good time. XXXX got sloppy drunk *laughter* and had a very nice meal

AA:

So, the prime considerations would depend on the prime motivations to the eating out because we agree there's different motivations to eating out, right? So, depending on those motivations, whether they be, you're looking for the social aspect or the food aspect, this would determine your prime consideration, in other words, food quality or company, or atmosphere.

AN:

And the process that you go through-

AA:

And the logistics,

AN:

Yeah because if you're thinking about company, then it's a bit... Well not more of a hassle, but you're going to spend more time-

HK:

Is dependent on others

AN:

Yeah and you're going to spend more time you know, texting trying to-

AA:

Organising

AN:

But, if you're going out for the food you can actually spend more time looking for the place that you want to go to then the gathering aspect of it, you know,

5.2.1. Finding Description:

In this conversation AA starts with what he considers when going out, which steered the topic of conversation toward that subject. Words that came up such as 'crave', 'satisfying', 'comfort', and 'atmosphere' here suggest desires that they look for when deciding on eating out. A discussion unfolds about prioritizing motivations that drive a person to eat out. For AA he considers the company, may it be himself or with others. He relies on what he needs satisfying such as, social interaction, food craving, comfort, and atmosphere. AA and HK have a conversation on the importance of how atmosphere plays a role in deciding on whether to eat out or not, and HK says that atmosphere would be an important thing to consider if he is considering eating out on the basis of having food and being comfortable. AA then tries to make sense of it by reiterating what was discussed, here we see AA trying to make sense of this. AN then brings up processes that one would have to go through. AN describes processes not as a hassle but to 'spend more time'. The group then discusses some of the processes that they would have to go through and consider, such as texting, AA pitches in and adds in 'organising'. AN says if you are just looking for food then you will spend more time on finding a location to eat rather than spending time on the 'gathering aspect'.

5.2.2. Sense-Making Process:

AA describes a social, emotional, structural, and motivational process. By saying "the first thing I consider is the company, I'm keeping" AA reveals the social process he would consider when going to eat out, for AA the people he will be with crosses his mind first. The emotional process emerges when AA is craving for a specific thing such as social interaction, food, comfort, and atmosphere. AA describes social and emotional processes as a dependent variable to motivational factors which then the consideration of a structural process emerges by how AA structures and lists what he considered to be a priority when going to eat out and

how each of his considerations in his list are dependent on other processes. HK goes on to reason with AA about the emotional process that he would go through when eating out, that is, when if HK considers the atmosphere of a restaurant as a basis of going to eat out, it would have to be dependant solely on the fact that he is going there for the restaurant's food and comfort; and, he is also willing to go to a restaurant despite if the atmosphere is not to his liking if instead his reason to go out is not based on an emotional process (food and comfort) but a social process. AN then describes time and organisational processes. He acknowledges that if he will be going out to eat with people, he will need time to prepare for the outing, though if the purpose of eating out was just the food and that he will exclude people, then he will spend time on choosing the restaurant that he will be eating in, than organising with people.

Atmosphere and Its Effects

AN:
Why would you prefer to eat in if you're alone, then go out to eat?

AA:
Because home beats every other atmosphere,

TA:
Yeah

AA:
If you're going out alone, the motivation again, personally speaking is the company. The atmosphere to me comes secondary most of the time. So, if I'm eating alone, my home atmosphere, nine times out of 10 will beat whatever atmosphere of the restaurant I'm ordering from

HK:
Okay, so right now you're home you eat alone let's say, for example, let's say, just hypothetically, you live in Goa, I'm giving you this example because I've been there and I know you've been there (points at researcher). You live in Goa, your home there is comfy as hell, but you can also go and eat a good burger on the beach, which would you?-

AA:
Aaahhh....

HK:
This is what I'm trying to say. I think the atmosphere plays a role. But I think right now currently, the atmosphere that is available to you are not attractive to you to go.

TA:
But remember what you said, you said assuming it's your home,

HK:
No, but that's the point I'm trying to put you in a different mind frame. Because right now, what's affecting your choice of atmosphere is Bahrain.

AA:
Very limited-

HK:
It's Bahrain's atmosphere

AA:

If I lived in Goa and was familiar with Goa, I would changed my answer. I think I would eat out at the beach. To me that would be more enjoyable then eating at home regardless of how comfortable because generally I love the beach.

HK:

That's what I'm saying. So, my point is that right now our answers are based on Bahrain.

AA:

Yes

HK:

If TA was living on the Isle of Skye, and there was a chance to eat somewhere where it's on top of the mountain or home, where would you prefer eating?

TA:

You know the answer

HK:

Exactly. So, I'm saying I think atmosphere plays a role. But our atmosphere is limited because we are in Bahrain because of what we do and what we have.

5.2.3. Finding Description:

When AN asked AA why he would prefer to eat at home rather than going out, AA responded that home beats every other atmosphere. For AA to eat out for him what matters is the social aspect, if he knows he is going to eat alone he would not go out, he will just order in. HK then brings up a hypothetical situation where he put AA in Goa (a state in India) where he has easy access to a beach, and asked him if he would still order in, AA realizes what HK has said. HK then goes on to explain it's not because home is the best atmosphere, it's because Bahrain doesn't have for him the best place to satisfy his experience and atmosphere outside of home, it's the atmosphere that Bahrain provides that's limiting and helping AA decide where to eat. HK does the same to TA that if he were to eat at a mountain top, TA would go eat there alone. Here HK is trying to make clear that atmosphere plays a role when people want to eat out alone.

5.2.4. Sense-Making Process:

AA describes an emotional process of how atmosphere affects his decision to either eat at home or at a restaurant alone, he describes that the atmosphere of home "will beat whatever atmosphere of the restaurant I'm ordering from". HK then goes on to explain to AA that it is not because of emotional processes solely that makes AA prefer to eat at home, but a result from expectational processes. The expectation is the knowledge that the atmosphere that your geographic location provides is limiting AA's opportunity to eat out alone; when HK presented the hypothetical scenarios to AA and TA, he delimited the opportunity for the participants to partake in eating alone, thus, by placing them in a different geographic location, HK introduces new expectational processes, which is the knowledge that you can eat out alone not in your home, because this geographic location provides the

atmosphere that encourages AA and TA to eat alone not in the comfort of their home.

Who's Going to be There?

YA:

Yeah, you said something. I think you asked them, 'Do you mentally prepare for it?' That's definitely one of my processes, mentally preparing for who I'm going to see. Sometimes if it's someone I don't know that well I.. I can't help it but I think of topics to talk about, you know, what if we just sit in silence that's my biggest nightmare so definitely I prepare myself mentally. Sometimes if it's so negative and like disgusting I try to uplift myself or I don't know. It's a defence mechanism, you know? Yeah

RESEARCHER:

You're prepping for this-

YA:

Yeah

RESEARCHER:

Has this happened like, the day of? An hour before do you feel like it depends on the person?

YA:

It usually happens right before I see them, but it also happens let's say it was planned a few days before it will happen like every time I think of it, you know? And another thing, ahh I forgot, umm. Yeah, sometimes when I, when it's friends like you guys, I don't think at all I don't mentally prepare myself because I'm so used to you. You know, it's just easy and you have no expectations or anything. I just go have fun and leave

RESEARCHER:

Yeah, that's what I always try to strive for. Things like that.

AS:

See, for me is different. Because I actively try to avoid people. I don't like *group laughs* so here it's easy. Because like people I usually go out with, people I'm okay with. So I don't have that issue but like in college, when we have plans for like group of friends to like go out, go out and eat or drink or whatever. And I find out there's someone I don't like there I just cancel. I just don't show up

YA:

What if it's a big group and you can avoid that one person would you still cancel?

AS:

Depends like if it's big enough I like there are a few times I actually still eventually went, but most of the time I just, I just cancelled

RESEARCHER:

Why would you cancel? Which is going to ruin your mood? The person?

AS:

Yeah, pretty much.

SK:

I think it takes away from-

AS:

It takes away from the fun.

RESEARCHER:

So what matters is when you eat out you want to have fun.

AS:

Yeah like I don't want to have a shit time. I'm not going out of my way. To like have a bad time-

SK:

And it's like he was saying earlier you're doing like usually you're going out kinda comfort but now this takes you out of your comfort zone again so might as well just eat at home, i think

AS:

Yeah order in be the true introverts you want to be

SK:

Only me and the delivery boy

5.2.5. Finding Description:

YA reveals to us that one of her processes that she considers is her being mentally prepared to meet someone when going out. For her it is important to keep a conversation with a person when they are out, she would consider this one of her worst processes. Sometimes this mental preparation overpowers her in a negative way emotionally and she has to overcome it. She reveals that when she is actively thinking about the outing she will try to mentally prepare for the outing, though with friends she does not because there are no expectations from her, which reveals how YA feels when presenting herself is dependent on the person she is meeting. For AS he prefers to go out with people he likes. He is willing to sacrifice a group outing if he knows another person that he is not fond of will be present in that group. He is willing to just not show up to the gathering. YA then asks what if there's a big enough group where he just does not get to interact with people he does not like, AS acknowledges that he has done it a few times, but the majority of the time he does not show up. It will ruin his mood and the fun for AS, SK was able to understand his position. SK and AS then go on to that you're leaving the comfort of your house to go out, so when a person you dislike is also going to be in the gathering, you're just putting yourself from a comfortable position to an uncomfortable position.

5.2.6. Sense-Making Process:

YA describes an emotional, social and preparational process when she talks about herself going to meet someone whom she does not know that well. She describes that she mentally has to prepare (preparational process) for the outing especially when she does not know the person (social process) that well, and she does so because of the fear (emotional process) of just sitting in silence. Although, when she is going out with people that she does know well, then the emotion of fear shifts to ease, and her preparational and emotional process diminishes. AS then goes on to bring another example of how people affect him when going out, and he describes an emotional, social, and expectational process. AS goes on to describe how he usually goes out with people he likes, but if he knows that a person that he is not

fond of attending the outing, he will cancel the outing. The social process occurs when he knows who will be attending the gathering; additionally an emotional process occurs when he finds out if someone he doesn't like will be attending, which then introduces the expectational process, since, if he attends, knowing that person he is not fond of will be there, it will ruin his experience. Here we see the group collectively sense-make how other people attending to the destination affects their processes.

It Depends on The Place

AM:

As going out to the restaurant and eating I just do it for the social aspect. Like yeah like the entire experience, not just like the food itself. Food is secondary for me. It helps that the food is good.

NM:

People would feel FOMO (fear of missing out) for the social aspect rather than the actual food.

DJ:

Depends also on where we are going

ES:

Depends on the place yeah yeah. If like we go to a tikka place, a place where it's horrible to eat, like for example-

HF:

Like if it's someone's birthday-

ES:

No no like where it's horrible to sit-

NM:

Yeah yeah yeah

ES:

But the food is delicious

NM:

Yeah yeah

ES:

But like in general you go to a restaurant because like you want to change your environment as well, yeah, you're just like 'oh I'm bored' yeah

5.2.7. Finding Description:

In this discussion we are able to see AM's reason to go out and it's for the social aspect, and he included the social aspect of eating out as an experience, and that he places food second to the social aspect of the outing. NM then brings up the fear of missing out, as an example for why people would choose the social over the food aspect of eating out. DJ then adds that it is not only about the social or the food but the place, and ES agrees. ES then talks about how you would go to a restaurant that has good food but horrible seating arrangements, where then he concludes that a

person would generally go to a restaurant to change his environment, and an example he brings up is if a person gets bored and chooses to eat out.

5.2.8. Sense-Making Process:

AM describes a motivational, social, expectational process by describing that what motivates him to go eat out at a restaurant is the social aspect and the entire experience. Here we see what matters for AM and what motivates him, (a motivational process), is the company he will be with (a social process), and that the experience of the outing (an expectational process), is a factor he would consider when eating out. NM then brings in an emotional and motivational process that would reciprocate within individuals if presented with an opportunity of an outing which is the fear that one would miss out on an event, thus leading them to go out, an emotional process that would motivate them to eat out with others. DJ then describes a locational dependent process which also should be factored in that it "depends also on where we are going". ES them adds a food consideration and emotional process by describing that one would go to a restaurant based on the food and not the atmosphere, and that generally one would eat out to change his environment, an example he brought up is that one could just say "oh I'm bored" and thus propels the person to eat out due to boredom.

5.2.9. Meanings associated within these processes

The place, atmosphere, food craving, and social interaction seem to be well integrated with each other. We are able to see that sometimes when a participant considers eating out, they also consider other processes, meaning that processes usually do not stand alone but are usually dependent on other processes. Usually the initial process is the most important process since other processes are dependent on the first process, for example if the main reason to eat out is to socially interact then probably the place that the participants would want to be in will not be of priority. Or, if the atmosphere of the place the participant is going to is the main reason to eat out then probably social interaction is not a priority but figuring out where one would go is. When HK explains that atmosphere is central to eating outside of the comfort of the home, this means that the surroundings we want to be in plays an important role in deciding where to eat out. Since Bahrain did not have the right atmosphere to motivate AA and TA to eat outside the comfort of their home, HK had to rely on placing them in an imaginary scenario, by doing so the participants were allowed to be placed in a certain environment, an imaginary atmosphere that would allow them to decisively act in a certain way where they would realistically not have, this means that our meanings towards certain places is fluid, susceptible to change, and thus not solid. This reveals that during the moment the participants were self-indicating (Blumer 1969) their meaning towards the

comfort of their home and eating outside of their home. By going through that process, we were able to witness a change in behaviour and meaning towards the comfort and the influence that home has on the participants in relation to eating out. Furthermore, the people the participants tend to meet will affect their processes, with the example of YA and AS in G2, different processes such as emotional and motivation processes are dependent on the people attending, this means that the participants keep in consideration who will be there and thus adjust accordingly. Since interaction creates a social order and this order structures experience, a dialectical movement (Inglis 2019), the participants reveal that to prevent a negative experience, or to promote a positive experience, certain interactions the participants have to deal with are either avoided or prepared beforehand so that they are able to construct their own reality to their liking.

5.3. Theme: Eating Alone

Don't Go to McDonalds

DJ:
It takes a lot of confidence to eat alone
ES:
Wow could you stop saying that *laughs*
DJ:
Nooo! I'm impressed! It's the first time I say it!-
ES:
It's like you're saying you're soo brave *laughs*
DJ:
It's impressive
ES:
I eat alone a lot now
DJ:
I do it a lot when I'm abroad, but it's hard to do it, for me, in Bahrain. Some people can't physically do it
NM:
I've done it
DJ:
Would you go to Mirai alone?
ES:
If you have your phone it's fine. If I was craving Mirai I could go alone. On a Friday night? It's a flex
HF:
laughs
RESEARCHER:
Is there a difference eating, for example, McDonald's alone and Mirai alone?

ES, DJ and NM agree

ES:

Yeah like McDonald alone I would take McDonald's like I would order it home-

DJ:

And eat it at home-

ES:

Eat it at home, because I don't want people to see me in the drive through nor see me alone in a McDonald's

DJ:

That's worse-

ES:

Because that means I'm hitting rock bottom *group laughs* If I'm going to any other place other than a fast-food place that means I'm craving that place and I want to get it on my own.

DJ:

McDonalds inside makes you sad

ES:

Yeah even when you're with your friends

NM:

Yeah

ES:

And I pass by McDonald's drive through and I see the people sitting inside the window and I just wonder what happened in their lives

Conversation side-tracks

AM:

I want to go back to the whole eating alone thing, I disagree with ES when he said "I can't eat McDonald's by myself"-

NM:

It's something that you do eat by yourself-

ES:

No like I can't go to a McDonald's and have it in the place-

NM:

Yeah no not in the place-

ES:

Yeah but I'll order it, or I'll pick it up-

AM:

Ok what about like me on my lunch break, like no one is in the office, I don't have any food, I don't order because I'm gonna have to wait. I'm just going to go to the Avenues quickly, grab something quick. Normally I'd have Nature's Market and then one day I decide 'okay I'm going to McDonald's'-

ES:

Yeah ok pick it up-

AM:

I'm not going to go back to my office-

NM:

No but Avenues isn't depressing-

AM:

Yeah fair enough

ES:

Food courts differ from going to a McDonald's

NM:

Yea, either way it's terrible, but like that's my opinion

ES:

Because the food court is there mainly for the mall and you go to the food court to have a quick bite to eat and leave, alright? I'm ok with eating in a food court, but if you're in a McDonalds branch like the one in Osra or in Mercado and you're sitting inside the McDonald's that's sad-

5.3.1. Finding Description:

This conversation begins with DJ and ES talking about eating alone. DJ says it is impressive to eat alone, she used to do it a lot abroad but cannot do it Bahrain. DJ then brings up eating alone in Mirai, ES says he could if he had his phone, this would probably mean to keep him company or give him some sort of entertainment. I then took the opportunity to compare Mirai, an expensive restaurant, with McDonalds, a cheap restaurant. There is a difference. For McDonalds, the participants agreed that they would rather have it delivered and eaten at home, because as ES said "I don't want people to see me in the drive through nor see me alone in a McDonalds." DJ agrees by saying that is even worse. ES then goes on to make an example of McDonalds by saying that if he ate at McDonalds it would mean he is hitting rock bottom. He concludes on that thought that if he is eating alone in any fast food place that means he hit rock bottom, but if any other place other than a fast food place he's just craving their food. He also says that even if you are with your friends it is sad. AM then goes on later to bring back the subject of eating alone in McDonalds. AM brings up reasons to ES why he could choose to eat at McDonalds during his lunch break, he brought an example of him going to a food court. ES then goes to explain it's not the restaurant that's the problem but the branch, going and eating McDonalds in a food court is fine, but it shouldn't be eaten at their own branch place.

5.3.2. Sense-Making Process:

DJ describes an expectational process to ES's practice of eating alone, as confidence. I would consider confidence as an expectational process because DJ see's ES's confidence as being able to handle the outcomes of what one might face when eating alone (expectational) and is impressed by it. DJ then goes on to describe to the group a geographic process when she explains how she would eat alone when abroad but not in her own country, as it is for her hard to do physically. I then asked if there is a difference between eating alone in McDonald's and Mirai, the participants described a, identity, and locational dependent processes when

discussing the topic. Identity processes emerged when the participants described eating at McDonald's alone as sad, AM refuted that argument by adding the scenario of his lunch break at the McDonalds food court at the Avenues Mall. ES countered AM's claim with a locational dependent process that food courts are different from a branch and that going to a branch is sad, while a food court is fine since it is essentially part of a mall. Furthermore, with location dependant processes, the participants would rather order-in McDonalds than go there either by drive-through or sit-in, this is due to an identity process; where if a person is seen at a McDonalds they will be seen in a negative light by others, thus by ordering-in you separate the virtual and the actual social identity to avoid stigma.

Play It Cool When You're Eating Alone

YA:

Although I do think if you're gonna eat alone take a proper place, like, you wouldn't want to eat alone in Mirai or Meat Co. that's just awkward you're like *group laughs* it's so sad so if you're in a cafe preferably facing a wall, tables that are attached to a wall somewhere like that, or even in Mirai you know where the sushi bar is that's totally you know-

RESEARCHER:

It's fine to eat alone-

YA:

It is fine, it's just awkward you look weird you look like something's wrong unless you kind of play it cool and like leave a coat on the other chair you know and a bag so it looks like someone is there they left waiting for someone

AS:

The thing is in college. How many times have you actually just eaten alone because like you're waiting between classes. Like, you don't know anyone going from this class.

YA:

Yeah.

AS:

So you have to have something quick. That's where I go-

YA:

That's not in our culture, you know, not in our society-

AS:

No it's not *agreeing with*

YA:

But outside if you're abroad, whether you're studying or travelling, whatever, it's totally normal.

RESEARCHER:

Why is our culture not kinda find this normal?

YA:

We come from a social culture

AS:

And if you're gonna compare it to like a place like the U.S, or the U.K, where they value individualism over like actually doing group activities and all that, of course, it's a completely fine there, a lot of people do it

5.3.3. Finding Description:

Here YA brings up the perspective of seeing someone eating alone in a restaurant since eating alone in a restaurant for her is an awkward and sad position to be in. She then remedies this by saying that by placing yourself in a specific location in the restaurant, you may reduce the awkwardness. When I said it is fine to eat alone, she agrees but she adds that eating alone carries with it perceptions and assumptions, unless you act in a certain way and to make the illusion of someone will sit next to you. AS then gives a counter argument for quick breaks between classes where it is ok to eat alone, but then YA reminds him that it is not in our culture to do it and AS agrees. YA assures AS that if you are abroad then it is fine, since you are not in a place where its culture looks weirdly on eating alone. When I asked why it is not in our culture to eat alone, YA responded that our culture is a social culture. AS then goes to give an example that western countries like the U.S or the U.K embrace individualism, so eating alone or doing things alone is considered fine there.

5.3.4. Sense-Making Process:

YA describes a locational dependent, identity, cultural processes when talking about eating alone. The locational dependent process occurs when YA reflects upon the criteria that if you are going to eat alone, eat at a place that is seen as normal to eat alone, and not in a place that it would be seen as awkward to do so, thus the location where one resides to eat has the ability to label your actions as what is common for people to do or not. But she would consider the practice of eating alone as sad, thus as earlier stated above, an identity process where others will look upon a person and stigmatise them in a negative light. When AS tries to argue YA's claim, YA counters with a cultural claim where it is not the norm in the culture to eat alone; thus, as AS agrees with YA's statement that it is not in the norm of the culture to eat alone, AS goes on by describing a geographic, and cultural process by comparing Western cultures and Bahrain's culture of eating alone.

Don't Get Noticed

AN:
But if you're going out alone, I think that's where it becomes more uncomfortable and you start conforming.
AA:
So solo eating out is more affected by cultural expectations or cultural-
AN:
Blending in.
RESEARCHER:
What do you guys feel?
AN:

I think because already you're going out alone to eat, it's a bit… you'd want to try to in a way blend in and not be that beacon you know

AA:

Because already going out alone will gravitate attention

TA:

I develop the sense that when I go out eat out alone outside, I don't really care

AA:

Okay

TA:

From my repetition, even though I know I will stand out, I just

AA:

Was it like this from the beginning or this is an attitude you developed?

TA:

Attitude that was definitely developed, I'm more comfortable eating out alone-

AA:

And not caring about the cultural aspect-

TA:

No because why would you-

AA:

And this is also applying to also within Bahrain?

TA:

In Bahrain I wouldn't eat out alone as much. For example, I would go in the comfort zone of like me ordering-in rather than going out to a place and out alone even though I did it a couple of times, but there's still a preference to ordering-in so I think like with… In Bahrain, the thing is, it's funny in Bahrain it's… I don't know like because maybe there's people you're more familiar with? As opposed to if I'm outside and most people don't know me-

5.3.5. Finding Description:

AN talks about how eating alone is uncomfortable and you start conforming by blending in. AN says that eating out alone may allow for a person in Bahrain to behave like a beacon, which AA confirms and says that it brings attention. TA said that it took a while for him to eat out alone, it took repetitions for him to feel more comfortable when eating out alone, but when asked if this was in Bahrain, he said he wouldn't and would rather order-in because it's more of a comfort zone. TA goes on to explain how in Bahrain it's hard to eat out alone because there are more familiar people around thus they are able to identify him easier, while when he is abroad he is safe from being easily identified.

5.3.6. Sense-Making Process:

AN describes an emotional and identity process when talking about eating alone by saying that eating out alone creates discomfort, an emotional process, and that a person needs to conform and blend in, an identity process, where a person attempts to not seek too much attention to lower the chances of being seen. AA tries to relate the effects of eating out alone by saying "cultural expectation"; thus, AA reflects

on cultural and expectational processes one must consider. TA then describes geographic, emotional, social, identity, and cultural processes when he explains that in Bahrain, he would not eat out alone as much as he would if he was abroad (a geographic process), he would resort to comfort (an emotional process), by ordering-in to avoid people (a social process), to preserve his identity since culturally it's not seen as normal to eat out alone (identity and cultural processes).

5.3.7. Meanings associated within these processes

When the participants discuss eating alone, we see the dialectical movement (Inglis 2019) between the participants discussing how eating alone is not considered a norm in Bahraini culture, even with some interjections, the overall sense of the notion of eating alone resides on the emphasis of the practice being antithetical to the culture. Eating alone is seen as a risky practice for the participants, because what entails in that kind of practice is the constant battle for preserving identity in a culture that looks down upon eating alone, we are able to witness from the participants discussions how the virtual identity and the actual identity are separated and how stigma is avoided is constructed through their definitions and language use with each other (Goffman 1959). When the participants converse about the topic of eating alone, the participants keep an emphasis on how location, the culture, and the social aspect of it matters. Eating alone was discussed more by participants as unspoken rules - mutual knowledge (Giddens 1979, as cited by Inglis 2019) - that one should be wary of, it is seen as a stigma in the culture to be eating alone, on top of that the location where one resides to eat alone in, and that this kind of practice will gravitate unwanted attention. Culturally the participants compare Bahrain with other Western cultures as a mechanism to construct the justification that eating alone in Bahrain is not the norm.

6. Conclusion and Further Reflection

The participants during their discussions were collectively making sense of different processes by describing their stories and thoughts, debating, convincing, and arguing with one another, all of which the participants were giving meanings to their experiences with one another.

Three prominent themes emerged through my research. 1- Attire, 2- Ambiance and Social Interaction, 3- Eating Alone. When it comes to Attire, there is a relationship between what and how a person chooses to wear and how it makes them feel. This then guides the decision of what to wear when going out. In terms of Ambiance and Social Interaction, decision making was dependent on pre-existing conditions, such as a desire to celebrate a certain occasion which will then affect the decision of where to go and who to invite. Through studying eating out alone, social and cultural norms became prominent in discussion. Participants implicitly and explicitly agreed that there are certain cultural stigmas to avoid that impacts their decision to eat out alone. Through their interaction with one another, participants made sense of the above processes through communicating their subjective viewpoints and made sense of reality through their interaction with one another and which allowed room for reflection, which gave meaning to their individual/collective processes.

Reflecting on these themes, to look at oneself from the perspective of another, goes across Attire, Ambience and Social Interaction, and Eating Alone when the participants spoke about eating out. What they wear depends on the place, and how others think of them. When the participants describe the process of where to go, they look to their future-self in that certain restaurant; entailing considerations with an other-perspective on the self. In eating alone, the lonely self would consider the look and thoughts from the perspective of an external observer.

These stories and scenarios that the participants are constructing are visual, like when they speak about waiting alone in the driveway of McDonalds or remembering how it was at college when having a fast bite between lectures. These stories and scenarios are spoken from an other-position. Existing alongside the other-perspective is the internal-perspective. To consider what the person is craving, or what clothes would make a person feel good is in itself an internal-perspective with the self because at those brief moments they are showing what

matters to them without the other-perspective, it becomes a personal thing to them, a personal connection that has nothing to do with the other.

To reflect on consumption is to look at yourself as a consumer with an other-perspective and an internal-perspective. The sensemaking in a consumption process is rather imagining how I will appear with my new commodity, in the new situation, and to consider how I will feel and think when experiencing my new commodity. If that is the case, facilitation of changes of consumption, eating out or other, needs to take into consideration the iteration between the other-position alongside the internal-position of a consumer and address the dialect and take into consideration both positions.

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8. Appendix 1

8.1. Interview guide

Structure of the discussion
    Introduction
    Introduce the topic of discussion and why they are here.
    Rules:

1. This will be recorded, everybody will be anonymous

2. No more than 2 hours long, unless necessary

3. Everybody goes around and introduces themselves

4. Let them know the purpose of this study / Rules

5. It is a group discussion

6. There are no right and wrong answers

7. Not to direct their answers to me but to the group

8. Feel free to express yourself

9. Let them know that I am just here not to just act as a neutral/objective figure but I'm here just to make sure that if our topic of discussion goes off topic, I bring it back.

10. Keep it friendly and be open minded with other opinions and answers

11. Try your best to not interrupt another person when they are speaking

12. Feel free to have tea and food whenever you want

13. Clear and concise English for the purpose of the recording

14. Feel free to question another person in the group, but do not antagonize them.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is eating out and why do we do it? (warm up group discussion)

2. What are the processes (the things you do and consider) before eating out?

3. What are the pros and cons of eating out?

4. How does culture play a role on you when you are planning on eating out?

5. What makes you want to eat out?

6. What do you consider is important to do before eating out?

7. Is there a difference between eating out with your friends and with your family?

8. Transportation methods

9. How do you decide on where to eat?

10. Why is it important on what you wear when eating out?

11. Group coordination of eating out

12. Eating alone: How do you feel about eating alone? What are some of the reasons?