Dining in the City: Server Behaviors, Time Preferences, and the Effect of Urbanization in Restaurants

Melissa Baker [a], Suzanne K. Murrmann [b] & Claudia Green [c]

[a] Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA

[b] Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA

[c] Lubin School of Business, Pace University, New York, NY, USA
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MELISSA BAKER

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA

SUZANNE K. MURRMANN

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA

CLAUDIA GREEN

Lubin School of Business, Pace University, New York, NY, USA

In this research the authors examine the importance of server behaviors and time expectations of restaurant patrons through analysis of consumer preferences in an urban and less urbanized market. Results indicate the dimensions of sanitation and accommodation are most important to both samples. Server responsiveness, friendliness, knowledge, time between arriving and seating, and time between receiving a menu and order taken are statistically different for these two groups. Managerial implications note that foodservice providers with multiple units across the United States may not want to use a one-size-fits-all service delivery model as the importance of server behaviors and time expectations varies by urbanization.

KEYWORDS urban, subculture, customer satisfaction, server behavior, time, restaurant

Address correspondence to Melissa Baker, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, UMass Amherst, 90 Campus Center Way, Amherst, MA 01003, USA. E-mail: mbaker@isenberg.umass.edu

INTRODUCTION

Frontline employee behavior and delivering high quality customer service play an important part in the perceptions of the hospitality experience and satisfaction (Butcher, Sparks, & McColl-Kennedy, 2009). Research suggests that increasing customer satisfaction may be achieved by modifying both tangible and intangible aspects of the service (Becker & Murrmann, 1999). One under-researched way is to better understand the importance of customer-contact employees behavior. However, little attention is given to the exploration of behaviors displayed by frontline personnel who play a key role in creating satisfactory service encounters (Kim, McCahon, & Miller, 2003). Understanding the service initiatives that a customer considers valuable is critical (Butcher et al., 2009). Some customers may perceive some aspect of a service as unimportant while for other customers it is critical (Nasution & Movando, 2008). One approach would be to examine the expressed customer importance of employee behaviors typically displayed during the service exchange. In other words, critical and untapped research exists regarding the importance customers place on standard restaurant waitstaff behaviors.

A second way of increasing customer satisfaction may be through delivering appropriately timed service. Wait time is considered a key factor for customer satisfaction (Lee & Lambert, 2000). Research suggests that a waiter's pace in serving a meal and attention to a customer's readiness for the next steps of service should influence perceptions of service (Wall & Berry, 2007) and satisfaction. Time duration for different parts of the dining experience may need to be managed carefully as some customers may place different levels of importance on their waiting experiences for each service stage (Hwang & Lambert, 2005). Few studies have explicitly examined how long customers believe is appropriate for a service encounter to last and it is argued that research in this area would have considerable value to restaurant operators (Kimes, Wirtz, & Noone, 2002).

Previous research also indicates that enhanced ways of understanding how to adapt service delivery behavior to the values of major cultural groups would be extremely beneficial to hospitality managers (Mattila, 2000). There is also sufficient evidence that using a nation as a proxy for culture can lead to erroneous results, and there has been a call for research that examines subcultures (Lenartowicz, Johnson, & White, 2003). However, despite these calls, studies rarely use sampling procedures that assess the differences between subcultures (Becker & Murrmann, 1999; Lenartowicz et al., 2003) such as level of urbanization. More specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau defines urbanized areas as at least 2,500 persons with at least 600 people per square mile (U.S. Census, n.d.). The level of urbanization varies based on the population, with New York City as one of the most highly urbanized areas at over 17 million people. In sociology, urbanization refers to the beliefs,

attitudes, behavioral patterns, and activities of the area population as it is organized to control, utilize, and consume goods and services (Lampard, 1961; Perloff, Dunn, Lampard, & Muth, 1960). Hence subcultures, such as degree of urbanization, are conceptually based on cultural values, refer to a subgroup within a society, and are usually identified in social science literature by a particular region (Lenartowicz et al., 2003) or urbanized area (Gronhaug & Kleppe, 2010).

This topic is extremely relevant as domestic markets continue to expand in both numbers of locations, with respect to customer demographics, and because of the expansion of American-style casual chain restaurants represent a growing segment of business development. Foodservice providers with multiple units across multiple markets may not want to use a one-size-fits-all service delivery model. A standardized or scripted approach to service, waitstaff behaviors, and wait time may not yield the same levels of satisfaction from different customers and across different levels of urbanized markets. Furthermore, an understanding of the differing nature of business in urban and less urbanized areas is of crucial importance (Westhead & Wright, 1998) and that a comparison between the level of urbanization of consumers can offer much needed insight (Cullen & Kingston, 2009; Douglas & Craig, 2011; Sun & Wu, 2004). By accommodating the sub-cultural based guest needs, a firm may be able to create a competitive advantage.

Therefore, in this study we attempt to close these gaps by investigating the influence of subculture on consumer preferences of behavioral and timing dimensions in a casual, full-service restaurant setting, through methodological sampling concentrating on two sub-cultural groups: highly urbanized and less urbanized restaurant patrons. We focus on four main research objectives. First, we seek to determine the importance level of different behaviors typically exhibited by a server during the restaurant dining service encounter. Second, we seek to determine the acceptable waiting times for the different stages of the service duration. Third, we seek to use the behaviors and time expectations to examine the differences that urbanization plays, using a highly and less urbanized sample. Fourth, we seek to determine if differences exist for the demographic variables of age, gender, and income.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction, while linked to service quality, is a broader concept (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). Customer satisfaction requires a transaction specific experience with the service, while quality can be perceived without a consumption experience or as an overall evaluation (Oliver, 1993). According to the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm, a customer evaluates satisfaction by

comparing previously held expectations with the perceived service performance. In addition, a positive or negative affect arises from the customers' cognitive process of confirmation/disconfirmation which contributes to the corresponding satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1993; Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997). Although researchers struggle to clearly define the concept of customer satisfaction, it is generally agreed that it is an evaluation process (Back, 2005). Different individuals evaluate components of the service independently and differently (Chang, 2008), and it is thus important to research how different groups view the different components, which, within the hospitality sector, are often delivered through customer-contact employees.

Customer-Contact Employees

Because hospitality services are personnel driven, the social nature of the face-to-face encounters between hospitality service providers and their customers is an essential feature (Becker, Murrmann, Murrmann, & Cheung, 1999). As the essence of service is the performance, customer-contact employees serve as a vital link between the external customer, the environment, and the internal operations of the organization (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). In addition, customer-contact employees serve the critical function of understanding, filtering, and interpreting information and resources to and from the organization and its customers (Kee-Fu & Ap, 2007).

The success and failure of service delivery can largely depend on the attitudes and behaviors of the contact employees (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Kee-Fu & Ap, 2007). One study finds that employee behavior is the most influential factor in shaping customer's perceptions (Berry & Lampo, 2004). Another finds that humanistic clues dominate mechanic clues in influencing service perceptions for the casual-dining restaurant diners (Wall & Berry, 2007). Researchers generally agree that employee behaviors can greatly affect customer satisfaction (Kim, Tavitiyaman, & Kim, 2009).

Satisfaction in exchanges is not a universal phenomenon and people will get different responses out of the same experience, as customers have different needs, objectives, and cultural backgrounds that usually affect perceptions and satisfaction (Davis, Lockwood, & Stone, 1998). Communication between guests and front-line employees involves more than spoken words; it involves an understanding of deeper cultural differences (Heo, Jogaratnam, & Buchanan, 2004). Given that American casual full-service restaurants are expanding throughout the United States, waitstaff behavior should be reevaluated from a sub-cultural perspective.

Server Behavior

Early studies in satisfaction focused on such dimensions as employee greeting, restaurant atmosphere, speed of service, and convenience

(Knutson, 1988). Employees display different affective characteristics such as friendliness and responsiveness. These can positively influence customers' overall perceptions and evaluation of service experiences (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). The development of definitive and actionable standards requires the identification of those characteristics of style and substance that customers actually use when assessing service performances (Czepiel, 1990). A behaviorally based measurement instrument would minimize ambiguity inherent in the use of evaluation criteria that rely on subjectively interpreted concepts (Becker et al., 1999).

Because the quality of service can vary from one employee to another, from one customer to another, there is a high potential for variability in service. Service variability may be seen as a business opportunity because it is possible to provide customized service to each individual customer (Iglesias & Yague, 2004). Prior research shows that groups differ in their preferences of communication and that the behavioral norms and attitudes that reflect the consumer's ideal components of service might be largely dependent on cultural orientation (Winsted, 1997; Mattila, 1999). Some cultures have a preference for high-context communications (nonverbal, indirect, and implicit) while other cultures prefer low-context communication (explicit, direct, and unambiguous; Mattila, 1999). In addition, common non-verbal behaviors used in the hospitality sector, especially restaurants, such as facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, body movement, posture, physical appearance, and touching are interpreted differently between cultures (Holtzman, Murthy, & Gordon, 1991).

Some research urges that cultural customization is critical, especially in the training and behavior of customer-contact employees. Hospitality managers need to be aware of the parts of the consumer experiences that are open to cultural influences in contrast with those that remain stable across cultures (Mattila, 2000). Some customers may perceive an aspect of a service as being comparatively unimportant while for others it is critical (Nasution & Movando, 2008). This notion is very important for researchers and practitioners to better understand, and to date, there have been few empirical studies that have examined it.

Subculture

While researchers' commentary on the importance of cross-cultural differences is evident, (Becker et al., 1999; Mattila, 2000; Kimes et al., 2002; Kee-Fu & Ap, 2007) research empirically examining subculture is scarce. There is a need to address cultural differences, perhaps through a rural and urban sample (Becker & Murrmann, 1999). Cross-cultural studies in management have not considered intracultural heterogeneity, often assuming and reporting that domestic populations are culturally homogenous (Adler, Doktor, & Redding, 1986). Subjective concepts such as courtesy or empathy are not free from

intracultural interpretation. As a result, customers' expectations for service delivery behaviors and their subsequent assessments of service performance are inseparable from the prevailing societal norms and cultural influences that govern their social interactions in general (Becker et al., 1999; Leung & Bond, 1989). Hofstede (1983) states that the essence of culture is a collective mental programming that conditions, constrains, and reinforces the thinking process and results in observable differences in the behavior patterns of its members. He further asserts, however, that the same dimensions that differentiate among national cultures also apply to subcultures within countries (Hofstede, 1991).

Even though boundaries are easy to identify, it does not make them an appropriate criteria for segmenting behavior and preferences (Lenartowicz et al., 2003). Country and culture are not synonymous, as only a few small countries may be culturally homogenous, and different countries may share similar culture traits (Furrer, Lui, & Sudharshan, 2000). Criteria for dividing the main society into subcultures may include ethnicity, religion, region, and demographic/socioeconomic characteristics (Lenartowicz et al., 2003). As much as different cultures possess different thinking processes and conditions, different locales may also possess such differing characteristics and preferences. That is to say, behaviors and preferences perceived positively from one region or area may not be universal. Heterogeneity exists within countries and a greater understanding may be a key element in segmentation decisions and implementation of a service (Douglas & Craig, 2011)

In sociology, the way people live, their consumption patterns, and values vary across social groups, and these differences in lifestyle are indicators of subculture. The lifestyle concept is related to such classes of urban and suburban forms of social life, such that it segments these groups because of differences in attitudes and opinions (Gronhaug & Kleppe, 2010). More specifically, a subculture is identified through a selected combination of demographic and psychographic variables that signify sub-group identity based upon a set of shared needs, experiences, and activities (Becker & Murrmann, 1999). For example, McDonald's uses this concept in developing regional menu items such as sweet tea in the South and the lobster roll in New England. With the expansion of chain restaurants, it is important to research the differences across subcultures that are important factors in determining desirable behaviors. While this has been examined in marketing, (Gronhaug & Kleppe, 2010) there is little empirical research examining behavioral dimensions within the service context.

Urbanization

Research demonstrates that it is necessary to consider the socio-structural factors and socialization experiences through which people form their attitudes.

One way to measure this concept is through rural and urban sampling. Investigating differences in subcultures, especially such as level of urbanization, would be of great interest to researchers and practitioners (Berenguer, Corraliza, & Martin, 2005; Douglas & Craig, 2011; Schopphoven, 1991). Urban and suburban forms of social life are identified as segments of subculture because of differences in attitudes and opinions. Specifically, urbanization is based on population size (U.S. Census) and the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the urban area's population (Lampard, 1961; Perloff et al., 1960). Hence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers in a less urbanized area (such as suburbs) and a highly urbanized area (such as a major city) may vary. An understanding of the differing nature of business in highly urban and less urbanized areas is of crucial importance (Westhead & Wright, 1998). A marketing approach focused on a more rural versus more urban context can provide important insights as to how a product or service can best be designed to fit the consumption context (Douglas & Craig, 2011).

Furthermore, comparison between the level of urbanization of consumers can offer much needed insight as the level of urbanization impacts living and consumption patterns most notably in relation to socialization, entertainment, and leisure behavior (Douglas & Craig, 2011; Sun & Wu, 2004). For example some people seek high privacy and others low which is studied in terms of seating preference, but has not been examined in terms of social factors or server behaviors (Hwang & Yoon, 2009) nor examined in terms of subculture and urbanization. Only a few studies have explored the regional (geographical) variations in consumer characteristics and their implications. Therefore, we are unable to provide specific directional hypotheses regarding preferences for server behaviors in this study. However, the limited studies examining urbanization have found differences between the two groups. Behavior regarding food consumption varies with the degree of urbanization (Kim & Geistfeld, 2003). Customers in highly urban locations are found to dine out more frequently and spend more money at restaurants (Cullen & Kingston, 2009; Kim & Geistfeld, 2003) and customer satisfaction of wait times varies significantly based on rural or urban location (Davis & Vollman, 1990).

> *H1:* There are significant differences in the level of importance of behaviors displayed by servers between the highly urbanized and less urbanized customers.

Expectations of Time

Most studies involving time focus on the relationship between perceived and actual wait time (Kimes et al., 2002), reducing perceived waiting time (Dickson, Ford, & Laval, 2005), or dining duration related to revenue

management (Kimes, 2008). Customer perceptions of time may differ from objective, measured time (Gail & Scott, 1995) where objective time is measured as the expectations by customers before consumption (Taylor, 1994; Davis & Vollman, 1990). Satisfaction is often measured as expectations minus perceptions (Oliver, 1997) therefore, to assess the effects of waiting time on customer satisfaction, it is important to assess objective time. "While it is evident that studies to date have addressed the concept of time, no study has explicitly examined how long customers think a service encounter should last. Such research would have considerable value to restaurant operators and to other services" (Kimes et al., 2002, p. 223). Therefore, to address this gap, this research addresses customer expectations of time in order to better understand customer expectations of time at the different meal duration stages. Through better understanding of expectations, managers can alter the design and delivery of the service stages and improve satisfaction.

A server's pacing in serving a meal and attention to customer's readiness for the next steps of service will influence perceptions of service (Wall & Berry, 2007). The notion of time as a valued commodity is well established in the United States where standards for the provision of service are often dominated by time criteria such as beverages being served within 2 minutes of ordering, lunch being served 12 minutes of ordering, and the check being dropped within 3 minutes of serving dessert or coffee (Becker & Murrmann, 1999). When customers enter a service system, they have specific expectations regarding the acceptable wait time that leads to satisfaction (Taylor, 1994). In other words, using customer expectations of wait time may be very important in gauging their satisfaction for the restaurant service delivered. Time dimensions need to be managed carefully as some customers may place different levels of importance on their waiting experiences for each service stage including the arrival, greeting, seating, ordering, serving, receiving check, and payment processing (Hwang & Lambert, 2005), as preferences may vary based on a variety of individual characteristics.

However, this assertion does not consider that customers are not homogenous and that time expectations may vary by culture. Anecdotal information suggests that time, particularly the customer's propensity to spend time waiting, may be conditioned and reinforced as a function of culture (Hofstede, 1983). Other research expresses the belief that time expectations are not contingent upon an individual's national culture as they are upon an individual's operating culture (Guy, Rittenberg, & Hawes, 1984). Satisfaction with a service is found to vary based on a rural or urban location for nursing (Elder et al., 2003) and marketing (Davis & Vollman, 1990), where both studies found a statistically significant difference.

> *H2:* There are significant differences in casual restaurant customers' expectation of satisfactory waiting times between the highly urbanized and less urbanized sample.

METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument was developed by Becker et al. (1999) to measure server behavior characteristics and timing preferences that customers felt were the most important indicators of satisfactory restaurant service. The published survey and scale used minimizes the potential for subjective interpretation, is free of cultural bias, and facilitates the identification of actionable standards at the applicable level (Becker et al., 1999). To control for the influence of intervening sources of heterogeneity, casual, full-service restaurants were selected as the particular subset. We defined casual, full-service restaurants by providing specific examples atop the survey of chain operations such as T.G.I. Friday's, Chili's, and Applebee's. In addition, these operations were defined as possessing an informal atmosphere, which included being greeted by a host, being escorted to a table by the host, presented a menu at a table by the waiter, having a food order taken by the waiter, having food presented at the table by the waiter, having the bill presented at the table by the waiter, and having the bill collected at the table by the waiter or at the checkout counter by the cashier.

As casual full-service restaurants are often visited by local residents (Becker et al., 1999), this maximized the opportunity for including experienced customers in this research project. As prior research has shown that respondents have different pacing expectations for different restaurant types (Hwang & Lambert, 2005; Noone, Kimes, Mattila, & Wirtz, 2007), and to control for this potential difference, we chose casual full-service restaurants which were described to respondents on the survey instrument.

The data consists of two samples, one highly urbanized and the other less urbanized. The less urbanized population was sampled from southwestern Virginia and central Kansas while the highly urbanized sample was taken from New York City. The determination of the highly and less urbanized areas were qualified based on the results of the most recent census available, the 2000 census of population and housing for the United States. The census bureau determined the level of urbanization using the urban area criteria published in the Federal Registry in March 2002 (U.S. Census). The southwestern Virginia area was classified as an urban area with a population of 57,236 and the Kansas area was classified as an urban cluster with a population of 46,671. Both are classified as being urbanized, but on the lowest end of the classification spectrum. Conversely, the New York City area is classified as an urban area with a population of 17,799,861, being one of the most highly urbanized areas (U.S. Census, 2000). Diners from rural areas were not deemed appropriate based on the limited existence of causal restaurants in these areas that serve these patrons.

Following the procedural guidelines associated with cross culture research, a narrow sample strategy was used to control for extraneous factors to the objectives of this research. The approach emphasized the selection of

two groups of respondents who were well matched and similar in many aspects except for that of subculture. In order to ensure the respondents represented the population of interest, all respondents were employed adult residents of the urban areas drawn from the faculty of business and professional colleges. While the sample represents a convenience sample, it also represents permanent residents of the urban areas, and a population segment that has a high rate of restaurant usage. It is therefore justifiable and appropriate for the context and purposes of this research. Data collected resulted in 181 completed questionnaires for the highly urbanized sample and 178 for the less urbanized sample.

Data were collected over the period of two years and service encounter expectations were assessed using a self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended items. In the first section, the situation was described and respondents were asked to refer to their dinner experiences at casual, full-service restaurants. The survey used all original 38 items (Becker et al., 1999) that listed behaviors that restaurant servers might engage in as they perform their jobs. The respondents were to rate how important each behavior is in determining their satisfaction with the service. Responses were based on a 5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = *not at all important* and 5 = *extremely important*. The second section asked respondents to select the time interval that best fit the time they would find acceptable or preferred to wait for each of the four services indicated. The first service involved the time period from arriving at the restaurant to being seated at a table, the second service measured the time period from receiving a menu to before the server returns to take the order, the third time period measured between placing the order to when the server brings the order to the table, and the fourth time period measured the time between meal completion to when the server brings the check. Each variable was assessed by six equal time interval measures: 5 minutes or less, 6–10 minutes, 11–15 minutes, 16–20 minutes, 21–25 minutes, and 26 minutes or longer. The third section asked respondents to provide demographic information.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Demographics

Table 1 presents a demographic profile of the less urbanized and highly urbanized participants of this study. The less urbanized sample is predominantly from the United States as their country of birth, while the highly urbanized sample was more heterogeneous with 36.5% having been born outside of the United States. However, respondents represented 34 international countries, with no more than six respondents from one country. Therefore, while more heterogeneous, respondents were more representative of the target New York City "multicultural" population (McQuarrie & Marwell,

TABLE 1 Demographic Profile of Less Urbanized and Highly Urbanized Samples

	Less Urbanized		Highly Urbanized	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender				
Male	79	43.6	65	40.0
Female	102	56.4	110	60.0
Age				
20 and under	2	1.1	20	11.5
21–25	46	25.4	59	33.9
26–30	20	11.0	29	16.7
31–35	14	7.7	9	5.2
36–40	20	11.0	7	4.0
41–45	23	12.7	8	4.6
46–50	26	14.4	8	4.6
51–55	13	7.2	13	7.5
56 and over	17	9.4	21	12.1
Country of birth				
US	177	97.8	110	65.5
Other	4	2.2	68	34.5
Income				
$15,000 and under	20	11.0	15	9.3
$15,001– $30,000	21	11.6	23	14.3
$30,001–$45,000	22	12.2	27	16.8
$45,001–$60,000	31	17.1	25	15.5
$60,001–$75,000	31	17.1	16	9.9
above $75,001	53	29.3	55	34.3
Number of times dining out at a full service restaurant in the past six months				
0 to 5	35	20.1	56	34.1
6 to 10	44	25.3	53	32.3
11 to 15	33	18.5	19	11.6
16 to 20	22	12.2	18	11.0
21 to 25	16	8.8	15	9.1
26 to 30	8	4.4	7	4.3
31 and above	16	9.0	6	3.7

2009). Both samples had a high percentage of respondents dining out frequently. The less urbanized and highly urbanized samples had 54.6% and 33.6% of respondents dining out at least 11 times during a 6 month period.

Factor Analysis

The study used the original 38 server behavior items developed by Becker et al. (1999) as opposed to their final 27 item scale developed using a cross national sample. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation was used to assess the number of underlying dimensions in the data and was deemed the appropriate option for use with a U.S. sample. With the objective of obtaining a power level of 80%, the use of a .05 significance level, and

the assumption of standard errors of factor loadings being larger than typical correlation coefficients, factor loadings above .40 for the sample size were required and used (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Five items were deleted as they did not load highly on any factor. A second factor analysis was conducted where a seven factor solution composed of 33 items was secured. The factor pattern was readily interpretable and accounted for 55.3% of the total variance. Table 2 provides the list of the seven factors, along with a breakdown of the items included in each with associated factor loadings, Eigenvalues, and reliability scores.

Coefficient alpha was employed to judge data dimensionality and reliability of each of the separate factors. Research commonly suggests Cronbach's alpha to be .70 or above and that those with correlations at .3 or below to be deleted (Nunnally, 1978). While two factors had reliabilities of .548 and .580, they were included in the factor analysis based on face validity, possessing Eignevalues over 1.0, and to allow for the additional explanation of variance. Construct validity implies that the empirical evidence generated by a measure is consistent with the theoretical logic about the concepts (Zikmund, 1997) where convergent validity refers to the ability of some measures to correlate with measures of the same construct and discriminant validity implies that a measure has a low correlation with measures of dissimilar concepts (Zikmund, 1997). Therefore, we sought to determine if the measures accurately measure the factors. Each factor was deemed to have appropriate content validity and discriminant validity based on the loading of the separate factors because the factors are uncorrelated in orthogonal rotation.

In order to assess the importance level for each of the server behavior dimensions, scores on the items included in each factor were coded into summary variables and named to provide a uni-dimensional aggregate score for each. Both the less and highly urbanized samples ranked the dimensions in the same order viewing sanitation as the most important, followed by accommodation, privacy, table maintenance, responsiveness, and knowledge. Interestingly, friendliness was found to be the least important behavior to display. The aggregate scores for each of the five factors were used to compare the magnitude of the importance between the less urbanized and highly urbanized groups. To test this, a multivariate analysis of variance was performed to assess the joint effects of the subculture differences on the importance of behaviors and timing variables associated with casual restaurant dining. The results in Table 3 display the multivariate analysis for each factor. The three dimensions of responsiveness, knowledge, and friendliness were found to be significant at the $p = .05$ level between the highly and less urbanized samples and the sanitation dimension was marginally significant at the $p = .10$ level.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) analysis revealed that gender, age, and income were all shown to have a statistically significant

TABLE 2 Summarized Factor Loadings of Waitstaff Behavior Items

	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Sanitation		7.56	22.9	.851
The server's hair is neat and well groomed	.876			
The server's hair is clean and restrained	.867			
The server's nails and hands are well manicured	.778			
The server's clothes are well maintained	.739			
The server avoids touching the surface of eating utensils	.508			
Factor 2: Accommodation		2.69	8.1	.749
The server accommodates special requests of the customer	.718			
The server provides for the customer's special needs when asked	.691			
The server clarifies any uncertainty about food items listed on the menu	.546			
The server delivers menu items to the table in proper sequence	.491			
The server makes direct eye contact with the customer	.486			
The server adapts the pace of service to meet the customers needs	.458			
Factor 3: Knowledge		2.43	7.4	.741
The server explains menu item ingredients	.695			
The server assists the customer in deciding what to order	.654			
The server suggests menu items suited to the individual customer's preferences	.623			
The server explains how menu items are prepared or cooked	.612			
The server thoroughly explains menu specials	.528			
Factor 4: Friendliness		1.67	5.1	.716
The server behaves in a way that entertains the customer	.698			
The server provides friendly conversation	.620			
The server entertains the customers with jokes or stories	.580			
The server behaves in a casual manner	.477			
When dining alone, the server spends more time conversing with the customer	.444			
The server behaves in a formal manner	.406			
The server smiles when greeting the customer				

(*Continued*)

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TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 5: Responsiveness		1.43	4.3	.757
The server adjusts the service style according to the customer's mood	.724			
The server is sensitive to the customer's mood	.721			
The server attends to special customer needs without being asked	.657			
Factor 6: Table maintenance		1.29	3.9	.548
When customers know what they want to order, the server does not offer additional choices	.596			
The server changes dishes when necessary	.501			
The server replenishes beverages frequently, without being asked	.456			
The server is prompt in removing dishes after the customer has completed his course	.456			
Factor 7: Privacy		1.19	3.6	.58
The server allows the customer opportunity for privacy	.411			
The server doesn't interrupt if customers are conversing among themselves	.714			
The server knows when the customer does not want to be bothered	.710			
Total			55.3	

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TABLE 3 Comparison of Importance Levels for Summary Dimensions of Restaurant Service

	Less Urbanized ($n = 174$)		Highly Urbanized ($n = 175$)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F ratio	p level
Multivariate test					5.55	.000
Univariate tests						
Sanitation	3.9	.83	4.06	.84	2.82	.094
Accommodation	3.88	.59	3.91	.63	.176	.675
Responsiveness	3.31	.86	3.12	.96	3.8	.050
Knowledge	2.79	.72	3.07	.79	12.07	.001
Friendliness	2.31	.51	2.49	.72	7.76	.006

difference for the seven behavior dimensions. Sanitation (F = 11.58, p = .001) and Knowledge (F = 4.66, p = .032) were found to differ significantly for males and females where females rated the importance higher than males. Post-hoc Tukey's tests were performed to determine which of the age categories displayed the significant difference between age groups. The accommodation factor showed a difference between age groups (p = .004) as well as the friendliness factor (p = .000). The importance of accommodation differed significantly between age groups of 25 and under and 46 to 55 (p = .008) as well as between 26–35 and 46–55 (p = .017). The importance of friendliness differed significantly between those 25 and under (M = 2.73, SD = .748) and all other age groups (p < .001) and between ages 26–35 and ages 56 and older (p = .003). Based on the results, behaviors of friendliness are most important to those customers 25 and younger.

In addition, to test the second hypothesis that time expectations differ between the two subcultures, a MANOVA was performed to assess the effects of subculture differences on the four timing variables associated with casual restaurant dining. Although categorical, because the intervals between the time periods are known and equal, the data was treated as interval data. The MANOVA revealed that the overall main effects associated with the less and highly urbanized subculture differences were statistically significant (F= 2.98, p = .021). Responses were then transformed from the time intervals to the associated time preference ranges. The longest waiting period is preferred to be between the completion of the meal and before the server brings the check, between a range of 10.38 and 13.3 minutes, and the shortest time period should be between receiving a menu and placing an order, between a range of 6.84 minutes and 7.40 minutes. Results of the MANOVA for the wait time levels are summarized in Table 4. The individual analysis of the four items for wait time preferences indicated that the acceptable wait time prior to seating was higher for the less urbanized sample than the highly urbanized sample and was statistically significant (F = 5.11, p = .024). The highly urbanized sample responded with a higher mean regarding the wait time

TABLE 4 Multivariate Analysis for Comparison of Preference Levels for Wait Time

	Less urbanized (n = 175)			Highly urbanized (n = 168)			F ratio	p level
	Time Interval	Mean Time Category	SD	Time Interval	Mean Time Category	SD		
Multivariate test							2.98	.021
Univariate tests								
After arriving at this type of restaurant, I find it acceptable to wait about ___ before being seated	6.84 to 7.40 minutes	2.14	1.08	6.12 to 6.20 minutes	2.02	1.03	5.11	.024
After receiving a menu, I would like to have about ___ before the server returns to take my order	5.73 to 8.65 minutes	1.73	.579	5.86 to 9.30 minutes	1.86	.56	4.6	.033
After placing my order, I prefer to wait about ___ before the server brings my order to the table	10.20 to 13.0 minutes	2.70	.936	10.02 to 12.70 minutes	2.67	.95	.089	.766
After completing my meal, I would like to be able to linger at the table ___ before the server brings my check	10.38 to 13.30 minutes	2.73	1.24	10.38 to 13.30 minutes	2.73	1.22	.002	.969

Note: Time category 1 = less than 5 minutes

Time category 2 = 6–10 minutes

Time category 3 = 11–15 minutes

Time category 4 = 16–20 minutes

Time category 5 = 21–26 minutes

Time category 6 = more than 26 minutes

between receiving a menu and placing an order (F = 4.6, p = .033). There were no statistically significant differences found for the other two timing items. Of the demographic variables, only gender exhibited a statistically significant difference. After completing the meal, females preferred to linger longer at the table before being presented with the check (F = 9.54, p = .002)

DISCUSSION

Sanitation is the most important factor to the highly and less urbanized groups and therefore constitutes a major area of concern and concentration for foodservice customers. While only marginally statistically significant, the highly urbanized sample did rate sanitation as more important than the less urbanized sample. This may be because of the governmental regulations by the health department whereby heath department grades are prominently posted in New York City restaurant windows and near entrances for all to see. Because scores are prominently displayed, it may make more urban consumers more cognizant of sanitation because there is a constant grade posted. In addition, more urbanized customers may still rely upon their own experience to assess potential risks for casual restaurants. Customers judge a restaurant in terms of unkempt uniforms, employee cleanliness, and sanitation (Seidman & Johnson, 2002). More specifically, customers in more urbanized areas may place a greater focus on attire, appearance, and overall looks in determining cleanliness and sanitation levels of employees. Attempts to determine employee appearance are regarded as legitimate managerial interventions for companies aiming to provide a desired level (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Regardless of sanitation and safety regulations, some foodservice operations do not maintain appropriate sanitation practices. A recent study found that during participant observation some of the most common violations included lack of hair restraints, lack of glove use, and lack of hand washing (Satow, Inciardi, & Wallace, 2009). These findings demonstrate that although restaurants may be aware they should practice proper sanitation, they may not actually be practicing proper sanitation and thus is an important finding in this research. To ensure the highest level of sanitation and cleanliness, managers may need to educate the staff, conduct uniform checks, and keep a diligent watch of hand washing and handling practices exhibited by their staff. In addition, table maintenance and pre-bussing should be viewed as increasingly important and may warrant a specific employee to maintain clean tables, such as a server assistant or busperson.

The Accommodation dimension ranked second among both groups in overall importance and is especially important for age groups under 35 years old. The United States is shown to exhibit a very strong desire

and acclamation toward individualism and self-interest (Hofstede, 1983). Higher levels of individualism and self-interest are displayed by members of Generation X and Y. Such behaviors relate to providing for customers specific needs and desires. Restaurants should continue to cater to individual customer needs, performing the necessary accommodations regardless of customer subculture. The specialized treatment and accommodation of specific requests presents evidence that such treatment is the expected norm. Furthermore, it is suggested that service customization may be critical to gaining competitive advantage.

Privacy ranks the third most important factor by both samples. The dimension of privacy can involve a customer contact employee managing the balance of being attentive toward the customer while not bothering or interrupting the dining party. The importance of privacy may be of more importance to those groups who want a more unobtrusive, more seamless service style. While not statistically significant, the highly urbanized sample did rate the behaviors toward privacy as more important than their less urbanized counterparts. Table maintenance is the next most important behavior for servers to engage in at casual restaurants, which was a unique dimension differing from those found in the Becker et al., (1999) study. Clean, well-maintained tables should be an important focus of job responsibility in order to aid in customer satisfaction. For example, some restaurants employ a specific individual to attend to table maintenance, bussing, and pre-bussing.

The Responsiveness dimension is statistically significant between the two levels of urbanization. This dimension centers around behaviors of being sensitive to the customer's mood and adjusting service style based on the customer's mood. It may be of value for establishments to train servers on sensing and altering behavior based on customers displayed mood and body language in order to meet their expectations. The United States, in particular, is found to be a highly individualistic society and thus rates personalization as highly important (Winsted, 1999). In order to be competitive in today's market, responsiveness and interactively designing and evolving offerings that meet customers' unique, dynamic needs may be one way to yield competitive advantage. This may be of particular interest to less urbanized patrons who do not dine out as often as urban consumers (Cullen & Kingston, 2009), may not be as cognizant of the demands upon servers in busy environments, and may then expect servers to be more immediately responsive. Conversely, individuals in New York City eat a majority of their meals away from home and may be more accustomed to the overall pace of restaurants and how long it takes servers to respond. Thus, as more frequent and experienced diners, highly urbanized patrons may not feel the need for instant responsiveness.

The Knowledge dimension ranks as the next most important dimension and significantly differed between the two samples. This may relate to more

specific explanations of item preparation as this then pertains to individual preferences. More specifically, such recent legislature such as the nutritional content of menu items displayed for restaurants (such as those in New York City) may lead to greater awareness of caloric, fat, and sodium content of many causal restaurant menu items, which may indicate why server knowledge was more important to highly urbanized customers. Americans, in particular, tend to have diets high in fat, sodium, carbohydrates, and calories, and females place a higher level of importance on knowledge than males. Managers need to be cognizant of the level of server knowledge about the operation and menu items. In addition, many people possess various food allergies (Lyons & Forde, 2004) that include nuts, seafood, and gluten. Customers in less urbanized areas eat only a small percent of their meals away from home. Conversely, there is a saying in New York that there is hardly a need for homes to have a kitchen because everyone eats out (Erway, 2010). Evidence shows that people who die from food allergies do so having eaten away from home (Gowland, 2001). Therefore, as more meals are consumed away from home in more urbanized areas, it is of greater importance to these consumers that the server possess knowledge about meal ingredients and preparation because the customer is solely relying upon the staff for accurate information. From this perspective, it is increasingly more important for servers to be knowledgeable not only to yield greater customer satisfaction, but also in order to protect the safety of guests. If a lack of service staff's knowledge is detected, managers should focus future training on teaching the fundamental components of food preparation, menu item ingredients, and specific customer needs.

Friendliness rates as the least important dimension and was even less important for the less urbanized sample. However, friendliness was rated the highest by those 25 and under and varied significantly from all other age groups. The results indicate that servers should display behaviors that exhibit a greater level of friendliness such as general entertaining, telling jokes or stories, and conversing when dealing with a younger demographic. This notion is supported by the concept of social support (Adelman, Ahuvia, & Goodwin, 1994) which posits that customers receive social support when service providers non-verbal communications reduce customer anxiety, enhance self-esteem, or create a sense of social connection to others. Eating out is intrinsically New York and part of a larger city's cosmopolitan lifestyle (Erway, 2010). People in more highly urbanized areas such as New York City may entertain friends less often at home due to limited apartment size and accommodation. As a result, much entertaining and gathering occurs in restaurants. As such, the friendliness of the waitstaff may be of greater importance to the overall dining experience. The friendliness of the waitstaff may also be seen as a direct reflection of the host, and may be seen as a more important attribute to those who host dinners more frequently, such as the more highly urbanized customer.

Our findings in this study provide support for the hypothesized relationship that timing expectations vary as a function of level of urbanization for subculture in casual restaurant service. The mean times for each category are preferred to take less than 15 minutes, which gives merit to the idea of casual restaurants tailoring their products for a more rapid cooking or preparation time. Less urbanized consumers are more willing to wait to be seated after arriving than those in urban areas. For less urbanized customers, dining out is more of a novelty as opposed to a necessity. Highly urbanized customers eat a large percentage of their meals away from home, must budget that time into their schedules, and may be less willing to wait for a table. In addition, there are a greater number of restaurants in close proximity in more urbanized areas. Less urbanized areas tend to have less options available and those options may be further away. A highly urbanized customer has more options and can more easily walk next door without any wait to be seated. Casual dining establishments in highly urbanized areas may want to consider implementing or modifying reservation and call-ahead policies in order to minimize wait time and maximize satisfaction. Conversely, those in highly urbanized settings are more willing to wait longer after receiving a menu and before the server returns to take the order. This may indicate that they prefer a greater amount of time to select the meal and that waitstaff should be cognizant of this preference. Additionally, women desire to linger longer post-meal than males. This can be attributed to social psychology and communication theories that state that for most women, conversation is primarily a language of rapport whereas for men, conversation is a means of simply reporting (Tannen, 2001). Establishing connections and fostering relationships may mean that women tend to talk more than men, which is why they tend to linger longer post meal. In addition, urban customers may prefer to take longer to review the menu before making a meal selection. This may be attributed to more urbanized customers eating more meals away from home, and must take greater time and care in selecting appropriate menu items. They do not make dinner, they make reservations. Diners in more urbanized areas may be pickier about their food, how it is prepared, what is in it, and where it came from. It is important for employees to be aware of the timing differences between highly and less urbanized customers in delivering better service and gaining higher satisfaction. Employees should be sensitive to and cognizant of the signs that the patrons are ready to order, such as placing the menus down on the table.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study provides theoretical implications within the foodservice literature by adding to the current level of knowledge in the existing literature.

Customer-contact employees are interacting with an increasing number of customers from a wide breadth of cultures and subcultures (Kee-Fu & Ap, 2007) and researchers may benefit from knowing how to minimize the negative perceptions of customers from different cultural and sub-cultural backgrounds. The researchers sought to address the gap in the literature by first testing the importance of server behaviors and timing expectations. Furthermore, this study investigated two samples, one highly and one less urbanized in order to measure the potential of subculture differences that exist. To date, research on subculture differences in service and restaurant operations is scant, despite the recommendations of researchers. As such, it progresses foodservice and business research through the empirical investigation of two subculture samples, and the associated significant differences.

Operational implications may include the suggestion of cultural training programs that help guest-contact employees better understand the desires and behavioral elements that lead to greater levels of satisfaction among different cultures and regions. There is not a one-size-fits-all model to service delivery, and customer preferences for behaviors are likely to vary based on subculture. For example, as responsiveness is more important to less urbanized customers, greater focus should be given to customer needs and achieving them more quickly. Training employees on body language that signals the customer needs something such as head tilting, eye contact, and straightened posture, can help in responsiveness. It may behoove casual restaurant managers to limit the use of scripted menu tours, greets, and shopper report items, in favor of altering service delivery tailored to the individual as well as the level of urbanization of the unit. For example, as knowledge of menu items is more important to highly urbanized customers, menu tours and detailed descriptions of specials will be more important. Conversely, less urbanized customers may not care for the detailed information in a greeting script as they want to order meals more quickly and do not desire detailed menu knowledge and description. Thus, the use of standardized scripts may actually decrease satisfaction. Some strict behavioral or timing components may actually be decreasing the level of customer satisfaction and may need to be readdressed based on the level of urbanization of the unit and its customers. All units across a restaurant brand may not prefer check-back check-down at lunch and strict timing specifications. For example, this research finds that women prefer to linger longer at the table. Waitstaff should pay specific attention to body language and cues that the patrons are ready to pay and leave as they do not want to be rushed. In addition, management can modify corporate determined time standards based on the specific local culture and level of urbanization of the restaurant.

This research provides important insights into the different dimensions of the casual restaurant service encounter and the impact of subculture. However, several limitations exist in association with this study. The first

involves the sampling procedure employed, as both samples were selected based on the U.S. census data for highly urbanized and less urbanized areas and participants were residents within those areas. While this is consistent with Hofstede's (1983) recommendations for cross culture research, future research should employ a methodology that may be able to better separate customers on the subculture of urbanization by incorporating ethnological descriptions and regional urban affiliation. Generalizations about urbanization of subculture and across different service settings should be made with caution. While post-hoc tests reveal differences for international respondents, the results are not consistent with the highly urbanized versus less urbanized samples such that sanitation and responsiveness became insignificant. While these aid in demonstrating that urbanization may be a separate subculture, future research is needed in investigating the degree that a multitude of nationalities affects responses. In addition, the results of this study may not be generalizable across all foodservice operations, but do provide useful information for casual restaurant managers and employees. In addition, the dimensions of privacy and table maintenance did not report high Cronbach's alpha's and future research should seek to refine the items for these dimensions to attain higher reliabilities.

Future research should continue to investigate the role subculture plays across research settings. Valuable future research could develop new scales for subcultures based on a detailed understanding of the constructs of different subcultures, as researchers have found that scales developed for one culture's use cannot be applied effectively to another (Winsted, 1997). In addition, as health concerns and allergies are rising across the United States, the knowledge dimension may be of increased importance for satisfaction in customization and safety. A potential area for future research could also investigate the affect that tailoring behaviors and customization have on employee emotional labor, specifically on job stress, job ambiguity, and role stress.

This research helps to close the gap in existing business and services literature by examining the importance of behavioral and time expectations for restaurant patrons. Sanitation, accommodation, and privacy are the most important behaviors for a server to display. In addition, this research adds to the theoretical body of knowledge by demonstrating that there is a difference for the behavioral dimensions of friendliness, knowledge, and responsiveness between the subculture of urbanization of customers. The shortest time lapse should be between receiving a menu and placing the order and there was a statistically significant difference between how long rural and urban customers found to be an acceptable wait time before being seated and between receiving a menu and placing their order. The findings of this research provide a foundation for future research regarding behavioral and timing preferences across one specific subset of culture: urbanization. In addition, this research provides a better understanding of how subcultures

evaluate service differently, and provide substantial managerial relevance to domestic marketers and operators.

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