

**Gendered or Ungendered Spaces? Exploring Dynamics of Gender  
Interaction in Café Culture of Lahore, Pakistan.**



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## ABSTRACT

Urban leisure places such as cafes are becoming increasingly popular among the youth in Pakistani cities, but little is known about their contribution to the formation of gendered relations. Although the literature on the sociology of the public space in Pakistan has centered on the market, public transport, and workplaces, little has been done on how leisure spaces are used to either uphold or oppose traditional gender norms. The emerging cafe culture in Lahore offers a special perspective to explore the intersection of gender, space, and social interaction within an urban setting. This qualitative study explored whether the cafe culture in Lahore is gendered or ungendered and how male and female experienced these leisure spaces. The study objective was to add to the existing knowledge of gendered experiences in urban leisure spaces and influence comprehensive and gender-sensitive urban planning and policy. The research aimed to illuminate the way in which the culture of cafes either replicates or defies gender borders and helps to make urban spaces more equal to all genders. The research adopted a qualitative approach using an in-depth interview guide for data collection. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants who matched the inclusion criteria. A total of 15 in depth interviews were conducted online via zoom, including 7 males and 8 female participants. Thematic analysis was applied to determine the common patterns and meanings in the narratives of the participants with the focus on the spatial arrangement, social practices, and unspoken gender rules within cafes. Overall, the study concludes that cafés in Lahore cannot be considered as completely ungendered spaces; rather, they are socially negotiated environments shaped by cultural values and power dynamics.

**Keywords:** gendered spaces, café culture, urban youth, social interaction, Lahore

## Chapter 1 Introduction

The cafe has become a cultural, social and symbolic space within metropolitan societies today, beyond a place of consumption. Cafes are often romanticized as a third place between home and work, a neutral place (Oldenburg, 1999). They are said to offer friendly locations where people can engage in informal social interactions, community building and even intellectual activities (Massey, 1994). These assumptions, though, are highly biased by the Western liberal ideals and may not be applicable in the patriarchal, culturally diverse countries such as Pakistan, where space is highly gendered, both literally and figuratively (McDowell, 1999).

In particular, the cafe provides a dense context in which the interaction between gender and space in the context of daily life can be explored as it is mirrored in the greater urban culture of Pakistan. Women often need to bargain over a set of unwritten rules which consider their dress, their company, the time of day, and even their posture, whereas men can assume access to cafes and their presence as a given. They consider being in the limelight as some sort of protest or stamping their feet. These discourses consider the underlying normative order that regulates the appearance, access and expression based on the gender identity of a person.

The theoretical foundation of this study is the theory of Third Place by Ray Oldenburg, the theory of social differentiation and cultural capital by Bourdieu and the spatial behavior of urban sociology. Above all, the paper examines how the patrons of the cafe perform, challenge or conform to the gender stereotypes by using their daily experiences based on the Judith Butler concept of gender performativity. This framework offers a more in-depth insight into the presence of people in the cafe environment as well as the way people enact their identities and the influence of the cultural and spatial environment on such enactments.

Importantly, the phenomenon of the cafe culture is not considered a homogenous one in this work. Instead, it focuses on two different cafe settings in Lahore, both of which portray a different class, culture, and time. Both places are symbolic of distinct gendered codes of access and interaction; one is an upscale westernized appeal to individuals and the other has an educated and reasonably priced atmosphere. These differences provide an opportunity to investigate how social stratification and geographical inequality are either refuted or endorsed within the context of cafes.

This study aims at exploring whether Lahore cafes are truly ungendered social spaces or are a manifestation of the gender, class and cultural stratification that is deeply embedded in the Pakistani society. Through this, the research is a part of a wider debate on gendered boundaries, spatial justice, and politics of leisure in Pakistan. The study, through the qualitative approach, tries to redefine the urban cafe culture as a space of contention whereby identities are constructed, disputed and re-constructed.

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

Although cafes have become increasingly popular as a contemporary leisure venue in urban Pakistan, the gendered dynamics of these venues is mostly unexplored. In practice, often gender neutral, access and experience in these spaces is frequently influenced by gender, class and cultural norms, leading to implicit exclusions and unequal participation. Although the current research studies on gendered public spaces in Pakistan have been inclined towards the market, streets or workplaces, the cafe is still largely neglected to study the interaction of gender, space and social interaction in the urban setting. This paper aims to explore the idea of whether cafes in Lahore are ungendered spaces or continue to uphold existing gendered and class-based hierarchies in the name of modernity and inclusiveness.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study:**

1. To examine whether and how cafes in Pakistan function as an ungendered social space.
2. To explore the experiences of young male and female café goers and identify any implicit gendered norms.
3. To analyze how culture influences perception of gender roles and social interaction in Pakistan.

## **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The research is valuable academically and scholarly as it seeks to fill a huge gap in the field of knowledge on gender dynamics, public places, and cafe culture in Pakistan. Even though some studies have examined gendered access to public spaces, most of them focus on the markets, workplaces, or transportation, with little research done on urban leisure spaces such as cafes, especially in Pakistan. Moreover, past studies often generalize gendered spatial behavior without taking into account how globalization, class and culture interplay to produce different effects on such experiences in different cafe environments. To address this gap, this paper is a comparison of three different cafe settings in Lahore, each of which is a different sociocultural setting. The more refined insights of the research on gendered urban geographies can be useful to urban planners, sociologists, gender researchers, and advocates of inclusive urban spaces by exploring how men, women and gender minorities perceive and utilize these spaces. Also, it puts into the limelight the agency and voices of ordinary patrons of the cafe, and how individuals defy or reinforce gender stereotypes in urban leisure spaces.

## **1.4 Aim of Study:**

This study seeks to understand the role of gender dynamics in the utilization and perception of the urban Lahore Cafe space by evaluating the ways in which male and female experience, negotiate and interact in the cafe space. It aims to know how gender, class and culture interact

to shape access and performance in various cafe contexts, as well as the voices and agency of cafe patrons in challenging or reinforcing gender norms. By juxtaposing two different situations in cafes, the research will help to understand the gendered urban geographies better and contribute to the development of more inclusive spaces in Pakistan.

### **1.5 Research Questions:**

1. To what extent cafes in Lahore provide socially neutral ungendered spaces for interaction?
2. How do male and female café-goers perceive and experience gender norms in cafés as public spaces?
3. In what ways do cultural perceptions of gender roles shape social interactions within café settings in Lahore?

### **1.6 Conceptual Definitions**

#### ***1.6.1 Gendered Space***

A gendered space is a physical or symbolic space in which access, behavior and participation are shaped by social constructs of gender. These spaces are reflective and supportive of gender hierarchies, which in most cases favor masculinity at the expense of women and gender minorities (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). Gendered cafe space in this study is a space where members of specific genders feel excluded, monitored or uncomfortable because of existing social norms.

#### ***1.6.2 Ungendered Space***

Un-gendered space refers to a social space that is socially neutral in regard to gender, that is, it is a space where all genders can freely interact without any discrimination, stigma or gender-based behavioral expectations (Oldenburg, 1999). In this study, a cafe is said to be

ungendered when the respondents of both genders claim to feel comfortable, accepted, and treated equally.

### ***1.6.3 Café Culture***

*Café culture* is a collection of social practices, rituals and symbolic meanings that are linked to the time spent in cafes. It encompasses consumption patterns, socializing, identity enactment, and signaling of classes (Mahmood, 2020; Zia, 2018). The Pakistani Cafe culture is a sign of increased middle-class interaction with global consumerism and modernity in the city.

### ***1.6.4 Social Interaction***

Any in-person communication or behavior exchange verbal or non-verbal that takes place between individuals in a common environment is social interaction. According to Goffman (1959) symbolic interactionism, such interactions are performances which are shaped by social roles, expectations and identity management. Social interaction in this study is defined as the sitting arrangement, discussions, body language and behavior in cafes.

### ***1.6.5 Spatial Inclusion and Exclusion***

*The concept Spatial inclusion* is the feeling of comfort, safety, and freedom of individuals in a particular space, and *spatial exclusion* is the feeling of marginalization, surveillance, or discomfort that discourages engagement (Sultana, 2017; Imran, 2022). In this research, customers of cafes who feel discriminated against or insecure because of their gender, social status, or physical appearance are taken as those who are experiencing spatial exclusion.

### ***1.6.6 Gender Norms***

*Gender norms* refer to unspoken rules and expectations that determine how people should behave in accordance to their perceived gender (Butler, 1990). Such conventions

influence the conduct within the cafe environment whether in terms of clothing and posture or voice and movement and tend to scrutinize women more.

### ***1.6.7 Third Place***

A *third place* is a social environment in contrast to home (first place) and work (second place) that enables informal interaction, relaxation and community-building (Oldenburg, 1999). Although cafes are thought of as inclusive third places in the West, in Pakistan, their impartiality is challenged because of gender and class differences.

### ***1.6.8 Performativity***

*Performativity* is the concept that gender is not an innate concept, but it is constantly constructed by repetitive social activities (Butler, 1990). Here, the patrons of cafes can engage in gender in a way that is consistent with the expectations of the society that regulates speech, clothing or conduct to prevent being judged or harassed.

### ***1.6.9 Surveillance (Social and Symbolic)***

*Surveillance* can be defined as the observation of the behavior of individuals, either in a physical sense (e.g., by staff, security, or passersby) or in a symbolic sense (e.g., stares and moral policing) (Ahmad and Shafiq, 2021; Rehman, 2022). Surveillance in this research is perceived as one of the most important mechanisms which impose gender rules in the cafe areas.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Public Spaces and Gendered Interactions

Public spaces have long been studied in the context of gendered accessibility and interaction. Historically, it has been observed that public spaces have been perceived as masculine domains, with women referred to private, domestic spheres (Massey, 1994). This dual understanding has some implications for how individuals experience public spaces, including urban spaces like parks, shopping malls, and more recently, cafe spaces nowadays. Feminist geographers have highlighted that space is not neutral naturally; it is socially constructed based on power dynamics, often supporting traditional and patriarchal norms (McDowell, 1999). In many societies, specifically in the Global South, public spaces remain deeply gendered which often exclude women or regulate their behavior through traditional social norms and thinking patterns.

The mode through which gender roles are prolonged in public places is also explained by Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. People's behavior in social settings, including cafés, is influenced by how society expects them to "perform" their gender everywhere. In Pakistan women are frequently seen changing their voice, movement, and appearance to fit in with societal norms and be stigma-free (Zia, 2018). These changes in behavior reflect the internalization of patriarchal norms that govern women's visibility and mobility in public spaces. As such, cafes and other semi-public spaces cannot be seen as simply benign; they operate as regulated environments where gender identities are being continually performed, analyzed and reproduced. Butler's theory, then, draws attention to the ways in which women's access to these spaces takes place not just physically but also in relation to normative gender identities.

## 2.2 Café Culture as a Public Sphere

The *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), a landmark work by Jürgen Habermas, provides the theoretical foundation for the idea of cafés as public spheres. According to Habermas, people congregate in the public sphere in an area distinct from the state and the private sphere to participate in critical, logical discourse and influence public opinion. In the 17th and 18th centuries, coffeehouses in Europe functioned as idealized forums for conversation, particularly among the affluent (Habermas, 1989). It was believed that cafés were democratizing places where people could openly exchange views without intervention from the state or the church.

But the traditional Habermasian ideal has come under fire for being exclusive. It appears that access to "publicness" has always been stratified since early public spheres excluded women, members of the working class, and members of colored groups (Fraser, 1990). According to this criticism, cafés in non-Western cultures particularly in patriarchal and postcolonial contexts like Pakistan cannot be assumed to serve as impartial or inclusive places. Rather, they frequently reflect the gender, class, and cultural capital disparities that already exist in society (Mahmood, 2020; Malik, 2020).

The concept of cafés as "third places," first proposed by Ray Oldenburg in 1999, builds on the function of casual spaces like cafés in fostering communal life in contemporary urban cultures. Third places are observed as neutral spaces that promote community involvement, informality, and inclusive socialization patterns. Although this could be the case in some Western cultures where cafés act as multipurpose gathering places for socializing, networking, and rest, the usefulness of these areas is more debatable in Pakistan. Who can visit cafes and use these third places is greatly inclined by gendered expectations and cultural norms (Haque & Naveed, 2016).

An increasing urban middle-class desire for modernity and global consumer culture is reflected in the growth of different cafés in Lahore like Gloria Jeans, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, and regional chains like Second Cup or Chai Shai in Lahore. These cafes are a representation of something unique and contemporary, particularly among the youth and college students nowadays (Zia, 2018). They draw couples, groups of friends, and digital freelancers because they provide a comparatively more laid-back atmosphere than typical family eateries. This appearance of openness, though, does not necessarily correspond to a public space that is actually inclusive.

According to study, Lahore's cafés could provide a representation of the world's café culture, but they fall short in terms of serving as forums for social equality and free speech. Economic status, social background, and adherence to gendered behavioral norms are frequently prerequisites for access (Khan, 2019). Dress regulations, monitoring, and moral examination are just a few examples of the physical and metaphorical obstacles that women, particularly those from conservative or lower-income households, frequently encounter (Sultana, 2017; Ahmad & Shafiq, 2021).

Furthermore, these areas seldom encourage civic engagement or political discourse as Western public spheres did in the past. In Pakistan, cafés frequently function as representations of well-manicured modernity, influenced by consumption rather than civic engagement, rather than as spaces for dissent or democratic dialogue. Café spaces are decoupled from Habermas's normative ideals of rational-critical discussion by this commercialized leisure activity, making them semi-public areas that are neither completely private nor politically public (Malik, 2020).

However, some feminist academics contend that women's overt involvement in these recreational environments signifies a symbolic violation of conventional gender norms (Zia, 2018; Rehman, 2022). Their presence undermines patriarchal ideas of spatial ownership, even

when they do not completely reclaim cafés as equal places. Pakistani café culture is a vibrant place to research social change because of these new gender negotiation and presence behaviors.

In the past, cafés were unofficial public spaces where people congregated for leisure, conversation, and even political debate. Cafés have frequently been idealized as egalitarian spaces in Western cultures (Habermas, 1989). However, a sociocultural perspective challenges the idea that cafés are "ungendered" or gender-neutral social places. Although they are far from neutral, cafés have grown in popularity in Pakistan as hubs for social interaction, young culture, and modernism. Instead, they frequently reflect gendered dynamics and socioeconomic hierarchies that are ingrained in the society (Malik, 2020).

### **2.3 Global and Local Dimension of Café Culture**

Cafés are frequently seen as "third places" in Western civilizations, social settings that are apart from homes (first place) and workplaces (second place), where unstructured public life thrives (Oldenburg, 1999). Men and women frequently enjoy about the same level of spatial agency and freedom in these environments. For instance, research conducted in North America and Europe demonstrates that cafés are often seen as welcoming, safe environments for people of both genders where networking, discussion, and personal leisure are welcomed (Holland, 2020; Wrigley, 2019).

Pakistani café culture, on the other hand, is enmeshed with limitations based on class, religion, and culture. Although Lahore's urban cafés serve as a leisure space for middle- and upper-class youngsters, its inclusion is still in doubt. Depending on the setting, its ambiance, staff behavior, and the liberalism of the consumers, women may feel accepted in certain cafés but excluded or convicted in others (Khan, 2019; Rehman, 2022). Pakistani cafés have started to adopt international café aesthetics including music, ambiance and coffees specially (such as

English menus and décor influenced by Starbucks), but they haven't fully merged the principles of gender neutrality and social equality.

Furthermore, working from cafés is less frequent in Pakistan, particularly for women, than it is in the West, where it is widespread and socially acceptable. Due to highly ingrained cultural beliefs around women's exposure in public, a woman sitting by herself in a café may draw criticism or unwelcome attention (Ahmad & Shafiq, 2021; Sultana, 2017).

## **2.4 Gendered Experiences of Public Spaces in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, highly ingrained patriarchal traditions, religious interpretations, socioeconomic distinctions, and cultural expectations all influence how people use public areas. Who is allowed to enter public areas and how they should conduct themselves there are determined by these interlocking influences? Roads, parks, marketplaces, transportation systems, and cafés are examples of public areas that are frequently dominated by males and where women's and other marginalized gender identities' movement is either regulated, policed, or challenged (Shirkat Gah, 2011; Sultana, 2017; Imran, 2022).

Women who are navigating these environments frequently exhibit more self-awareness and caution. According to studies, women are routinely subjected to harassment, unsolicited attention, moral judgment, and surveillance not just from male onlookers but also from security guards, store owners, and even café employees even in urban areas like Lahore, which are thought to be more liberal and progressive than rural ones (Siddiqui & Kamal, 2021). The psychological and social phenomena known as "spatial anxiety," which is caused by this gendered experience, is characterized by women's mobility in public being characterized by dread, limitation, and preemptive self-policing (Phadke, 2007).

Mobility restrictions for women further intensify the uneven access to public space. Women who cannot drive their own cars or commute safely by means of public transportation

are sometimes excluded spatially thus making it hard to visit cafes, shopping centers or even workplaces alone. According to research by Imran (2022), women's decisions on where and when to go are dependent on male family members, transportation options, and the apparent safety of the area. As a result, women have to negotiate many levels of social control, whereas males enjoy greater geographical independence in this gendered layout.

Furthermore, there are many moral meanings associated with the woman's public appearance. For instance, a lady sitting by herself in a café can be perceived as suspicious in terms of challenging societal expectations or as having doubtful morals. Even in classy metropolitan districts, women's comfort in public leisure areas like cafés is impacted by this moral framing of visibility (Ahmad & Shafiq, 2021). Women belonging to conservative or lower socio-economic households are often restrained from independently accessing such spaces, as societal constructs of honor (*izzat*) place significant limitations on their mobility (Ahmad & Shafiq, 2021).

Crucially, class, age, and physical appearance have a significant role in mediating gendered perceptions of public space, which are not consistent. Compared to working-class women or women wearing traditional clothing like burqas or hijabs, elite women may have more access to public areas since they are more likely to speak English, wear Western clothing, and frequently visit expensive cafés (Mahmood, 2020). However, this class privilege only alters the nature of their harassment and judgment, frequently shifting from overt aggression to covert monitoring and moral policing.

Furthermore, the reality faced by transgender and non-binary people is significantly more severe. They frequently face direct hatred, ridicule, or exclusion when they are in public. They seldom find any inclusion in public leisure areas like cafés, where patrons and employees frequently engage in discriminatory behavior (Hunzai, 2021). These experiences show that

social legibility, the degree to which a person complies with prevailing gender norms as well as visibility are key factors in Pakistani gendered access to public space.

Nevertheless, opposition and negotiation take place despite these challenges. Young urban women are also defending their entitlement to the city through the increasingly frequent use of such concepts on public protests such as the Aurat March, co-working spaces, open mic nights, cafes occupations, and others. Based on these acts of symbolic reclaiming space, gendered representations of the public space are fluid and constantly shifting (Zia, 2018; Rehman, 2022). By themselves, women share their cafe visits on social media, which adds to the virtual and real spatial assertion. Digital technologies also play a contribution.

Cafes in Lahore may be heard as having a Progressive or egalitarian agenda but many times, it is actually still rooted in social systems that limit access. These gendered experiences are also critical in planning cities in a way that is truly inclusive, safe and accommodating to everyone, irrespective of their gender, classes, or identities.

## **2.5 Cafés as Sites of Cultural Transition**

The cafe culture in Lahore has become a cultural icon of cosmopolitanism and modernity in the past years. These establishments tend to be popular among young people, couples, and mixed genders who want to be free to a certain extent of the conventional household standards (Zia, 2018). But the idea of cafes being ungendered is not as valid on a closer examination. The cultural norms of honor (*izzat*), gendered actions, and visibility continue to influence how individuals, particularly women maneuver these spaces (Ahmad and Shafiq, 2021).

Interestingly, some cafes are more welcoming and accommodating to women and families whereas others implicitly or explicitly target male customers. The physical layout, atmosphere, and the manner in which staff treats people all make them feel included or not in

such areas (Rehman, 2022). In addition, surveillance systems, both technological (CCTV) and social (judgmental gazes) can contribute to making the environment less comfortable to marginalized genders

## **2.6 Socioeconomic and Cultural Influences**

The perception and use of the space of cafes are not only gendered but also influenced by socioeconomic status, urbanity, and exposure to global culture. Youth of middle and upper classes, especially in private universities, tend to visit cafes as a lifestyle due to the impact of the global consumer culture (Mahmood, 2020). To them, cafes are a symbol of leisure, identity construction and a partial escape of the conventional standards. Conversely, conservative or low-income people might consider cafes as either morally questionable or not suitable, particularly to females.

In addition, religious and cultural ideologies are effective in influencing the acceptable gender interaction. Although Pakistan is not a homogenous society, and cities such as Lahore are more liberal than villages, the traditional gender norms continue to play a significant role in shaping social norms (Haque and Naveed, 2016). The cafe, thus, is a disputed location, where modernity, tradition, and gender politics meet.

## **2.7 Gender and Space: Social Construction of Gendered Spaces**

Space is not a physical location but rather a socially constructed space that is influenced by cultural meanings, power relations as well as social norms. According to the feminist researchers, spatial configurations reproduce and support gender hierarchies leading to the establishment of gendered spaces, which favor some groups and discriminate against others (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1994). Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is a product of social practices, institutional organization and symbolic meaning, and is therefore an expression of dominant social relations and not a blank canvas.

Gender is an important factor in determining the experience, access and navigation of spaces. Social coded spaces like streets, cafes and markets are usually considered as masculine and private spaces like homes are commonly linked to femininity (Spain, 1992; McDowell, 1999). The spatial segregation supports the gender roles by restricting the access of women to the social spaces and by linking their mobility to the moral judgments and social control. Consequently, the presence of women in the public or semi-public areas is often socially justified, and that of men is accepted and not questioned.

The availability of public and semi-public spaces is not only affected by the physical availability, but also by the perceived safety, social acceptance, and cultural expectations. Pain (2001) claims that fear and the fear of being harassed plays a major role in the spatial behavior of women, which limits their movements and affects their decision on where and when to use the public space. This limitation adds to unequal spatial mobility, in which women are self-regulating and avoidance strategies to preserve social legitimacy and personal safety.

Gendered expectations also influence the feeling of comfort and belonging in public spaces. Women tend to be more under surveillance and moral judgment especially when they are alone in a given space (Phadke, Ranade, and Khan, 2011). Semi-public places like cafes, shopping malls and schools might seem to be inclusive yet they are also subject to social norms governing the interaction and visibility of genders. The idea of spatial entitlement emphasizes the fact that men tend to feel more at home and in control in the open areas whereas women have to negotiate their existence in order not to be stigmatized or harassed (Valentine, 1989).

Cultural norms, religious interpretations and family structures are strong factors that shape the gendered spatial practices in South Asian contexts. Access to leisure spaces, such as cafes, by women is usually mediated by family approval, social class and respectability (Phadke et al., 2011). Gendered access to space therefore is not only a matter of physical access

but also a matter of symbolic acceptance, comfort and legitimacy. These dynamics reveal that cafes are semi-public spaces that are socially coded spaces in which gender norms determine who is free to occupy the space and feel comfortable.

## **2.8 Gaps in Literature on Gendered Café Spaces**

Although there is increasing interest in gendered experiences of public space, there is a large gap in empirical studies to explore the gendered space of cafes in South Asia, especially in Pakistan. The literature on gender and space in the area has mostly concentrated on streets, means of transport, workplaces, and markets with little consideration of leisure-oriented semi-public spaces like cafes (Phadke et al., 2011; Imran, 2022).

The bulk of the existing literature on cafes as a public space is based on the Western experience, especially in Europe and North America, where cafes traditionally served as an intellectual and civic space (Habermas, 1989; Oldenburg, 1999). Nevertheless, these theoretical frameworks fail to explain the sociocultural realities of postcolonial and patriarchal societies like Pakistan, where the access to public leisure spaces is determined by gender norms, privilege of classes, and moral control (Mahmood, 2020; Malik, 2020).

The studies on gendered public space in South Asia have mostly focused on the safety, harassment, and mobility of women in urban spaces (Phadke et al., 2011; Sultana, 2017), yet there are few studies that have specifically focused on how gender affects interaction, comfort, and spatial negotiation in cafes. Additionally, the literature tends to focus more on structural barriers but offers little information on lived experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms of people who navigate the space of cafes.

Cafe culture in Pakistan has grown considerably in the last 20 years, especially in major cities like Lahore, but there is a lack of academic studies on the subject of cafes as gendered social spaces (Zia, 2018; Rehman, 2022). Qualitative studies examining the differences in the

experiences of women, men and marginalized gender groups in cafes and how they negotiate social norms in these spaces and how cafes can both reproduce and challenge gender inequalities are limited.

Moreover, the interplay between gender and class, age, and cultural capital to determine access and experiences to cafes has not been adequately investigated in empirical studies. The experience of cafes by middle- and upper-class women and working-class women can be different, which is why an intersectional analysis is required (Crenshaw, 1991; Mahmood, 2020). In the same way, the views of transgender and non-binary people are mostly missing in the research on leisure spaces in Pakistan.

This literature gap indicates that there is a necessity to conduct empirical and context-specific studies that look at cafes as gendered spaces in Pakistan. The current research helps fill this gap by examining lived experiences, social interactions, and perceptions in the context of cafes in urban Pakistan and offers a more in-depth insight into how gender, culture, and space intersect in modern urban Pakistan.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework**

This research is informed by some of the most important sociological theories that assist in explaining the intersections of gender, social interaction and inclusion/exclusion in urban public leisure spaces. Using the works of Ray Oldenburg, Pierre Bourdieu and Judith Butler, the study constructs a multidimensional view of the functioning of the cafe culture in Lahore as a social space as well as a place where class differences and gender roles are articulated, negotiated and even transgressed.

### **3.1 Ray Oldenburg's "Third Place" Theory (1989)**

Third places are informal spaces that are easy to access and are not related to the realms of home (first place) and work (second place) where people can meet, communicate, and develop a sense of community (Oldenburg, 1989). These areas are usually described as neutral and friendly, inviting to talk, frequent involvement and social interaction among various groups. Cafes have become a relatively new form of third place in urban life, providing a space where people can relax and be productive in a relatively relaxed environment. To the youth, in particular, these areas are valuable places of socialization, networking and daily interactions.

Cafes in the case of Lahore can be interpreted as the development of third spaces that are influenced by local cultural practices and changes in the city. Although they seem to provide inclusive and comfortable settings, not all may equally access or experience the same access. The issue of gender, safety and social expectations can determine the level of freedom which individuals, especially women can enjoy using and accessing these spaces. Thus, the work relies on the framework of Oldenburg to both interpret the attraction of cafes among urban young people as well as to critically analyze whether these places are really inclusive social spaces or some sort of exclusion is still implicitly present.

### **3.2 Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital and Social Distinction (1984)**

The Pierre Bourdieu theory of cultural capital is a useful concept to explain how social class is manifested and reproduced in daily practices, preferences and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital comprises knowledge, tastes and dispositions that people learn in their social background, and which influence their decisions and actions. These forms of capital are manifested in leisure spaces, like cafes. The choice of particular cafes, experience of the world cuisine, and the dynamics of communication in these areas can all serve as indicators of social status.

This is more pronounced in the cafes of Lahore where the youth of the middle and upper classes hang out in areas that are a representation of modernity, beauty and international influence. These cafes are often more than merely a place to relax; they are identity, taste and status. In the meantime, the allocation of access to such spaces is uneven, and economic capacity and social norms contribute to participation in these spaces. Gender also intersects with class to mediate these experiences, and having women in these kinds of public leisure spaces may be more firmly mediated or negotiated in current era. Using the Bourdieu framework, this paper examines how the preferences of classes and gendered experiences are both related to the inclusion and exclusion patterns in urban cafes.

### **3.3 Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity (1990)**

Judith Butler argues that gender is not an identity or a predetermined or innate phenomenon but a constant construction that is constantly created and reinforced by repetitive acts, behaviors and social interactions (Butler, 1990). This performativity idea of gender implies that people perform gender in their daily lives by either adhering to or going against socially constructed masculinity and femininity. It is in the public spaces that these

performances are therefore significant places of performance, observation and control, which tend to reinforce larger societal expectations.

Gender performativity is evident in the context of the cafes of Lahore where people are introduced to each other, how they present themselves, and how they negotiate social visibility. The women, as an example, can be aware of how they act, dress and interact to fit the socially acceptable norms and the men can feel relatively freer to occupy these spaces. Meanwhile, cafes can also offer the possibility of more flexible or changing manifestations of gender especially with younger and urban populations. This paper adopts the view of Butler to analyze the maintenance and negotiation of gender roles in cafes, and to emphasize how people negotiate and experience the public space of leisure.

## Chapter 4 Research Methodology

### 4.1 Nature of the Study

In this study qualitative research methodology was used to determine how gender dynamics shape the use and perception of café spaces in urban Lahore by examining how men and women experience, negotiate, and interact within these environments. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative methods are highly effective for gaining intricate insights into social behavior that are difficult to quantify. The aim of the study was to explore how both genders experience and interpret café culture in the context of cultural norms. The qualitative methods such as participant observations and in-depth interviews were selected in order to gain a comprehensive exploration of the subjective experiences and social implications associated with café culture in Lahore.

The study specifically adopted a phenomenological approach as its guiding methodology, in which the researcher interprets and explains the lived experiences of the participants about a certain phenomenon in the way the participants describe it (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). This approach enables the researcher to acquire a profound understanding of the experiences of café goers concerning how they navigate, perceive, and negotiate these urban leisure spaces during their visits to café spaces.

The phenomenological approach involves different dimensions such as intentionality, bracketing intersubjectivity and subjectivity. But this study specifically employed descriptive phenomenology, which is concerned with the interpretation of the experiences of participants and the ways social realities are understood by the people who live through these experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Husserl is considered the founder of phenomenology, and his approach is closely linked to the idea that the meanings of lived experiences can only be revealed through one-to-one interaction between the researcher and the participants (Husserl,

1970). In line with this perspective, the researcher sought to understand the perceptions and viewpoints of study participants regarding their experiences in cafés. This approach helped in exploring if people see cafes as ungendered spaces or if they consider cafes as socially neutral spaces.

## **4.2 Research Design**

The study employed qualitative research design using in-depth interviews to understand the phenomenon of café culture as a site of socialization and experiences and perceptions of young people in Pakistan's urban hubs. This design was considered suitable for this study because the aim was to understand participants' experiences, views, and meanings regarding café spaces. Qualitative exploratory design enabled the researcher to explore social phenomena in depth by gaining insight into people's experiences and perceptions. In this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews to allow participants to freely express their opinions and experiences and to enable the researcher to ask clarifying questions.

## **4.3 Research Site**

For this study two cafes were particularly selected to identify the potential participants for the study. Café 1 was a traditional café and café 2 was a modern café. These cafes were selected only for the onsite observation and identifying the potential participants, after getting the permission from café owners. The selection of these two cafes helped the researcher to capture variation in spatial and social setting to have an in-depth understanding of interaction patterns existing across different contexts of selected cafes.

In this study, the cafés were not the focus of the analysis, but rather they were used as spaces to gain access to participants and understand social practices. Observations took place in the cafés to better understand the context of the café space and recruit participants. Consent was taken from the café management before observations were conducted, as per research

ethics guidelines. Two cafés were purposely chosen as they represented different types of café culture and custom. One of them was a more modern and elite space with contemporary interior design, higher prices and a customer base that was mostly middle- and upper-middle-class young people and professionals. The second café was more traditional and culturally rooted, with a more basic aesthetic and less expensive products and services, and drawn to the cafe by a more diverse population of students, intellectuals and people from different classes. This enabled the researcher to gain insight into how café culture is experienced, negotiated and performed in these two settings.

#### **4.4 Sampling Design**

##### ***4.4.1 Selection Criteria***

The participants were selected based on inclusion criteria. Firstly, to ensure a variety of perspectives it was made sure that individuals being chosen belong to both genders (male and female). Secondly, the emphasis was on youth aged between 18 to 35 years, who quite often visited the cafes within the previous six months. In addition, efforts were made to include participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in order to explore how people belonging to different backgrounds experience cafe spaces.

##### ***4.4.2 Sampling Technique***

The study utilized purposive sampling with maximum variation. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit individuals who meet the inclusion criteria and were willing to reflect on their café-going experiences. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method where participants are selected based on their purpose in advancing the research goals and for providing in-depth information and insight into the phenomenon being investigated (Marshall, 1996). This sampling technique was suitable for this study as it allowed researcher to purposely identify the participants who visit café more often and can provide relevant

information. The approach of maximum variation helped the researcher to include participants from both genders, and socioeconomic class, which was essential to understand cafes as gendered or ungendered spaces.

#### **4.2.4 Sample**

The concepts of data saturation were used to calculate the sample size. According to Dworkin (2012), saturation is the point in the data collection process when no novel or pertinent information is being provided by the participants. Total 15 interviews were conducted as at that point saturation point was achieved.

**Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of participants (N=15)**

<b>Participant ID</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education/Occupation</b>
F1	Female	25	Student
PF2	Female	25	Student
PF3	Female	22	Student
PF4	Female	23	Student
PF5	Female	28	Freelancer
PM6	Male	30	Marketing Manager
PM7	Male	28	Research Assistant
PM8	Male	27	Freelancer
PM9	Male	24	Student
PM10	Male	29	Freelancer

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**Participant ID Gender Age Education/Occupation**

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PF11	Female	34	Marketing Director
PF12	Female	26	HR Executive
PF13	Female	27	Lecturer
PM14	Male	31	Business Owner
PM15	Male	26	Software Engineer

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Table 1 reveals the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants. The study sample included a total of 15 participants who were interviewed during the data collection phase of the study. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 34 years, with seven male and eight female participants. Three participants were students, while twelve were employed professionals. It was ensured that all the participants were frequent café goers.

#### **4.5 Data Collection Method:**

##### ***4.5.1 Pilot Testing***

Before the main data collection, pilot interviews were conducted to assess the effectiveness, clarity and ordering of questions in the interview guide. This is a crucial step in qualitative research to highlight any improvement in functioning of questions prior to the main study. Two pilot interviews were done with people from the target population, but not part of the sample. Following these pilot interviews, small changes were made to question wording and sequence to enhance clarity and flow of the interview. This helped to refine the interview guide for the main study.

#### **4.6 Data Collection Technique**

The main data collection method used in the study was in-depth interviews to understand people's perceptions, experiences and meanings associated with café culture as gendered or ungendered space. This approach was appropriate for this study as it enabled participants to explain their experiences in their own words and the researcher to follow up on specific questions if necessary. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to help ensure consistency across interviews and to allow participants to share in-depth information regarding their café spaces experiences. The conversational nature of the interviews gave participants a comfortable environment for discussion and permitted the researcher to explore in depth the experiences and attitudes towards café culture among participants of both genders.

#### **4.7 Data Collection Tool**

A semi-structured interview guide was formulated. The interview guide comprised open-ended questions developed on the basis of deductive codes derived from the existing literature. The interview guide consisted of two distinguished sections. The initial section comprised questions regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants while the second segment enclosed the questions regarding experiences, feeling of comfort or discomfort, perceptions of gender norms, and opinions on café culture. The instrument was initially pilot tested on two persons. Pilot testing was conducted prior to data collection to ensure the clarity of the data collection tool. After successful pilot interviews, it was determined that the research instrument did not require any modifications. A total of fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted.

#### **4.8 Data Collection Process**

The researcher completed the data collection process within three weeks. The two selected cafes were used for observation after getting the required permission from the cafe's

management. This observation helped in identifying the potential participants who voluntarily showed interest in the study, a brief verbal information about the study and researcher's contact was given to them. Later, the researcher contacted the interested participants to arrange interviews at a convenient time for both researcher and participants. The eligibility screening and informed consent was taken electronically from the participants before the interview. According to availability of participants online zoom interviews were scheduled with them. On the first day, one in-depth interview was conducted with a frequent cafe goer that lasted 40 minutes. On days two and three, three participants were interviewed each day who reached out to researcher for an interview. The duration of these interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. All interviews were taken online at Zoom meetings.

Subsequently, the researcher scheduled more interviews with other cafe goers and interviewed five more participants over the course of three days. These interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Urdu as well as in English, depending on the choice and comfort level of the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded after taking the participants' formal approval to ensure an accurate representation of their lived experiences. All the recordings and transcriptions of interviews were stored in researcher laptops in password protected files, which were later deleted after completing the data analysis and no personal or any other information of participants was stored.

#### **4.9 Data Analysis**

To make sense of the complex social interactions and lived experiences of cafe goers, this study utilized Thematic Analysis. This method was chosen because of its flexibility and its specific utility in identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns (themes) within qualitative data. In order to explore the connection between gender and space, thematic analysis allows for an extensive exploration into the participants' narratives, moving beyond what is

said to understand the underlying cultural and social norms that actually affect and shape their behavior.

The researcher could easily organize the raw data from onsite observations and interviews in a systematic manner by using thematic analysis, in order to develop a comprehensive narrative that addresses whether the cafes are truly “ungendered” or the existing gender hierarchies are reinforced by them. Thematic analysis method introduced by Braun and Clarke in 2006 was used to arrange and assess the data systematically. Following are the steps in which analysis was conducted.

#### ***4.9.1 Data Familiarization***

The researcher started by getting to know the data. This was the first step. It included writing down the interviews that were recorded and carefully re-reading the notes taken during on-site observations. The aim here was to understand the data as a whole. This helped the researcher grasp what the participants were saying and the overall vibe of the cafes being observed while onsite observations. The researcher wanted to hear the participants' experiences and understand the atmosphere of the cafes.

#### ***4.9.2 Data Coding***

When the researcher became familiar with the data the next step was data coding. During the coding process the researcher identified the key themes, ideas, and concepts inherent in the dataset. Initially, the researcher determined significant segments within the data and assigned unique codes to each segment known as “open coding”. After that the similar coded data underwent analysis, categorization, and organization. Furthermore, a re-coding process ensued, wherein a more encompassing label, denoted as a category, was assigned to enhance the overall organization and understanding of the data. This systematic coding approach contributed to the in-depth and structured interpretation of the explored information.

For example, when people talked about "staring" "seating choices" or "feelings of safety" the researcher called this data coding so that the stories they collected could be put together in a way that was easy to understand. The researcher used data coding to make the stories easier to work with.

#### ***4.9.3 Theme Development***

After coding, the researcher looked for connections between the codes to develop broader themes. Themes are the bigger reflection of the cores in the narratives. These themes represented significant coherent patterns, such as "spatial negotiation," "gender dynamics," "social gaze" or "class-based inclusion," which directly addressed how gender-based interactions and experiences function in the cafe environment.

#### ***4.9.4 Interpretation and Analysis***

In this phase the researcher looked at how the themes matched up with the research question. The researcher also wanted to see how these themes went against the theories that explain how men and women interact in Lahore. The researcher used the study's framework to understand the themes, including the idea of the "Third Place" by Oldenburg and "Gender Performativity" by Butler. The researcher interpreted the themes using these ideas to get an understanding of the reality of gendered interactions in Lahore. The researcher paid attention to how the themes related to the "Third Place" idea by Oldenburg and the "Gender Performativity" idea, by Butler.

#### ***4.9.5 Triangulation***

To make sure the findings were good and trustworthy the researcher used a method called triangulation. This means that the researcher checked the data from sources to see if it all matched up. This helped to reduce any mistakes and make sure the results were reliable. For example, what the people said in the interviews was checked against what the researcher saw

happening in the cafe. They looked at the observation checklists to see if what the participants said about their experiences in the cafe was the same, as what was happening in the cafe space.

#### ***4.9.6 Reflexivity***

Throughout the analysis procedure, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance, acknowledging their own role and potential biases as a sociologist and an observer. This ensured that the interpretation of the data is valid, organic and remains grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's preconceptions.

#### ***4.9.7 Reporting***

The final step was the systematic presentation of the findings from the data. The analysis was explained including the narrative that uses direct quotes from participants and specific examples from field notes to illustrate the identified themes, providing a clear and evidence-based answer to the research questions.

### **4.10 Field Work Experiences**

The overall fieldwork experiences were smooth. The researcher didn't face any difficulty getting permission from the cafe's management for the onsite observation, which helped in identifying the participants and telling them about the study. It was helpful in a way that only the participants who were actually interested in the study contacted the researcher for interviews on the provided contact information.

But some challenges were also faced in a way that the researcher had to rely on the participants for the initial contact and it lowered the response rate as all interested potential participants may not follow up for the interview. During the data collection some interviews were rescheduled because of internet issues, participants unavailability and unforeseen circumstances due to which the duration of data collection time period increased.

## **4.11 Research Ethics**

### ***4.11.1 Privacy and Confidentiality:***

Ethical considerations were carefully observed, throughout the study. To maintain participants confidentiality no personal information was taken all over the research process. And during data analysis participants were assigned anonymous codes such as PF1 and PM2, only showing the number of participants and identifying the gender only for the study purpose. All the information was only stored in a researcher laptop in secured files and deleted after the data analysis. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

### ***4.11.2 Data Security:***

The responses of the participants were kept anonymous and confidential. Any personal information was not collected. And it was ensured that the data will be securely stored on the researcher's laptop privately and only accessible by the researcher. Moreover, the data was permanently deleted after the analysis and no personal identity of the participants was reported in the results.

### ***4.11.3 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent:***

In consent form voluntary participation was included in which it was clearly stated that their participation was voluntary. Participants had the option to skip any question or withdraw from the interview at any point without any consequences. The purpose and procedure of the study was clearly explained in the consent form, along with the right to withdraw any time (appendix A). As interviews were taken online via zoom, consent form was signed electronically by the participants prior to the interview showing their voluntary participation. Ethical clearance was taken from the Institutional Board Office, Forman Christian College, University, Lahore.

## **Chapter 5 Findings**

This chapter includes the results of the research, the ways in which the experience of the café culture in Lahore is negotiated and experienced by different genders. The discussion examines the interactions between people in the cafes and specifically on the aspects of accessibility, social interaction, spatial comfort, and gendered experiences. It seeks to comprehend the way cafes are social spaces that are influenced by cultural practices, gender relations, and classes in modern urban Pakistan.

The whole findings of the research revolve around the following themes:

1. Cafés as Contemporary Urban “Third Places”
2. Perceived Accessibility and Inclusivity of Café Spaces
3. Gendered Experiences and Spatial Comfort
4. Social Interaction Patterns and Gender Dynamics
5. The Social Gaze and Public Scrutiny of Mixed Social
6. Cultural Norms, Gender Roles, and Social Change
7. Imagining Inclusive Urban Futures

### **5.1 Cafés as Contemporary Urban “Third Places”**

By means of Ray Oldenburg's idea of "third places," it can be observed that cafés are important separate social spaces in Lahore's urban setting from home (first place) and work or school (second place). The findings of this study showed that cafés not only serve as sites for consumption but also as multifunctional social environments where individuals participate in leisure activities, engage in social interactions, perform informal work, and achieve emotional relief. People of different ages and social backgrounds, including students and different professionals highlighted that cafes are a socially meaningful part of their routine lives.

The data showed a key pattern regarding the frequency of café visits and how normal it is primarily for students, young professionals, and freelancers to visit cafes frequently. A key pattern in the data is the regularity of café visits, particularly among students and young professionals, for whom visiting cafés has become a routine part of weekly life. For example, one of the female participants said:

*“I visit cafés quite often. Just recently, in the previous week, I enjoyed coffee from different coffee shops more than four times. Yes, I would say I visit cafés quite frequently.”*

*(Female participant, P4)*

Likewise, one more participant explained how cafés are part of their daily academic and social routine:

*“I visit different cafes two or three times a week. After classes, my friends and I sometimes go to cafés to relax or discuss assignments. Other times cafes are just a place to sit and talk without feeling rushed.” (Female participant, P1)*

These responses show that cafés aren't just fancy places to go once in a while; rather the places where people go every day for different activities and to interact with each other. This trend is observed even in working professionals:

*“Often, I prefer official and unofficial meetings in cafes. It happens around three to four times a week. Sometimes cafes are more suitable than offices, for short meetings and for friends to catch up over coffee.” (Female participant, P11)*

There was however no uniformity in the visiting patterns among the study participants. Although some of them visited regularly, while a few discussed that financial constraints acted as a barrier to access cafes according to the gathering type on regular basis:

*“I visit cafes once or twice a month. If it is a very special event like a birthday or a good gathering, I prefer going to a higher-end café. But if it is a normal gathering, then I usually go to a regular café.” (Female participant, P2)*

A key aspect of cafes as third place is that they facilitate social interactions. The majority of the participants revealed that they wanted to visit cafes with their friends, relatives, and co-workers while highlighting their role as important socializing venues. Cafes are not merely a place of consumption; they allow people to continue interacting with each other, as they have used to have meaningful conversations in the cafes and maintain social relationships. One of the participants shared his experience:

*“Most of the time I go with friends or colleagues as it gives us an opportunity to enjoy informal seating, sometimes I meet clients for casual discussions.”*

*(Male participant, P6)*

Cafes provide a way of transitioning between a formal and a less stressful and casual environment for many. This reiterates Oldenburg third-place idea of informal public spaces where talking is central. Meanwhile, cafes can be considered as both social and personal places that can meet the needs of different groups. Some of the participants highlighted their use for a single visit, work or silent contemplation.

*“I’ve also gone alone a few times, especially when I just want to sit, think, or work on my laptop as the ambiance of a café provides a sense of solace and peace of mind. But I visit cafes mostly with friends.” (Male participant, P8)*

This two-fold use proves that cafes are a hybrid environment that promotes sociability and individualism. Compared to homes and workspaces, cafes offer an environment that is not as restrictive as workspaces and is more social than homes. Cafes are also emotionally

significant places which offer comfort and break from the routine. One of the participants described cafes as:

*“When I was a student two years ago, I probably visited cafés even more often because university life was very social. Now I’m a bit busier because of my job, but cafés still feel like a small escape from my routine. The calm ambiance, soft music, and casual environment help me relax and momentarily disconnect from the world.”*

*(Female participant, P12)*

In general, the results are good indicators that cafes in urban Lahore can be considered as modern-day third places. In café spaces, individuals can accomplish their tasks, relax, and socialize with new people. They are open to everybody and are multifunctional. The research also identifies class, life stage and social context as other important determinants of differences in experiences for both genders. Cafes are not very new places, but this does not imply that everybody frequently visits them or knows how these third places feel.

## **5.2 Perceived Accessibility and Inclusivity of Café Spaces**

The research results indicate that, following the thesis of Ray Oldenburg which states that third places should be friendly and accessible to everyone, most of the residents of Lahore perceive cafes as very friendly places, especially when compared to other forms of public spaces. Nevertheless, the degree to which gender norms, social judgments, and restrictions based on class impact this openness is still under-researched. The general opinion of the participants was that, unlike more traditional places of socialization such as tea stalls, the modern cafes are more open and accommodating to both men and women. This difference was highlighted by one participant:

*“Nowadays modern cafes are very accessible to both genders especially due to ambiance. Nonetheless, tea stalls are non-comparable. I once visited a tea stall with my family, and it*

*was not a very comfortable place to be, since there was no cleanliness, few seats, and the place was not very welcoming.” (Female participant, P1)*

While onsite observation mixed gender groups were seen interacting without any discomfort. This was also highlighted by the majority of the participants who shared a common viewpoint that cafes facilitate heterogeneous social gatherings, where men and women can interact freely in a well-managed and socially accepted environment.

*“In elite cafés, you see women having meetings or socializing with friends. That workplace facilitates the work. I change my mood sometimes by going to cafes. Also, cafes are certainly more open to both genders than many other areas of Lahore, you can find combined groups of friends, couples and even women sitting alone” (Female participant, P5)*

The findings indicate that cafés are safer and more welcoming environments, which enable women to actively participate in public life. Though cafes are inclusive for both males and females and appear to be safe places for women as compared to other public spaces, yet many women expressed varied experiences during their café visits. One of the female participants narrated her experience as:

*“Compared to other public spaces in Lahore, I think cafés are more welcoming to women. In café spaces, you’ll see women sitting alone, working on their laptops, meeting friends, or even conducting business meetings. That kind of visibility creates a sense that women belong to these spaces too. But I wouldn’t say the experience is completely gender-neutral or carefree. As a woman, you are still mindful of certain things, for example, if a café is very crowded or if the crowd feels overly male-dominated, you become conscious and uncomfortable.” (Female participant, P11)*

Such difference was also observed in male participants and demonstrates that they were mindful to the gender impact on the experiences:

*“I believe that cafes are one of the comfortable places for the public in Lahore, both for men and women. Cafes are less disorganized and risky in comparison to parks or traditional tea stalls. To illustrate, in certain cafes women are found sitting casually that gives the impression that the area is free to anyone. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the experience aligns in both sexes. Being a man, I believe that I can sit wherever I want without giving it a lot of consideration. Conversely, I suppose that women might also wish to take other things into account like the time of the day, the number of people around or how comfortable they feel in that particular environment.”*

*(Male participant, P8)*

In addition, the findings reveal that even though cafés are physically open spaces, but social and cultural norms still affect people of different genders how freely they can use such places according to their needs. Another noteworthy characteristic obtained from the data is the impact of social perception and judgement on the comfort of female participants which particularly reflects the underlying societal attitudes and gendered expectations about women's mobility and public visibility in cafes.

*“For men going outside or at cafes has been normalized in our society. On the other side, when women go to cafes it might raise some eyebrows and people start to wonder and question sometimes. Mostly when females visit cafes alone, people start judging them. However, I believe this perception is gradually changing because society is evolving and more women are working and socializing in the public spaces.” (Female participant, P12)*

This shows that urban society in Pakistan is still transforming from traditional norms. Cafés are helping in modifying gender roles, but traditional ways of reasoning are still prevalent in some aspects of life. The responses reveal how cafés are the socially selective places that

are shaped and influenced by economic and cultural capital, even though they seem to be symbolically open and accessible to both genders.

The findings indicate that the cafes are partially inclusive third spaces in Lahore. In comparison with many conventional public spaces like old traditional tea stalls, café spaces are more accessible and comfortable for both genders, particularly for women, and they promote healthy interaction among individuals of both genders. However, gendered experiences, societal perspectives, traditional thinking patterns and class-based constraints continue to influence the practice and perception of inclusion in café spaces.

### **5.3 Gendered Experiences and Spatial Comfort**

Following the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler, the viewpoints of the interviewees indicate that, nonetheless, cafes appear to be a neutral social setting; they are also being constructed and experienced in a gendered manner through all-day routines and interactions of people. Although participants of both genders visit these environments based on their daily routines, gender norms and societal expectations still pervade the comfort of both genders regarding their belonging to these spaces, despite the fact that they all are slowly influenced by the expectations of these places.

Most participants indicated that they tend to avoid certain cafés based on their ambiance and gender composition, particularly when these spaces are perceived as male-dominated and associated with judgmental social atmospheres. For instance:

*“Yes, there are places that I would not like to go, particularly when the crowd is too male dominated. Other less cool cafes may be uncomfortable as most of the attendees are older men, and as a young lady you feel that you are too conspicuous sometimes. Due to that fact, my friends and I tend to go to those café’s where we can notice other women or even mixed companies.” (Female participant, P4)*

Another participant said:

*“I think that is true. Some cafes are really for men like the old tea stalls type cafes. In those places men often sit around for a long time. When there are men and women in a group, they might feel a little uncomfortable or stand out too much. So, when I have meetings with friends or people I work with, I like to pick modern cafes that are really friendly and welcoming. I think cafes with mixed gendered groups are better for meeting friends or coworkers.”*

*(Male participant, P7)*

These responses suggest that spatial comfort is not something which is solely determined by the physical environment of places, but also by the social composition of the spaces, which directly influences the choices and mobility of individuals of both genders. Another essential factor to consider in this regard is how gender influences behavior and self-presentation in cafes. Many female participants reported that they were being more aware of their actions, seating choices, and duration of stay while visiting cafes:

*“I tend to be more aware of my duration of stay or seat. I also find it more comfortable to sit in an open table or nearer to other groups as opposed to sitting in lonely corners. I believe that many of these things come naturally to women since we are accustomed to considering safety and comfort in the streets.”*

*(Female Participant, P4)*

In contrast, male participants reliably described a greater sense of ease and freedom:

*“Being a man, I believe that while at a cafe I am free to spend more time alone and move just in case I would be self-conscious. I have observed that women appear to be more conscious of what is going on around them. Therefore, despite the fact that space is technically*

*unrestricted to all people, the issue of gender has a way of influencing the experience of the people.”*

*(Male Participant, P6)*

The most often reported type of gender-based encounter in interviews was covert observation and gazing, as opposed to explicit discrimination. Several individuals narrated similar experiences:

*“Well, people are staring, most of the time. In some situations, when my friends and I enter a cafe, we observe some individuals staring back and forth. It is not necessarily annoying, but makes one feel slightly uncomfortable or self-conscious. On the good side, I have also attended cafes: the atmosphere there is highly respectful and does not follow anybody where they sit”. (Female participant, P1)*

*“I have watched and can hardly imagine it myself. You can find that sometimes once a group of women enters a cafe, particularly when the place is full of men, people may be looking at them more than they normally do. It is not necessarily bad or violent, but it may create the atmosphere a little uncomfortable.”*

*(Male participant, P9)*

These behaviors make people feel like they are being observed in the sitting, which makes them less comfortable, especially women. At the same time, the data also highlights positive gendered interactions, signifying that café culture is not entirely limiting for women. Some individuals also noticed a bigger change in society toward acceptance and normalcy:

*“As a female, people at cafes sometime offer their seat or show extra respect. I’ve also seen cafés where the environment is very balanced and nobody pays attention to who is sitting where and with whom.” (Female participant, P2)*

In general, the results show that cafés in Lahore are places where people negotiate their space. Gender doesn't technically limit access, but it does affect how people coming there feel comfortable, how visible they are, and then how they act in café spaces. Although clear discrimination remains limited because of evolving societal norms, nuanced behaviors such as staring, self-awareness, and spatial adjustment illustrate persistent gender dynamics, which supports Butler's assertion that gender is perpetually constructed through everyday interactions in public spaces.

#### **5.4 Social Interaction Patterns and Gender Dynamics**

This theme explores how gender is demonstrated in various terms like, daily interactions, seating arrangements and social behavior at cafes in Lahore. The findings reveal that despite cafes being progressively evolving into more collaborative and inclusive sites nowadays including continuous societal transformation from traditional norms, subtle gender norms and societal expectations are still somehow reflected in the interaction patterns of both genders. The data shows a significant trend that in traditional cafes, mixed grouped interactions are not prominent yet, and gender-based interactions are still noticeable because of old thinking patterns associated with male dominance there. Several participants recounted identical situations, especially in traditional settings, where their presence caught attention due to certain factors:

*“I remember one experience at a traditional cafe. I was discussing a class project with my two female friends from university. The café is known for its intellectual history and many older men were sitting there discussing politics. While nothing negative happened, we did feel that people were observing our table more than others. It made us slightly more aware of our behavior, even though we were just having a normal conversation.”*

*(Male Participant, P7)*

These kinds of responses emphasize the traditional thinking of judging male and female interactions that is still somehow practiced in traditional old cafes. That's why people there get conscious of themselves and have to modify their behavior in subtle ways. Another essential part of this matter is how men and women sit, talk to each other, and use café settings in different ways. Participants repeatedly emphasized unique patterns:

*"I have noticed that men usually sit by themselves or with their friends and they stay there for a pretty long time. Women on the other hand tend to come with their friends or with their family. These days it is more common to see men and women in groups especially, among students and young professionals and this is happening a lot in modern cafés like the ones that are popular now. The thing is, modern cafés are really bringing men and women together in groups."* (Female participant, P1)

### **5.5 The Social Gaze and Public Scrutiny of Mixed Social Groups**

This theme explores how individuals in café settings navigate their feeling of belonging to those settings in different ways based on the theories of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu, such as utilizing visibility, behavior, and social cues. According to the results driven from the data, cafes aren't fully neutral spaces; some people experience subtle forms of observation, judgement and class-based distinction that affect how comfortable and involved they feel in those spaces. Women especially felt being looked at or closely examined at cafes sometimes. This made them feel uncomfortable and more aware of themselves in café spaces. One individual gave a thorough explanation of this:

*"This happens to me all the time. I am talking about groups of men. They will stare at women like me. They look us up and down. It makes women like me feel really uncomfortable. I remember one time I was at a café with my family. My family got up to leave. I stayed behind for a minute. I wanted to take a picture in the mirror. As I was walking back to my family, I*

*saw a group of guys staring at me. I looked at them thinking they would stop staring. They just kept looking at me. I felt really uncomfortable. So, I walked away quickly to join my family”.*

*(Female participant, P1)*

These answers show that visibility works differently for women. Just being in a scene whether alone or with others while visiting cafes, as a female they observe attention and judgement. Participants further associated this experience with cross-gender interactions, which may draw increased social attention in public settings.

*“I personally haven’t felt excluded, but I have noticed situations where mixed groups attract more attention. The attention itself can sometimes make you feel slightly judged, even if nothing is said directly.” (Male participant, P9)*

These responses demonstrate that, even in the absence of direct conflict, gender norms influence behavior through observation. And if we talk about the other gender although men typically did not feel excluded themselves, male participants acknowledged the existence of the social gaze. Some of them felt being observed when they were sometimes in the mixed gender group.

*“I have never felt like I do not belong to cafes because they are like public places where men can go and feel okay. Sometimes when I am with my friends in old fashioned places, I get a little weird feeling like people are watching us. This happens when people stare at us much. It is not that we will not go to these places. It makes me think about what other people think is normal and how they see me and my female friends when we are together in these cafes. The cafes are fine, for men but my female friends and I will notice when people look at us too much.” (PM6 & PM7)*

Beyond gender, participants highlighted that experiences in cafés are shaped by class position and physical appearance. They further noted that cafés are commonly linked to specific social groups, which influences patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

*“Yes, definitely. There are numerous cafes in Lahore that appeal to the customers of the middle or upper-middle classes. The environment and prices are naturally formed to determine who will visit them frequently. There are cafes in Lahore which are linked to a more elite or modern lifestyle. Individuals or students who do not match the picture may feel out of place or awkward.” (Male participant, P10)*

These results significantly support Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital, which says that cafés are places of social differentiation that gently shape who feel included or excluded. At the same time, most people said that the workers at the café acted professionally and were mostly unbiased, however they were sometimes a little more attentive:

*“In most modern cafés, staff are very professional... Sometimes staff are extra polite when women are present because they want to maintain a welcoming environment.”*

*(Female participant, P11)*

These answers show that even if formal service encounters are mostly the same, there are still small differences in how attentive people are at public spaces. Overall, the results reveal that café settings in Lahore are shaped by a constant negotiation of belonging, where people become conscious of how others see and judge them. People actively show that they are there by staring, watching, changing their behavior, and following indications based on their class. Butler and Bourdieu agree that belonging is not set in stone, but is instead built through visibility, social conventions, and cultural expectations. This means that café culture is both welcoming and subtly exclusive at the same time.

## 5.6 Cultural Norms, Gender Roles, and Social Change

The café culture of Lahore is an intricate blend of cultural norms, gender roles, and the evolution of society on the basis of westernization. The participants have experienced that cafés are not just places for recreational activities but also serve as spaces in which traditional values are negotiated, debated, and occasionally sustained by modernizing the society. By learning about peoples' experiences and perceptions regarding café culture, we can understand how the normal activities taking place in coffee shops have the potential to alter the implications of gender roles and modernity.

An important aspect that is highlighted as a result of data collected is the impact that cultural and familial values have on the availability of cafés for both genders. A significant number of participants stated that although going to cafés is becoming more frequent, particularly in urban areas, the influence of one's familial background continues to affect who visits, particularly women. I noticed one of them express the following:

*“Family values definitely influence it. In some families, frequent café visits might still be questioned, especially for girls. But among younger generations, it's becoming more normal to meet friends in cafés.” (Female participant, P4)*

A more detailed reflection was provided by a male participant:

*“In many families, especially traditional ones, cafés were not always seen as appropriate places for women to visit frequently. But this perception is changing among younger generations. Many families now see cafés as normal social spaces, especially in urban areas.” (Male participant, P6)*

These responses show that the traditional values still affect the conduct, but there is a slow move toward acceptance, especially among young generation and more urban groups. Bourdieu's idea of habitus states that deeply ingrained cultural norms continue to affect

behavior, even when new ways of interacting with others have been emerged. Another crucial aspect is how people perceive cafés in relation to gender. According to the participants in study, men have always been more welcomed in cafés, whereas women have often been looked down upon for visiting cafes alone or too frequently in families and society. One of the participants stated:

*“Yes, to some extent. When men go to cafés it is totally fine. For women, especially a long time ago people would stare or say something. Women who went to cafés were treated differently. Now perceptions are changing. Women are working and they have their money so they have some liberty to do what they want. This means the way people think about women in cafés is getting better and that is a good thing.”*

*(Female participant, P12)*

These answers show how cafés are a part of bigger gendered social institutions, where men have traditionally controlled public space. But the slow addition of women shows that social norms are still changing. People also talked about whether café culture supports or goes against established gender roles. Most people agreed that it did both, although the general feeling was that it should change. One member made it quite clear:

*“I think it does both. On one hand, it challenges traditional norms by allowing men and women to socialize together in public spaces. On the other hand, certain behaviors still reflect traditional expectations, so the change is gradual rather than sudden.”*

*(Male participant, P6)*

These results are very similar to Judith Butler's thesis, which declares that gender roles are always being played out and may be changed by doing the same things over and over again. In this way, cafés are places where these performances are reworked, which makes both continuity and change possible. Lastly, many people in Pakistan saw cafés as signs of

modernization and globalization. People said that they were places that show how lifestyles are changing, how the world is changing, and how social norms are changing. One person said:

*“I think cafés reflect westernization. You see people from different backgrounds there, families, couples, business people, and friends. It shows globalization and a mix of cultures. Moreover, nowadays people are very creative. Many cafés have unique themes such as card games, abstract art etc. These ideas reflect modern trends and technological influences.”*

*(Female participant, P2)*

According to all these perspectives of participants, cafés are functioning as cultural indicators of urban modernism, which is characterized by the modification of global activities in accordance with the socioeconomic circumstances and norms of the local community. This provides further suggestion in support of Bourdieu's theory that new cultural forms are incorporated into pre-existing social institutions rather than completely replacing them.

The findings suggest that café culture in Lahore serves as a transitory social space, where already established gender norms are simultaneously passing on and disputed. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from the data. The presence of cafés presents prospects for gender relations that are more open and flexible, despite the fact that cultural values and social standards continue to influence behavior. In light of all this, it is quite clear that societal transformation is still taking place by means of media and tradition coexisting and influencing the way in which people live their lives.

## **5.7 Imagining Inclusive Urban Futures**

This theme is about how participants picture café spaces that are more welcoming to everyone and what improvements they believe might make the experience better for everyone visiting these spaces. Their answers indicate that being inclusive isn't only about the space itself; it's also about how people act in it, the rules of the café, and how people in general think

about societal perceptions. A lot of people highlighted that it was important to make cafés a safe and respected place for everyone inclusive of gender identity. Many people who took part in interviews believed that management had a big function to play in betterment of café spaces. For instance, one individual thought:

*“Increased policy and better staff behavior would help in making the café environment better. Provided that the cafes are properly regulated, the citizens would not have to be over-vigilant. Additionally, I believe that smoking in cafes is not acceptable.”*

*(Female participant, P1)*

Similarly, another participant emphasized the need for clear rules and staff training. In addition to policies, participants also talked about how important the layout of cafés is:

*“I think there should be clear harassment-free policies and proper staff training. Staff should avoid any biased behavior and ensure that the environment is welcoming for everyone. Also maintaining a respectful environment is very important. Cafés should ensure good lighting, visible staff presence, and comfortable seating so everyone feels safe”*

*(Female participant, P2)*

These responses depict that the environment and the management can have an impact on the inclusiveness of a place. To take an example, such elements as lighting, seats, and employees can significantly change the comfort of people. This is connected with the concept of third places provided by Oldenburg, that cafes are the places where one can hang around and feel comfortable and welcoming. The other important idea that emerged was the influence of personal activities on things. Some people said that it's not just the café's job to be inclusive; it's also the job of the consumers.

*“I think awareness among customers is very important. People need to be more respectful and avoid staring or judging others. Creating a welcoming environment can make a big difference.” (Male participant, P9)*

This illustrates that daily things, like not criticizing others and giving people their space, are just as important as explicit rules for making places welcoming. Participants also said that city planning and rules may help make places for fun more welcoming. One person said rapidly:

*“Yes, if laws are implemented properly, it can definitely improve these spaces. Urban planning that encourages more public leisure spaces like cafés, parks, and cultural venues can help normalize mixed-gender interaction and make cities more inclusive. When cities create more safe and accessible leisure spaces, it encourages women to participate more actively in public life”*

*(Male participant, P6)*

These perspectives imply that inclusivity extends beyond individual cafés to encompass the city's general framework, including the safety and accessibility of public spaces. Many of the people who took part in the study said that café culture is part of a bigger change in society that is happening in urban Pakistan. One participant explained this in a more everyday way:

*“Cafes are not only a place for coffee to me but a connection. Cafes offer a comfortable place to socialize whether it is spending time with my husband, catching up with friends, or after a hectic day. I believe that they are a small, but significant change in the way Pakistani urban life is changing, particularly among women.” (Female participant, P13)*

Cafés are more than simply places to eat and hang out; they are also places where society is steadily changing, especially when it comes to gender roles and how people conduct in public. These ideas show that cafés are not merely places to eat or hang out. In conclusion, the participants said that to make cafés more welcoming, people need to pay attention to a few

different areas, like better management, being nice, and making cities that are welcoming to everyone. There have already been some good changes in the culture of cafés, but there is always potential for more to make these places more friendly and accessible to people from all walks of life. Cafés, in general, can be thought of as places that aren't extremely important but are nonetheless important since they are where bigger changes in society are happening.

## Chapter 6 Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that the café culture in Lahore is not simply a passing leisure trend nowadays; rather it has some deeply rooted social phenomenon structured by gender, socioeconomic class, and cultural norms. Participants observed cafés as places where they can socialize and relax. On the other hand, their experiences propose that these settings are affected by significant socioeconomic differences. These findings align significantly with the existing literature on the gendered interactions in public spaces.

Ray Oldenburg says that other than home and work, cafés are "third places". Oldenburg (1999) says that café spaces foster both social interaction and daily activities. This approach aligns with what the participants said about using cafés for different purposes, such as relaxing, socializing and interacting with both genders. The realities, on the other hand, make it hard to believe that this theory works everywhere. Prior studies (Haque & Naveed, 2016; Khan, 2019) have underscored the inequitable distribution of access to these places in Pakistan. The results of this study indicate that cafés serve as third places that are selectively inclusive, with participation depending on the individuals' financial status and cultural understanding.

Moreover, the results also support the objections to the public sphere in its original form which Jurgen Habermas has defined it. Although cafes might create an impression of an environment where individuals can freely interrelate with each other, it should be mentioned that they do not convey the notions of inclusiveness and equal involvement in full (Habermas, 1989). The access to the public spaces is usually stratified as Fraser (1990) believes that this is so. This is evident based on the experiences of the participants who, although they may be different in their gender, social class and physical appearance, have the perception that they are comfortable and accepted. According to the results of the conducted studies in the Pakistani

setting (Malik, 2020; Mahmood, 2020), this study offers a significant amount of evidence to the notion that cafes help to maintain the existing disparities instead of eradicating those things.

Class plays a gigantic role when it comes to the experiences at cafes. In such cases, participants raised the issue of how such aspects like price, lifestyle, and aesthetic presentation affect a sense of belonging. This is quite compatible with the concept of cultural capital as put forward by Pierre Bourdieu that explains the role of taste, behavior and symbolic capital in creating social differentiation (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, cafes in Lahore are used as the venues of expression and acceptance of identities of middle and upper classes, thus, playing a role in associating socio-economic hierarchies. In its turn, this gives the results of Mahmood (2020) some credibility as he claims that the culture of cafes in Pakistan is inextricably linked to the construction of the identities founded on the social class and the culture of global consumers.

The study brings out the gendered nature of the interactions that occur within cafes, hence the need to support the feminist geography theories that consider space as a social production and power laden (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999). Within the framework of cafes, female participants reported that they were more aware, they had more self-regulation, and they were more selective in their mobility, which is also indicative of more general trends recorded in the Pakistani public life (Sultana, 2017; Ahmad and Shafiq, 2021). Having these experiences, it is evident that entering the public space does not merely involve physically entering the space but also involves social norms and moral judgements.

According to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which states that gender is exhibited through repetitive social acts (Butler, 1990), these findings are in close agreement with the theory. The respondents of this study were constantly changing their behavior, clothes and relations to fit in the socially acceptable standards. These amendments were normally done

in the hope that they would be judged and not because of an explicit restriction. This, according to Phadke (2007) is one of the manifestations of the so-called phenomenon of spatial anxiety, where women internalize the risks and expectations that accompany the presence in the public.

The role of the social gaze and its role enhance these processes. Some of the participants associated the experiences where they were observed, judged or analyzed and influenced their degree of comfort and behavior. This gives some credence to the outcomes of Siddiqui and Kamal (2021) who emphasize the role of surveillance in the open spaces, both formal and informal, on the experiences of women who live in metropolitan Pakistan. The gaze, as a subtle, but effective tool of control, operates in a way that is consistent with feminist arguments that focus on the controlling of visibility with gendered frames.

The findings suggest a significant and a gradual social change. The interviewees observed that the interpersonal relations between the representatives of different genders in cafes are becoming more common, particularly among young urban populations. Cafes are regarded as the areas where various forms of social interaction and gender conversation are promoted. This is a sign of bigger changes in culture that have been seen in recent studies (Zia, 2018; Rehman, 2022). Although it is prohibited, women are still permitted to be in cafes. This is contrary to the norms and the scarce space.

Such change, however, is not consistent. The literature suggests (Khan, 2019; Ahmad and Shafiq, 2021) that the experiences of women vary based on their classes, places, and cultures. This paper confirms that the best way to think of the cafes in Lahore is that it is a transitional place, in which modernism and tradition are in a state of coexistence. Some cafes promote tolerance and openness, whereas some of them preserve the old traditions, influencing the behavior of people and their relationships.

The papers also examine how the cafe culture varies in the world. The findings of this paper indicate that these assumptions are not entirely applicable in the situation in Pakistan, although Western literature portrays cafes as friendly and gender-neutral places (Holland, 2020; Wrigley, 2019). Although the global aesthetics and behaviors are incorporated, cafes in Lahore are firmly rooted in the cultural structures of the local society especially in the aspects of gender and moral issues. This confirms the notion that the local environment-specific factors influence social experiences, and they are not universal (Mahmood, 2020).

The paper brings out the point that cafes are the venues of cultural change, which are the venues where major societal changes are reflected in daily life. There are ongoing conflicts between the norms, including respectability norms and parental control, and the growing norms of autonomy and self-expression, as can be seen through the experiences of the participants. This aligns with the results of recent studies (Zia, 2018; Rehman, 2022), which depicts the sphere of the cafe culture as the sphere where the gender norms are both supported and criticized throughout the period of their existence.

## **6.1 Conclusion**

This study sought to analyze the cafe culture in Lahore as a socially constructed location, and how gender, social class and cultural norms influence the experience of people. The results show that cafes are not just a recreational place, but a significant location of social interaction, rest and expression of identity. Yet, there is no even access to and comfort in these spaces. Participation is greatly affected by socioeconomic status, familiarity with culture and gendered expectations. Specifically, the experiences of women point to the fact that inclusion is not limited to physical presence but also includes the sense of safety, social acceptance, and the necessity of self-control in order to move in these spaces.

On the whole, the paper has found that cafes in Lahore cannot be regarded as entirely ungendered or neutral spaces, instead, they are socially negotiated spaces, which are influenced by the cultural values and power relations. On the one hand, the café culture is an indication of new changes in the urban life like the greater visibility of women and more normalized mixed-gender relations, but on the other hand, it reproduces the existing gender norms and inequalities based on classes. Cafes are therefore dynamic social environments where continuity and change co-exist, which not only reinforce social structures, but also bring about gradual transformation of everyday social relations in urban Pakistan.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

### ***6.2.1 Theoretical Contributions***

This study highlights the fact that cafes are socially constructed places that are affected by gender, class, and cultural beliefs as opposed to neutral third places. It adds to context-specific sociological meanings of urban public spaces as it helps to emphasize that inclusion does not only imply access but also a feeling of safety, comfort and social acceptance.

### ***6.2.2 Policy Level Recommendation***

To reduce the exclusion of classes, the policymakers ought to promote cheap cafe settings, improve security and create gender sensitive policies to create safer and more inclusive recreational spaces.

### ***6.2.3 Urban Planning and Spatial Designs***

The layout of the cafes should be bright, secure and convenient without compromising privacy and openness. Intelligent seating plans and convenient locations can be made to enhance comfort especially to women and other diverse users.

#### ***6.2.4 Social Awareness and Cultural Change***

The media and community efforts should challenge stereotypes of women in social places and promote polite and inclusive social behavior. Gender sensitive staff training can be used to make the environment of the cafes more pleasant.

#### ***6.2.5 Recommendations for Further Research***

Further studies need to be conducted using mixed methods, larger and more diverse samples, and explore other factors such as age, class, and digital culture to have a proper understanding of changing cafe experiences.

### **6.3 Limitations**

The results might not be applicable to a larger population because of the qualitative nature of the study and a small sample size. Since the majority of the participants belong to a particular socioeconomic and educational background, the findings might not reflect the realities of people in all the facets of life. The findings do assist in providing answers to significant issues, but they might not reflect the entire picture of what individuals experience in Lahore or any other place. Since the data was gathered by self-reporting, there was a chance that the results might be affected by the personal opinion, memories or the need to be positive.

Being an urban environment the study on Lahore cannot be relevant to the less populated and yet conservative cities. We are only able to gaze at one period of café culture and that is evolving. Future research may better understand these changes by longitudinal research or research that combines other methods.

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## **Appendix A (A Consent Form)**

**Research Title:** Gendered or Ungendered Spaces? Exploring Dynamics of Gender Interaction in Café Culture of Lahore, Pakistan.

### **Principle Investigator**

Malaika Waqar

Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College University, Lahore.

### **Dear Participant,**

My name is Malaika Waqar, and I am conducting a research study for my thesis titled “*Gendered or Ungendered Spaces? Exploring Dynamics of Gender Interaction in Café Culture of Lahore, Pakistan.*” I am writing to invite you to participate in this study through online interview, which aims to explore how young people in Lahore experience café culture, how gender may or may not influence their choice of cafés, their comfort in public spaces, and how these spaces contribute to their social interactions and everyday lives.

The online interview/discussion will take approximately 30–40 minutes. The interview will take place via Zoom or Google Meet at a time and location convenient and private for you. To ensure accurate data collection, the interview may be audio-recorded. All recordings will be stored securely on encrypted devices and will be deleted after transcription verification. You may choose not to have your interview recorded, and this decision will not affect your participation in the study in any way.

There are no known risks associated with your participation. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any point without giving any reason or facing any consequences. All the information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Your name and any identifying details will not appear in the final report or any publication arising from this research. The data collected will only be used for academic purposes.

Please indicate your consent below:

I have read the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without any penalty. I also understand that my responses will remain confidential and anonymous. I consent / do not consent to have my interview audio-recorded for the purposes of this study.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B (Interview Guide)**

**Title:** Gendered or Ungendered Spaces? Exploring Dynamics of Gender Interaction in Café Culture of Lahore, Pakistan.

**Method:** In-depth Interviews

### **Section A: Demographic and Contextual Information**

1. Age, gender identity, education, income and occupation
2. Frequency of café visits
3. Usual company during visits (alone, friends, family, colleagues)

### **Section B: Gendered Use of Café Spaces**

4. Do you feel cafés in Lahore are equally accessible and welcoming to all genders? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever avoided a certain café due to its environment or how it treats men and women differently?
6. Do you feel your gender identity influences how you behave or are treated in cafés?
7. Have you ever experienced or observed any form of gender-based behavior (positive or negative) in a café setting?

### **Section C: Personal Experiences and Social Interactions**

8. Can you describe a café experience where gender-based interactions or boundaries were noticeable? When gender seemed to shape how people behaved or interacted with one another?
9. How do male and females usually sit, socialize, or interact in cafés?

10. Have you ever felt stared at, judged, or excluded while at a café? What do you think contributed to that?
11. How do café staff treat customers of both genders in your observation or experience?
12. How do you or people you know modify behavior, dress, or seating choices based on the café's environment?
13. Do you think class or appearance (how someone looks or dresses) affects how people experience café spaces in Lahore?
14. How do you think café spaces reflect ideas of modernity in Pakistani culture?
15. Do you believe cafés are inclusive of all genders and classes? Why or why not?

#### **Section D: Cultural Influences and Perceptions**

12. How do cultural or family values influence café use as a leisure space?
13. Are cafés viewed differently in society based on gender (e.g., respectable vs. risky)?
14. Do you think café culture reinforces or challenges traditional gender roles? How?

#### **Section E: Reflections and Suggestions**

15. What changes would make cafés feel more inclusive for all genders?
16. Do you believe urban planning or policy can help make leisure spaces more gender-inclusive?
17. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with café culture and gender?

## **Appendix C (Permission Letter for On-site Observation at a Café)**

I, -----(Name of Owner/Manager), (Name of Café) -----, grant permission to Ms. Malaika Waqar, an MPhil student from Sociology Department of FCCU, to conduct brief on-site observations at our café for academic purposes. She has assured me that:

1. The observations will be non-intrusive and conducted in a manner that will not disturb our customers, staff or operations of the cafe
2. No interviews or data collection will take place in cafes.
3. The privacy and confidentiality of all visitors and staff of the cafe will be fully respected.
4. The purpose is to gain a general understanding of café usage patterns and to identify potential participants for a later, separate stage of the study, which would occur outside the café and only with voluntary consent.
5. Any findings from the observations will be used solely for academic research purposes.

Signature -----