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The Nitro Bar: A Third Place for Dreamers

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify what type of neighborhood development happens within The Nitro Bar, and what social factors encourage people to gather at this local coffee shop. I want to know what types of conversations shape the social landscape of The Nitro Bar, and make an attempt at understanding if the desire to belong acts as the strongest form of branding.

A Quick History of Coffee and the Brooklyn Coffee Shop

The history of coffee began in Ethiopia when a goat herder decided to boil the beans of a plant that was assumed to provide extraordinary energy.¹ From this observation, the drink spread throughout the Arab world and was adopted into daily social life. Because coffee is a stimulant, cosmopolitan centers of learning quickly began to adopt coffeehouses to literally fuel and sustain intellectual conversations. In the late 1500s, coffeehouses established themselves in Europe, and furthered encouraged a link between coffee and intellectual conversations.

Starbucks has shaped the modern history of coffee, and how people in cities view the commodity today. Starbucks created the idea that coffee could be a luxury commodity, and that coffeeshops could sell an experience in addition to a product. As the company expanded and

¹ Hanaa Masalmeh (Oct 2015), "The Coffee Shop as Social Space" *The Harvard Crimson*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecrimson.com/column/the-hipster-paradox/article/2015/10/27/coffee-shop-social-space/>

became a global brand, the expectation of the coffeeshop as an experience also expanded.

Starbucks has openly adopted the idea of a “third place” from Ray Oldenburg, who defines the term as hosting “the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.” Notably, Oldenburg declined a job offer from Starbucks, because he was not convinced that the company truly embraced the essence of “third places”, which I will further explain later in this paper. Starbucks did create a space for social interaction within a city, by luring all types of people in with their product.

Unsurprisingly, New York City has the greatest number of coffee shops of any city in the United States. Young coffee shop entrepreneurs like Audrey Finnocario and Samuel Lancaster gain inspiration from this innovative city, but more specifically coffee shops are drawing from a specific borough: Brooklyn. The Brooklyn culture as we know it today emerged around 2006 as a place that embraced industrial aesthetics and lo-fi, a subgenre of hip-hop. Shortly after the creation of a hipster Brooklyn, the financial crisis hit. People looked back to this idea of Brooklyn hipsters in a nostalgic way, in a sense trying to recapture a “non-mainstream” culture as a counter to the Wall Street crisis.² This led to the acceptance of simple and raw materials like wood, steel, concrete, and lots of light in coffee shops, and quickly this creative atmosphere became associated with a “Brooklyn” aesthetic, even if the actual origin is debatable. Silicon Valley and the global acceptance of social media perpetuates a standard of luxury and aspirations that coffee shops strive for and consumers expect. Through sharing and Instagramming, people come to desire a type of luxurious minimalism, so the Brooklyn vibe has entered cities like Mumbai, Paris and Sao Paulo using coffee shops as a vessel.

² Kyle Chayka (Oct 2018) “Coffee shops around the world are starting to look the same” *Quartz*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/1436053/coffee-shops-around-the-world-are-starting-to-look-the-same/>

Nate Armbrust, a food scientist from Portland, OR, is credited with inventing nitrogen-infused cold brew coffee.³ Nitro cold brew coffee is made by adding tiny nitrogen bubbles to the brew by squeezing it through a special tap, and this process produces a smoother and creamier cold brew. Since Armbrust introduced the concept in 2013, the popularity has spread from Portland to New York and many other major cities across the world. Audrey Finocchiaro's uncle has studied food science for over forty years, and helped Finocchiaro and Lancaster master the art of nitro cold brew.⁴ According to Lancaster, the nitro brew coffee "pours like a Guinnesses", and now Nitro Cart kegs can be found across Rhode Island and are expanding into Massachusetts and beyond.

Perceptions About the Roles of Local Coffee Shops

In general, the current trend of coffee shops is that they are becoming social hubs where neighbors gather, as well as work spaces for students and freelancers. Starbucks is a good model of the modern coffee shop, and I will use studies of Starbucks to look at as a comparison to The Nitro Bar. In many articles written, there is a general consensus that Starbucks sells more than coffee. They function as access to a third place, and journalists have argued that third places are critical to humans' psychological well being. The concept of "third place" was established by Ray Oldenburg in 1989 in his book *The Great Good Place* as public places where people can socialize. Home is a "first place" and work is a "second place", so the "third place" are places where people can enjoy community outside of the first and second places.⁵

³ Lisa M. Jarvis, Jessica Morrison "What's nitro cold brew, and why is it so damn delicious?" (Aug 24, 2015) Retrieved from <https://cen.acs.org/articles/93/i33/Nitro-Cold-Brew.html>

⁴ Nikki Betuel, "The Beloved Nitro Cart (and now, Nitro Bar)" (7 March, 2018) Retrieved from <http://vagabondmagazine.org/beloved-nitro-cart/>

⁵Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (1989).

The informal social network created in local coffee shops help create an urban social fabric that extends beyond the value that one person gets from a cup of coffee. A Starbucks spokesperson says, “People connect with Starbucks because they related to what we stand for. It’s the romance of the coffee experience, the feeling of warmth and community people get in Starbucks stores”.⁶ In conversation with Audrey Finocchiaro, co-founder of Nitro Cart and The Nitro Bar, she emphasized that she and Sam wanted The Nitro Bar to be a place that is unapologetic for reflecting the values and ideals that they think are important. Part of the purpose of my study is to attempt to highlight if the The Nitro Bar followers connect with the brand because their personal values align with the values of the brand. I also will explore how “the romance of the coffee experience” manifests itself in The Nitro Bar.

A major point of my study is to identify what social factors encourage people to gather at The Nitro Bar. During my preliminary observations at the location on Broadway, I gained a sense that the coffee shop functioned as a type of neighborhood living room. According to *Public Space and the Ideology of Place in American Culture*, “To [Oldenburg], third places serve not just as refuges or hideouts from the world. They perform a vital public service--they bring different people together, people who would not come in contact with one another in any other setting. And they do this, not just for commerce, but also for the larger social good, for democracy even.” Before I started my study, I predicted that The Nitro Bar will fit this definition of a third place more closely than the Starbucks chain, because of the thick social network that Providence has. There is also an idea that the owner plays a large role in defining the atmosphere and culture of a local coffee shop⁷, and before I stepped foot into The Nitro Bar I had the

⁶ Miles Orvell and Jeffery L. Meikle, *Public Space and the Ideology of Place in American Culture* pg 249 (2009).

⁷ Miles Orvell and Jeffery L. Meikle, *Public Space and the Ideology of Place in American Culture* pg 257 (2009).

expectation that this is a widely accepted view that will likely be confirmed in my observations yet with a slight twist. Since The Nitro Bar has a flat organizational structure, I expected the culture of the company to be impacted equally by the group who interfaces with customers each day.

When coffee shops are mentioned, often people instinctively picture gentrification and an influx of Millennials and Gen Zs into a neighborhood.⁸ At first glance at The Nitro Bar's highly curated and extremely trendy Instagram, one might assume that this is the case at the location on Broadway Street. From my initial interactions with the brand at its physical location, I expected the study to challenge the thought that Millennials and Gen Zs make up the primary customers because the location of The Nitro Bar is located in an area where few Millennials live and this area farther than a mile from most of the colleges in the area.

Research Methods and Context

The Nitro Bar site is located at 228 Broadway in Providence, RI, which opened in the winter of 2017. The Nitro Bar is a brick-and-mortar extension of The Nitro Cart brand that started as a pop-up selling nitro cold brew coffee around Providence. For this research paper, I incorporated a mixture of fly-on-the-wall observations, participatory observations, and an interview. I visited The Nitro Bar a total of 11 times and on average stayed in the space 2.5 hours. The advantage of incorporating a specific interview, casual conversations, and



Figure 1. Image of The Nitro Bar on the right looking toward downtown Providence

⁸ Rosie Spinks, *The Guardian*, "The caffeine curse: why coffee shops have always signalled urban change" (Apr 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/08/coffee-shops-gentrification-urban-change>

observations is that I attempt to understand how The Nitro Bar team and Nitro Bar customers view the brand, third place, and social interactions. I also had the ability to use observations to see if the internal dialogue matches with the expression in The Nitro Bar. Another advantage to the method of my study is that I had never stepped foot in The Nitro Bar or followed The Nitro Cart or The Nitro Bar on social media before this study, so hopefully my interactions with the brand, community and products will be genuine and as objective as possible. The disadvantage to this approach is that the interviews are very dependant on the information the interviewees are willing to share and my observations were restricted to only activities and conversations that took place within The Nitro Bar. I also do not have the “insider perspective” that would come with being part of The Nitro Bar team or a member of the local Broadway Street community.

I interviewed Audrey Finocchiaro, girl-boss and co-founder of The Nitro Cart and The Nitro Bar, early one March morning. Originally from Southern Rhode Island, Audrey and her co-founder Sam Lancaster didn't really have any ties to Providence, but wanted to try selling their Nitro brew in this community. Audrey said that the hyper-foodie culture was quite a shock, but it challenged the duo to elevate their product and now continues to push them to elevate the food they serve at the bar. She talked about drawing inspirations from a hip new Netflix show when she mentioned, “We also watch a lot of ‘Chef’s Table’”.

In the interview, one of the things that formed the foundation most of the conversation was how she and her co-founder, Sam Lancaster, wanted to create a space that embraced their “I don't give a f*ck” attitude. In a practical sense, this meant that the Nitro Cart/Bar brand was able to be vocal about political ideas and cultural views, and in a place like Providence, their customers and community tend to share similar ideals. Audrey views the customer base as

entrepreneurially spirited and creative individuals. She says that this client description transcends age. This idea of a transgenerational community counters my original perception of who comes into the Nitro Bar/Cart, but is something that has been supported in my daily observations of the space. It is more about the type of people, social views, political views, and lifestyles of customers rather than their job descriptions and social status. The creative garnishes and mixes that they sell at Nitro Cart/Bar reflects the creative crowd that they attract. This compliments the “foodie” culture of Providence well. The food menu was crafted by someone who was recommended to Audrey and Sam from the chef at North, and the menu uses local food and brings in items from Olga’s Cup and Saucer and Rebelle Bagels, as well as local egg and microgreens. The spirit of collaboration with local food businesses runs deep, and they even partner with Bolt Coffee for the beans that they use in their coffee.

The Nitro Cart group started with a group of friends who all loved the concept and the ability to work together on a fun product that they believed in. This was how the idea of a flat organization structure was born. Audrey studied business in college, and she felt (more so than Sam) that with a flat organization structure, everyone in the group would be more productive because they could take ownership and feel a close tie to the brand. Baristas play an integral role in The Nitro Bar setting. These individuals are the people who The Nitro Bar “regulars” identify with and habitually converse with. The baristas also engage in conversations with first-time visitors and I have observed them facilitating connections between patrons.

Also in the interview with Audrey, we talked about their cult-like following that has been solidified through their social media presence. Currently, The Nitro Cart has approximately 12,000 instagram followers and The Nitro Bar has just under 7,000 followers. In the past, The

Nitro Cart loyals were referred to as the “Nitro Cartel”, which is a cheeky play on words. The term was born from friends and customers self-identifying as such – this was not a term that Audrey and Sam came up with. But while in conversation with Audrey, she explained, “our vibe and social culture does not really support the word ‘cartel’ in the ‘Nitro Cartel’ community name.” As a result, they are transitioning away from the use of this term. I viewed the organic creation of the term “Nitro Cartel” as well as the transition away from the term as a telling example of how the brand is self-reflexive, and highlights the true values of the brand.

Observations Of The Local Living Room

On March 6th I observed Cole, the first barista and member to join The Nitro Cart/Bar team beyond Sam and Audrey, engage in conversation with a Nitro Bar “regular” named Jack. Jack appears to be in his late 60s. In my personal conversation with Jack I found out that he has a



Figure 2. Photo of the bar at The Nitro Bar

weekday routine in which he visits a couple local establishments in the area. He mentioned to me that he will grab a coffee at one cafe, eat breakfast at his favorite spot, and then come into The Nitro Bar for another coffee and to hang out. From this conversation with him, I saw first

hand someone who loves the community and human interaction created by third places. On this particular day, Jack sat at the bar and talked casually about the bartending profession, and Cole mentioned that he much prefers working as a barista. Jack joked that he might want to be a Nitro Bar barista, but he was hesitant about the position. Then Cole said something that I thought was critical when he posed the question, “You don’t

want to be a [Nitro Bar] barista? You get to talk to people all day.” I felt like this was a meaningful question, because in theory a barista’s job is to prepare coffee and drinks for customers, but in this brief dialogue, Cole describes the job in terms of social interaction.

Before starting this project, my perceptions of the interactions that occur in a coffee shop were quite simple - I imagined a space where individuals work on their laptops, read a book, write a paper, or chat with a friend who they came to the coffee shop to meet. After many observations at The Nitro Bar, I did notice a number of people performing those activities but I was shocked to observe another activity that occurred much more frequently in the space. Most days when I walk into the entrance off Broadway Street, I immediately hear a buzz of chatter from inside The Nitro Bar. Cole was serious when he alluded to the idea that Nitro Bar baristas have the opportunity to talk to people all day, in many interactions that happen in the store the barista is the first person a patron talks to. Sometimes the conversation is focused on products at The Nitro Bar, and the barista is providing information or recommendations to first-time visitors but other times the conversations reflect the sentiment of friends who are very comfortable around each other.

The Nitro Bar functions as an extension of a local living room, and during my visits I was able to observe separate examples of what this means. One day during the late morning, a group of five young men came in adorning flannels, beanies, Vans, and messy hair. They knew the female barista working, so she immediately asked them about what was happening in their lives. The men mentioned they were all are moving closer into downtown Providence this summer. The guys talked with the baristas, and one of the baristas mentioned, “If I’m ever quiet, it’s cause I’m super high” and the casual drug-use mention got an accepting chuckle from everyone at the

bar. It reminded me of friends chatting in a living room. The group of young men in flannels are regular patrons of The Nitro Bar who choose to drive to the shop to be a part of this community and enjoy the craft drinks. Similar interactions between customers and baristas reoccurred often, and they created a space that is comfortable for casual conversations. Patrons like the five young men and Jack who are known as “regulars” are people who continuously return to a location. This type of attachment to a coffee shop is not uncommon, and Lisa Waxman describes the idea of place attachment as part of what appeals to people about coffee shops.⁹

Customers who come to the space less frequent often still use The Nitro Bar as an extension of a local living room. During one occasion, I observed two ladies sitting at the table near the window, while one was giving advice to the other who is about to have her 23rd birthday and I documented through my fieldnotes:

The two were engaged in reflections about college and recent work experiences. The conversation evolved the longer they sat in the Nitro Bar, and they transitioned to the topic of relationships and their experiences being single in times when all their friends are getting engaged, and how they remain hopeful in periods of waiting. The two continued to talk about their personal values and maturity, and I heard them reference sermons and experiences at Sanctuary Church. This is not the first time I have observed people mention Sanctuary Church while engaging in conversation about beliefs and hopefulness at the Nitro Bar.

During this interaction, the women talked about personal reflections, relationships, spirituality, and a local community in tones that were very hopeful for the future. I observed that the majority

⁹ Lisa Waxman, *Designing The Coffeeshop: Implications for People, Place, and Community*, Summary (2009).

of these casual conversations took place toward the front of the store where there is a couch, a nice table and a bar area which are made up of pieces of furniture from West Elm.

Observations Of Creative Networking

Past the front of the store adorned with natural light and plants, there is more seating in the back surrounded with bicycles from Dash Bicycle shop and tables suitable for laptops and other work materials. During my interview with Audrey, she highlighted that she views the customer base as “entrepreneurially-spirited and creative individuals”. Some of the individuals are freelancers or work in creative fields where they can work from various locations, like The Nitro Bar. I observed individuals using the space as the backdrop for networking conversations through moments like one I documented in my field notes in late February:

A man in his late 20s in a red zipper hoodie that looks like it is branded with a startup logo comes in and talks to the two ladies sitting beside me, but ultimately finds a space at the bar to relax. The man in the black Nixon backpack and Fila shoes goes up to the guy in the red startup hoodie and then talks with a woman in a flannel shirt and a messy bun who is apparently doing her work while sipping nitro coffee. The woman in a flannel shirt has been there since I arrived, but tucked away toward the back of the store engaged with her laptop. She spoke with the man in the Fila shoes about a mutual friend. The man in the red sweatshirt also engaged the woman in flannel about what local music events she had gone to recently. The conversation evolved to the woman informing the man where her art is currently being exhibited and casually invited him to one of her art shows. Following these conversations, the women beside me took a break from their religious conversation to give the woman in a flannel shirt a big hug and comment that they would support her art show.

It was interesting to see how five individuals, each participating in unique activities at The Nitro Bar, were so intertwined and connected to one another.” In this moment, it seemed like mutual friends were able to talk about many things, but because they were all inhabiting this third place and ran into each other unexpectedly, the woman in the flannel shirt was able to mention her creative work and ask for support at her art show. This type of creative networking that happens in the bar instead of through email or LinkedIn I think is very impactful because it is more intimate and from what I have observed people seem genuine in their desire to support each other. I will note that I do not know if the others actually went to the woman in the flannel shirt’s show, so the assumption about a genuine desire to support others is based solely on interpersonal relationships I observe at The Nitro Bar.

The Nitro Bar has a bulletin space like many cafes in the Providence area, and on multiple occasions local artists and musicians would come in to display information relating to an upcoming event. During early April, a man with a nose ring and arms full of posers came in and ordered two cold brews, one with ice on the side. For someone who had seemingly never been to The Nitro Bar before he felt comfortable making a customized order. After smalltalk with Nick and Noah, he asked where he could hang a poster. When they responded, he did not immediately hang the poster, take his drinks and leave like I expected; instead, he remained sitting at the bar. Noah and the man engaged in a lively conversation relating to the great selection of vintage clothing at the Salvation Army and Savers in Providence. The mention of vintage clothing attracted Jack and a man in an orange vest sitting at the bar to also engage in the conversation. After they had shared their appreciation for vintage clothing, Jack asked about the posters in the man’s hands and the three customers and one barista all participated in a

conversation about the man with a nose ring's work. He talked about the creative work he does daily and went into details about the logistics of planning an event like the one he was advertising for. The Nitro Bar setting facilitated this networking opportunity between a group of individuals that probably never would have met otherwise.

Networking was not an activity reserved for customers. In early March, a lady in a simple suit outfit who appeared to be in her 50s walked in and immediately started a conversation with Cole about family friends that they shared. This type of connection was not an uncommon occurrence between Rhode Islanders. After she ordered, conversation switched to where they were from. The woman mentioned that she had a beach house, and Cole noted that he goes surfing and sometimes crashes at a friend's house in that particular coastal area when the waves are good. The woman offered that next time he wants to go surfing and needs a place to spend the night, she would allow him to stay at her vacation house if he ever needed. She gave him her card. In this interaction, networking stemmed from connections the two people had outside of The Nitro Bar, but the act of being in The Nitro Bar at the same time is what allowed this exchange to occur.

Community Fostered By The Nitro Bar

Based on my observations during this study, The Nitro Bar serves two main functions as a space: to serve as a local living room and to facilitate networking for creatives in Providence. These two functions facilitate a number of the characteristics Oldenburg believes a third place should exhibit, and a few relevant characteristics to my research include: conversation is the main activity, a home away from home, and a place with welcoming "regulars".¹⁰ Urban

¹⁰ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (1989).

researchers and many members of the general public have accepted the idea that third places exist and are vital spaces for human interaction, and based on my observations I argue that places like The Nitro Bar can actually create spaces for specific types of conversations. Through serving as a physical place to encourage casual conversations and networking, The Nitro Bar community facilitates aspirational conversations.

In the observations I have already noted earlier in this paper, topics of hopefulness, future plans, and dreams occur, and the following observations are interactions I witnessed at The Nitro Bar between late February and early May. Two young women in leather boots come in and the one with a nose ring talks about getting a car and all the places she will travel with this car. They talk about getting better jobs in the coming months and moving beyond their current economic position in life. On a separate occasion, a pair of ladies in oversized sweaters sat at the round table near the window and discuss what Christianity means to them and how it manifests in their daily lives and what they believe happens after death. Once I observed two teachers talk about their college experiences and how they have grown up and “adulted” since then as they graded papers on the couch at The Nitro Bar. One barista talks about their experience with social work and how they can be hopeful for society when they have experienced a community like the one they have in Providence where everyone helps each other out whenever someone is in need. There were many more stories like this, and while all the conversations feature different topics, they all have an underlying sentiment of hopefulness and aspiration. The subjects in the conversations were talking about dreams and desires they have for the future, rather than talking about things happening in their present.

Oldenburg alludes to the idea that third places can function as extensions of local living rooms and areas for creative networking when he says, “your third place is where you relax in public, where you encounter familiar faces and make new acquaintances”.¹¹ Third places exist to bring people together, but the specific types of conversations and community that is created can differ. Based on my observations over the course of two months, The Nitro Bar as a third place facilitates not only a space for casual conversation, but serves as a setting for numerous aspirational conversations.

The underlying thread of aspiration in many of the conversations at the bar was striking, because when I am in other coffee shop settings I am accustomed to hearing conversations about current job conditions, what is happening in the news, and people catching up with other people about the past week’s activities. Third places are spaces where people can interact and engage, but then different third places create a space for different types of conversations. In an attempt to further understand this phenomenon, I observed the roles that the baristas and owners played in the daily atmosphere of The Nitro Bar.

The Role of Baristas

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the major jobs of a barista at The Nitro Bar is to talk to people. Sometimes the conversations are quick and informative, other times they are long winded and personal, and quite often they are casual and witty. In *Public Space and the Ideology of Place in American Culture* Jeffrey Meikle and Miles Orvell talk about Oldenburg’s view of the role that baristas and owners play in creating the environment of a coffee shop when they state, “Real third places, he insists, must have open doors and throw off a whiff of danger or

¹¹Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, pg 14 (1989).

a hint of unpredictability. In Oldenburg's mind, the owner plays a key part in creating the unique--and really transformative--character of a third place. Standing behind the bar or the counter day and night, he sets the tone for the place through his jokes, political commentary, wall hangings, jukebox choices, and gruff or gentle gestures. He welcomes strangers and brings them into the community by introducing them to the regulars. And he doesn't do this just for the money; he does it for himself, out of a desire for social connections, and in service of his town or neighborhood".¹² The baristas on shift at The Nitro Bar are the ones who decide what music plays in the space each day, and this sets the atmosphere at the bar at any given time.

Additionally, whoever runs The Nitro Bar Instagram does not shy away from posts that reflect specific political views, especially relating to topics like abortion and climate change. In April, the monthly drink specials were a S'mores Latte and a Lavender Tonic drink, where 10% of profit from the purchase of these specialty drinks went to support Camp AmeriKids (a camp for kids living with HIV/AIDS) and Planned Parenthood. Conversations at the bar frequently arise centered around the music, store decor, and political causes that the drinks of the month support. In subtle ways like this, Audrey and the team have an influence over conversations at the bar and I think the experience that is created for customers is reflective of the "we don't give a f*ck attitude" that The Nitro Bar team values.

Beyond influencing the atmosphere of the space, baristas and the owners of The Nitro Bar also serve a critical role of connecting customers to each other. Baristas will start a conversation with one customer, and then engage another customer in the conversation by introducing the two patrons. Because they know so many people due to the sheer number of

¹² Miles Orvell and Jeffery L. Meikle, *Public Space and the Ideology of Place in American Culture* pg 257 (2009).

customers that interact with the space, the baristas also have the power to connect different people in the Providence area who have similar interests. Sam and Audrey collaborate closely with local restaurants in the Providence area for the food items sold at The Nitro Bar.

Relationships between The Nitro Bar and establishments like Olga's Cup and Saucer, Bolt Coffee, Caprichos, and LevenCBD support local businesses and encourage positive interactions between the businesses instead of a competitive spirit. These connections form a thick network of people that is readily available to the owners and baristas of The Nitro Bar, and positions The Nitro Bar as an influential intersection of local living room and space for creative networking.

Summary and Considerations

The Nitro Bar exists as a physical location that functions as both a local living room and a space for networking. A “we don't give a f*ck” attitude plays a large role in the branding of the company, and welcoming baristas create a comfortable environment for specific individuals to gather on this space. These physical factors and social characteristics shape a community within The Nitro Bar that is filled with aspirational conversations. Because I observed The Nitro Bar over the course of 10 weeks from the perspective of a customer, the observations I used to make this claim are limited. There is literature available related to the topic and study of third places that make claims about the types of activities that are necessary to cultivate a safe and inclusive community gathering space. The current study of third places does not address the type of conversations and community development that takes place in different third place settings.

The study I performed based on my recent observations creates the claim that The Nitro Bar is a third place that fosters aspirational conversations. If I was to extend this research in an attempt to understand why aspirational conversations take place in this environment, I would

need to spend more time in the space and observe customers' conversations outside of The Nitro Bar to see if the aspirational conversations are a product of the brand and the physical space, or if it is the result of the specific types of people who come to The Nitro Bar. Regardless of the underlying reasons behind individual customer behavior, this study shows that third places like The Nitro Bar can function as a casual social space and a place for networking to facilitate safe havens for dreamers to have hopeful conversations. The next time I want to talk about my future plans and dreams, maybe I will invite a friend to grab a Wilbur from The Nitro Bar.



Figure 3. Photo of a Dirty 'Chata and churro at The Nitro Bar