

6-30-2008

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Alcohol Use among Restaurant Workers:
An Examination of the Impact of Work-related Stress and Workplace Culture

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Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Sociology

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June 30, 2008

Ypsilanti, Michigan

ABSTRACT

Despite reports indicating high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry, little research has examined alcohol use among restaurant workers in an in depth fashion. Through an examination of personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture, this study explores the prevalence of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. Twenty restaurant employees were interviewed, recruited via snowball sampling and flyers posted on various college campuses in southeast Michigan. High levels of alcohol use were found to be related to a combination of personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture. Results supported social learning theory, with heavy drinking being positively and negatively reinforced, having no significant deterrence, and thus established as normative behavior. Findings also suggest that more could be done to curb heavy drinking, particularly with regards to the cultural elements (tolerance for hung-over employees, after-shift drinking, on-the-clock drinking, etc.), implementing drug-testing programs, and providing employees with substance abuse information.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Justification and Significance.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Research Question.....	4
Chapter 2: Review of Literature.....	5
Chapter 3: Methods.....	14
Research Design.....	14
Population and Data Gathering.....	15
Chapter 4: Results.....	16
Demographic.....	16
Drinking Habits.....	17
Personal Characteristics.....	21
Workplace Stress.....	23
Workplace Culture.....	30
Drinking as Socially Learned Behavior.....	38
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions.....	42
References.....	46
Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions.....	51
Appendix B: Informed Consent.....	53
Appendix C: Human Subjects Approval.....	55

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Americans go out to eat countless times a year at a seemingly increasing rate. In fact, according to *Meal Consumption Behavior—2000*, a National Restaurant Association report, an average of one out of five meals consumed by Americans, approximately four meals per week, is prepared in a commercial setting (Ebbin 2000). Given this frequency, dining guests are conditioned to know what to expect when it comes to their dining routine, but they are frequently hidden from the restaurant's backstage performance. For example, most guests would be surprised to learn that there is an 11.2 percent chance that their server is high on drugs, meaning that one out of every ten times they dine out the server is likely to be under chemical influence (Sanson 1999). This percentage places food service industry third in workplace drug use among 14 industries surveyed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 1999.

This finding is consistent with previous data on substance use in the food service industry. Based on a 1997 SAMHSA survey of self-reported drug use, illicit drug use rose from 11.4 percent in 1994 to an occupational high of 18.7 percent in 1997. This 7.3 percent rise was greater than for all other occupations. By 2007, food preparation and serving were again at the top of all occupations in "Past Month Illicit Drug Use," at 17.4% (Larson et al. 2007).

When considering alcohol, a legal drug, the rate of heavy drinking jumped from 12.2 percent in 1994 to 15.0 percent in 1997. This increase catapulted the food service industry to the top of all occupations, in terms of self-reported alcohol consumption among its workers. According to the 2007 NSDUH report, food preparation and serving

were third among occupations in “Past Month Heavy Alcohol Use” (five drinks or more), at 12.1% (Larson et al. 2007).

The cost of this substance usage is enormous, with greater consequences than an error made on a particular food order: It is estimated that substance use in the workplace costs nearly \$100 billion (Sanson 1999). Workers who abuse substances are more likely than nonusers to be absent from work, to be involved in an on-the-job accident, and to file workers’ compensation claims (Sanson 1999).

In an occupation that concerns itself with responsible alcohol service to its guests, these high rates of substance use are ironic. Substance use also does not seem to raise much concern from within the industry as workers are not often offered substance abuse programs or information. Christine McGovern, a nationally recognized expert on workplace drug abuse, states that “...only 61.5 percent of workers in the industry reported that their workplace provided information about the use of alcohol or drugs” (Sanson 1999:18).

How can these high rates of substance use in the food service industry be explained? Little research has been conducted on this particular question, but according to Lieberman (2000), “Long hours, high pressure and opportunity have contributed to an exceeding high level of drug and alcohol abuse in this industry” (24). Similarly, it could be that drug and alcohol use are confounded by other variables such as age or income (1997 NHSDA). Both of these are plausible explanations, but clearly more systematic, empirical research is needed.

Justification and Significance

As indicated earlier, there is not a lot of literature on the prevalence of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. What literature that does exist, however, consistently indicates that there are indeed high levels of alcohol use within this industry. More extensive research in this area is clearly needed.

Increased knowledge and understanding of alcohol use in the restaurant industry could help reduce the severity of alcohol use problems prevalent within the industry. Furthermore, given that the consequences of alcohol use are far reaching, extending beyond the individual to the restaurant owners, the workers' families, the customers, and society as a whole, the research has widespread relevance.

Purpose of Study

One of the aims of the research will be to increase the knowledge and awareness of alcohol use within the food service industry. As noted earlier, the fact has already been demonstrated that alcohol use is higher in the restaurant industry than most others. However, despite this information, many within the industry are unwilling to address this circumstance.

The second aim of this research will be to improve efforts to offer food service workers prevention and coping mechanisms that would reduce alcohol use. The industry provides a great deal of information for servers on responsible service of alcohol to patrons, but virtually none for employees as to how to seek help for their own problem drinking. When it does occur, assistance should be given in locating treatment centers.

Research Question

The review of the literature indicates that demographic characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture are likely to be key factors associated with high levels of alcohol use within the food service industry. The general research question for this study, therefore, is to examine alcohol use in the food-service industry and its relationship to these factors. More specifically, with a qualitative focus, the research aims to provide deeper insight into how personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture particular to the food service industry contribute to high levels of alcohol use.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress

There are three components to social stress: sources of stress, mediators of stress, and manifestations of stress (Pearlin et al. 1981). The sources of stress consist simply of eventful experience, life strains, and self-concepts (Pearlin et al. 1981). Mediators of stress are a little more complicated, consisting of two types: social supports and coping (Pearlin et al. 1981). As for the manifestations of stress, Pearlin et al. (1981) discuss how there are a multitude of outcomes.

Although all three stages of the stress process are important, perhaps most important to the stress-alcohol relationship is the mediating process involving social support and coping. After all, it would be at this stage that alcohol use is potentially most pervasive. It is through this frame of reference that the two key models regarding the stress-alcohol relationship most common to the literature must be discussed: the Tension Reduction Hypothesis and Social Learning Theory.

Tension Reduction Hypothesis

The Tension Reduction Hypothesis has two main propositions: First, that under most circumstances alcohol will reduce stress; and second, people will be especially motivated to drink alcohol during stressful times (Sayette 1999). In line with the first proposition, it is believed that alcohol consumption can result in a stress-response dampening effect (Sayette 1999). According to Michael Sayette (1999), both individual factors (family history, personality traits, extent of self-consciousness, cognitive functioning, and gender) and situational factors (distractions during a stressful situation

and timing of drinking and stress) determine the extent to which stress-response dampening occurs.

It is important to further distinguish between individual and situational factors. Individual factors identify those people for whom alcohol is most likely to reduce stress, whereas situational factors identify circumstances under which alcohol consumption is most effective in reducing stress (Sayette 1999). Situational factors can be further categorized as either distraction or timing. Distraction uses an attention-allocation model where alcohol impairs cognitive functioning, functioning as a distraction to a stressor (Sayette 1999). Conversely, timing uses an appraisal-disruption model where intoxication precedes exposure to a stressor whereby impaired appraisal functions to reduce stress (Sayette 1999).

The relationship between alcohol consumption and tension reduction with regards to work-related stress has some unique characteristics when compared to non-work-related stress. In comparing work-related with non-work-related stress, Armeli et al. (2000) interviewed 46 heavy drinkers and found that these individuals consumed more alcohol on days with more negative non-work events; however, they speculate that days with greater negative work-related events may be a result of role overloads and therefore time constraints. So, though there may be an increase in stress and a desire to drink, to do so is less pragmatic (Armeli et al. 2000). However, when considering the restaurant industry, the availability of alcohol may potentially offset these time constraints, with end-of-shift drinks being convenient, more practical, and even expected.

The social construction that alcohol reduces stress could influence the frequency with which people turn to alcohol when stress occurs. As Sayette (1999) points out,

“Since antiquity, people have observed a complex relationship between alcohol consumption and stress” (250). For example, 2500 years ago, the Greek lyric poet, Alcaeus, suggested drinking to cope with stress (Sayette 1999). Today, many cultures utilize alcohol for ceremonial purposes (weddings, birthdays, graduations, etc.). Furthermore, in American culture, expressions such as “having a drink to unwind” or drinking to “calm the nerves” are commonplace. Last, the media perpetuates this construction. It is therefore a widely held, often cross-cultural belief that drinking is a way to cope with stress.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory was proposed by Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers as an extension of differential association theory, with a greater focus on differential reinforcement. Social Learning Theory also builds much on both symbolic interactionism and classical conditioning as it views deviant actions as learned and influenced by positive and negative reinforcement or deterrence (Akers 1973).

With regards to the stress-alcohol relationship, Akers (1973) discusses how alcoholic drinking may be negatively reinforced by reducing anxiety and becoming associated with the avoidance of stressful situations. To this, Cooper, Russell, and George (1988) state how, “Fundamental to the social learning perspective is the dual premises that alcohol may be used as a generalized coping mechanism and that the use of alcohol to cope will promote heavier drinking and alcohol abuse” (218). As for positive reinforcement with alcoholic drinking, the creation of drinking groups may be rewarding in that they may legitimize drinking and provide “pseudo-primary” relationships (Akers 1973).

Social Learning Theory includes the study of associations among socio-environmental influences and drinking behavior (Read, Wood, and Capone 2005). According to Read et al. (2005), Bandura called the term “reciprocal determinism” to describe “...that behavior is shaped by environmental and individual-level factors, which, in turn, shape subsequent behavior” (23). These socio-environmental influences can be active or passive. Read et al. (2005) note that, “Active social influences that facilitate drinking may be especially relevant for college students, who may frequently be in settings where both drinking and overt offers to drink are socially normative” (24). Passive influences, on the other hand, occur when “...an individual perceives and interprets the drinking patterns of others as reinforcement of his or her own drinking and then behaves in accordance with that perception” (Read et al. 2005:24).

Key to social learning is social modeling and structural factors. Kristina Kjærheim et al. (1995) examine whether social modeling and structural factors in the restaurant business are associated with heavy drinking. They administered a questionnaire to active and retired restaurant workers organized in the Norwegian Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Union for at least 1.5 years (Kjærheim et al. 1995). Results showed that both the structural and modeling factors were significantly associated with heavy drinking, with the strongest predictors being “end-of-work drink” and “go out after work” (Kjærheim et al. 1995). The findings led Kjærheim et al. (1995) to conclude, “...social habits of the co-workers and liberal company policies should be focused upon in attempts to reduce heavy drinking” (1494).

Work Environment

Found in various aspects within the theoretical frameworks of the stress-alcohol models are more general topics related to the issue of substance use and work. Perhaps most fundamental of these topics are work environment and culture.

Work environment can be broken down into three perspectives: the social control paradigm, where "...alcohol use may be higher among employees who are not integrated into or regulated by the work organization" (Frone 1999:285); the culture/physical availability paradigm, where "...work settings where alcohol is physically or socially available may promote alcohol use among employees" (Frone 1999:285); and the alienation/stress paradigm, where "...employee alcohol use may be a response to the physical and psychosocial qualities of the work environment" (Frone 1999:285).

The perspective dealing with alienation seems to appear most frequent in the literature. Alienation should include one of three concepts: powerlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangements (Seeman, Seeman, and Budros 1988). The idea of work and alienation is based on the Marxian concept that work is crucial to personal identity (Seeman and Anderson 1983). Greenberg and Grunberg (1995) discuss how, "The alienation model is based on the assumption that alienating work has negative consequences for the development of healthy human personality, and results in a range of problematic behaviors..." (83). Among these problematic behaviors is the abuse of alcohol (Greenberg and Grunberg 1995).

The alienation paradigm is not the only model found in the literature, however. Support for the cultural availability paradigm was found when Nusbaumer and Reiling (2002) examined the relationship between working in public drinking establishments and

heavy drinking. They administered a questionnaire to a random sample of all individually licensed beverage servers and sellers in the state of Indiana (Nusbaumer and Reiling 2002). Their results suggest the importance of environmental influences on employees' drinking behaviors, as drinking on the job was found to be a very significant factor (Nusbaumer and Reiling 2002). Heavy drinking behaviors were also associated with "enjoyment of the social setting" and "enjoyment of mixing drinks," leading Nusbaumer and Reiling (2002) to suggest that occupational availability of alcohol might be important in the recruitment of heavy drinkers to the occupation.

Culture

Another key component to workplace environments is the culture. Culture involves shared understandings, beliefs, values, and practices among workers regarding alcohol use. Within this cultural context, there are four dimensions in which the workplace influences alcohol consumption: normative regulation, quality and organization of work, external factors, and drinking subcultures (Ames and Janes 1992).

The first dimension, normative regulation, can be broken down in terms of social control and alcohol availability. Regarding social control, there are both formal (rules or written policies) and informal (drinking rituals or values or expectations) control (Ames and Janes 1992). Alcohol availability can similarly be broken down into both physical (the ease with which alcohol can be accessible for work-related consumption) and social (how one's friends' use of alcohol affects one's own drinking) availability (Ames and Janes 1992). The second dimension with which the workplace influences alcohol consumption involves the quality and organization of work. This dimension deals primarily with the alienation issues mentioned above. External factors constitute the

third dimension, focusing on personal characteristics such as a workers' own socialization or experiences (Ames and Janes 1992). The fourth dimension, drinking subcultures, is described as sharing "...a well-developed system of beliefs considers frequent and heavy drinking acceptable—or at least permissible—for such purposes as enhancing conviviality, reducing stress, and promoting organizational goals" (Ames and Janes 1992:117).

Corsun and Young (1998) found support for the workplace culture perspective surveying alumni of a hospitality program at a Northwestern university. Results showed that social drinking, as opposed to drinking in isolation, is encouraged and that drinking frequency was more related to the occupation than to the individual position. This leaves Corsun and Young (1998) to speculate that heavy drinking could result from the sheer availability of alcohol in hotels and restaurants, common "shift drink" practices, and a general desensitization to the social undesirability of heavy drinking in the larger population.

Within the culture of the workplace, social support was also examined by various studies. For example, in a questionnaire administered to municipal workers from two cities in the southwestern United States, Bennett and Lehman (1999) found that co-worker social drinking can become a primary means of social support for employees who work in stressful occupations, and that group composition plays a large role in employee substance abuse. In another study by Hagihara, Tarumi, and Nobutomo (2003), which surveyed a population of male white-collar workers in Japan, social support was found to have both positive and negative influences on the workplace stress-alcohol relationship, depending on the type of social support and environmental factors defining the groups.

Age

With regard to alcohol use and the food service industry, age also seems to be a very important variable. In the food service industry, the mean age is 30 (1997 NHSDA). This is significant because the highest level of alcohol consumption in the United States occurs in the late teens and early twenties (Chen, Dufour, and Yi 2004/2005). Furthermore, young adults ages 18-25 have the highest levels of binge drinking and heavy drinking (Chen et al. 2004/2005). So, with a youthful workforce in the restaurant industry, the high levels of alcohol use could be a reflection of the general population of young adults. At the very least, the youthfulness of the restaurant industry provides the potential to have high levels of alcohol use.

Extensive research on age and alcohol use has discovered a cessation that occurs from the late 20s to the mid 30s (Chen and Kandel 1995). One explanation for this cessation period is that adult roles come into play, making heavy alcohol use incompatible to the new role such as marriage or children (Chilcoat and Breslau 1996). This offers another potential explanation for the high levels of alcohol use found within the restaurant industry because the younger workforce is less engaged in adult roles and familial responsibilities. In a workforce that has less familial responsibilities, a heavy drinking lifestyle is more compatible.

Conclusion

After examining the literature on work-place and alcohol use, it is important to note that though there are established theoretical frameworks and concepts, many studies produce conflicting results. Much of the failure for consensus, however, seems to be attributed to methodological issues. For example, Cooper, Russell, and Frone (1990)

state that "...few studies have included adequate sociodemographic and psychosocial controls despite both theoretical and empirical evidence suggesting the potential for serious confounding of perceived work stress and alcohol-related pathology" (262). Furthermore, they discuss how future research could benefit by including structural features of the work environment as well as workplace norms, cultures, and networks that encourage drinking (Cooper et al. 1990).

Another methodological issue is that researchers often develop their own measures of work stressors, ignoring validated measures from organizational behavior and occupational health literatures (Frone 1999). According to Frone (1999), future research should therefore be more inclusive and systematic in assessing work stressors. Frone (1999) also recommends using a moderated mediation model where researchers explicitly incorporate variables thought to link work stressors to alcohol use and the drinkers' reasons for drinking (mediation), as well as explicitly incorporating variables that moderate the relation between work stressors and alcohol use (moderation).

Limitations aside, there have been many studies regarding work-place and alcohol use over the years. However, there has been little alcohol use research focused directly on the restaurant industry, an occupation that consistently has among the highest rates of alcohol use. Much qualitative research is needed in this area exploring the environment, culture, and basic demographics to attempt to gain an understanding as to why alcohol use is so prevalent among the food service industry. The case study approach implemented in this study attempts to glean deeper insight into the relatively unexplored realm of alcohol use in the restaurant industry.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Research Design

The youthfulness of the general workforce and the availability of alcohol in the restaurant industry create some unique cultural elements with regard to alcohol use that are simply not found in other industries. These and other elements combine to create a distinct culture and environment within the restaurant industry that has yet to be adequately researched, even though the restaurant industry is consistently ranked among the top industries in terms of alcohol use by employees. Moreover, much of the research that has been done focuses on levels of alcohol use, but virtually no research has attempted deeper exploratory insight. Qualitative research exploring the high levels of alcohol use among restaurant workers and the impact of the personal characteristics of the workforce, workplace stress, and workplace culture with regards to these levels is lacking.

The proposed study was qualitative, using face-to-face interviews. This approach was the most appropriate as its flexibility allowed adaptation to any emergent themes. More importantly, the qualitative approach was the most appropriate as it provided rich narratives of description, gaining insight into alcohol use in the relatively unexplored food service industry.

The research was carried out using a case study strategy, which allowed for the depth of alcohol use among restaurant workers to emerge close to its real-life context through face-to-face interviews. Given the paucity of previous research on alcohol use in the restaurant industry, the primary focus on exploration and description was highly beneficial. Furthermore, the ease of implementation and familiarity allow for easy replication.

Population and Data Gathering

The unit of analysis consisted of a sample from the population of restaurant workers. Twenty restaurant employees were interviewed for this study over an eight month period (June 14, 2007 – February 7, 2008). Of the interviews, 15 were conducted in various coffee houses and the remaining five occurred in libraries. Participants were recruited via flyers posted on various college campuses throughout southeast Michigan.

In addition, recruitment involved snowball sampling, where respondents were asked to recommend others who also met the criteria for inclusion in the study. It is important to stress here that respondents were not asked for contact information for the recommended others; the respondent simply passed on my contact information. In this way, all respondents contacted me under their own volition.

Most of the interviews typically lasted 30-60 minutes. All participants gave consent to tape record the interviews. Any tape-recordings, transcriptions, and interview notes were coded with the participant's pseudo-name, date, and time to maintain confidentiality. Location of employment was also kept strictly confidential.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Demographic

As noted earlier, the restaurant industry tends to employ younger workers more than many other industries. Those interviewed for this study reflect the general youthfulness found in the restaurant industry, with a mean age of the restaurant employees interviewed of 24.75, ranging from 18 to 33. The mean of 24.75 falls below the industry mean of approximately 30. This dip, however, is not surprising considering that no managers volunteered to be interviewed, a position that is generally composed of older workers.

Of the 20 interviewees, 12 were female and eight male. The ethnic makeup was less evenly dispersed, with 15 being Caucasian and the remaining five self-identifying as African-American, Arabic-Middle Eastern, East Indian, Latino-Mexican, and North African. Five of the 20 participants stated they have previously been arrested and two admitted to having at least one D.U.I. Specific charges other than D.U.I.'s were not asked.

To examine the extent of familial responsibilities, participants were asked about their marital status. Not only is the general restaurant population younger than many other industries, but there are many single workers as well, correlating with less familial responsibilities and obligations. This, coupled with the youthfulness of its workers, could help to set the stage for high levels of alcohol use. After all, those who are young, single, and have minimal familial responsibilities and obligations would certainly be higher risk populations for alcohol use than others. Of the 20 interviewees, there was only one

individual who was married, with the remaining 19 being single. Also important, only three of the 20 participants had children, all three of whom had only one child.

Regarding time spent working in the restaurant industry, the mean was just over six years (6.33), the median was five years, and the mode was three and a half years, which occurred three times. On the whole, the number of years in the industry ranged from 5 months to 15 years. To some, the low mean of 6.33 years may seem surprising. However, when considering the overall youthfulness of the population (mean age of 24.75), most have likely worked in the industry since they were 18 or 19. When asked about their primary position, 15 were servers, three were bartenders, two were cooks, one worked a buffet, one was a busser, one worked a cash register, and one worked room service. (There are over 20 positions reported because one worked in multiple positions in different restaurants and some identified as holding more than one position).

Finally, as to the type of restaurant the employee worked in, three were identified as “family places,” three were identified as “burger places,” two were identified as “bars,” and two were identified as “steakhouses.” The remaining types of restaurants each had one response: “fast-food;” “snack bar;” “sit-down;” “Caribbean;” “seafood;” “Italian;” “Irish;” “family and sports bar;” and “hotel.” Of all the types of restaurants, 13 were identified as corporate and four were identified as privately owned.

Drinking Habits

Although generally speaking the restaurant population is young and single, this in itself does not necessarily ensure that there will be high levels of alcohol use. Rather, these demographics are important because they highlight the population’s susceptibility

to high levels of alcohol use. To get an actual gauge on the levels of alcohol use, interviewees were asked a variety of questions regarding drinking habits.

Overall, the interviewees did indicate high levels of personal alcohol use. However, with great alacrity interviewees discussed and elaborated on the drinking habits of their co-workers, revealing very high levels of alcohol use among co-workers. In fact, most of the interviewees would smile and laugh when discussing the drinking habits of their co-workers. This possibly is a reflection of the levity of high levels of alcohol use to the interviewee, almost like the bashful or ashamed child who gets caught with a hand in the cookie jar—though it was funny to them, they knew or had a sense that having such high levels of alcohol use was problematic.

The interviewees were asked how frequently they went out drinking in general. Approximately half of the interviewees stated they went out “often,” or two to three times per week, and four stated they “never” went out for drinks. Of those who did report consuming alcohol with any frequency, some were then asked the quantity of drinks consumed when out for drinks generally. All those asked stated they consumed three drinks or more on average, and just over half stated they consumed four drinks or more on average.

The interviewees were also asked how frequently they went out for drinks with their co-workers. The majority responded by stating “sometimes,” or about weekly. Most of the interviewees were then asked the quantity of drinks consumed when out for drinks with co-workers. Nearly half said they consumed four drinks or more when out for drinks with co-workers.

The results regarding the quantity of drinks consumed with co-workers are copasetic with the quantity of drinks consumed in general, as in both cases just over half of those asked stated they drank four drinks or more. However, when compared to the frequency with which respondents went out for drinks in general, on the surface, the frequency of going out for drinks with co-workers appears minimal. Deeper insight, however, can be gleaned when considering the inclusiveness of going out for drinks in general, the difference in going out for drinks among those who do not consume alcohol, and the schedule of restaurant workers.

First, in regards to the inclusiveness of going out for drinks in general, it is important to note that going out for drinks in general includes all instances in which one goes out for drinks, whereas going out for drinks with co-workers is specific to only one group of people. One would therefore expect the frequency of going out in general to be higher. Second, when going out for drinks in general, all four who did not drink alcohol stated they did not go out for drinks, whereas two of the four who did not drink alcohol admitted they went out for drinks with co-workers about monthly or less. The latter is particularly important because it indicates that, although not willing to go out on their own, there is something enticing those who do not drink alcohol to go out for drinks with other co-workers. Third, when eliminating those who do not consume alcohol, 13 of the 16 who do drink go out weekly or more for drinks with co-workers. When considering the irregular schedules of the employees, this number is quite high as many only work on the weekends or a few days a week. Future research should also ask specifically about the frequency of going out for drinks per shift, as well as per week, month, or year.

When asked about the drinking frequency of their immediate family members, there was a marked distinction between the frequency of mothers and fathers. The most common frequency for mothers was “about yearly or less.” As for the fathers, both the extremes were prevalent as five drank “four or more days a week” (two described as “alcoholic”) and five “never” drank (one described as “recovering alcoholic”). The frequency with which siblings in general drank was also asked, with the most common response being “about monthly or less,” followed closely by “four or more days a week.”

Interviewees were asked if their co-workers drank more frequently than their friends outside of work. An overwhelming majority said their co-workers do indeed drink more than their friends outside of work, with only two saying their co-workers do not drink more than their friends outside of work, and two saying it was about the same. Mary discusses this difference between the drinking habits of co-workers and friends outside of work:

Um, my friends will go out three times a week, my co-workers will go out...depending on the person like five. So, I mean, just a few days but it's a difference of getting drunk or just having a few drinks. Friends have a few drinks, co-workers—some of them get drunk.

When probed as to why the comparative difference between the drinking habits of co-workers and friends outside of work, Eric provided an enlightening explanation:

I think it's...I'd have to say yes, in the sense that you have it readily available. Friends that work, let's say somewhere like K-mart, you know, you can't—well, I don't know anyone who works at K-mart, but, somewhere where alcohol's not around, you can't just go like, “Oh, I think I'll have a beer” or, you know, you just

punch out and go sit down. So, probably yeah, I would say my co-workers drink a lot.

Eric's account really hits on the notion of the sheer availability of having alcohol at the workplace. This is a consistent finding with other research, as Nusbaumer and Reiling (2002) found support for the cultural availability paradigm with drinking on the job being a very significant factor with employees' drinking behaviors. Similarly, Corsun and Young (1998) found that heavy drinking could result from the sheer availability of alcohol in hotels and restaurants and common "shift drink" practices. When one considers that it is not illegal to drink on the job in most states (Reiling and Nusbaumer 2006) and that restaurant employers and managers not only allow after-shift drinks but encourage employees to do so, consuming alcohol becomes very convenient—it's there, it's cheap (if not free), and, perhaps most important, it's often encouraged.

The explanations regarding the co-worker and friends outside of work distinctions first appeared to be scattered, but a pattern emerges reflecting the previous literature: personal characteristics, workplace stress, and the workplace culture and environment are the main explanations given by those interviewed as to why their co-workers consume alcohol more than their peers outside of work. The next few sections will focus on these three themes that emerged from the data.

Personal Characteristics

With regards to alcohol use, many focus primarily on the personal characteristics of the general restaurant population. It is often taken for granted that since employees are generally young, single, and have less responsibility, they are likely to have higher levels of alcohol use than those in other industries. Age in particular appears to be very

important as the highest level of alcohol consumption in the United States occurs in the late teens and early twenties, with young adults, ages 18-25, having the highest levels of binge drinking and heavy drinking (Chen et al. 2004/2005).

There are additional personal characteristics of the restaurant population, though, that may be associated with high levels of alcohol use. For example, personality type is a personal characteristic that is often speculated as being particular to the restaurant industry. Indeed, several interviewees suggested that one explanation for the high levels of alcohol use may stem from the more extroverted personality type found in the restaurant population. Some research substantiates this, as restaurant employees scored significantly higher on extraversion compared with a population sample, using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Kjærheim, Mykletun and Haldorsen 1996). Although the restaurant industry is speculated to be largely composed of more extroverted personality types, on the surface there appeared to be great variation in personality type among those interviewed for this study. However, personality type was not scientifically measured for this study, and the fact that each interviewee volunteered to participate in a face-to-face interview is perhaps an indication of a more extroverted personality trait.

With regards to personality type, Kjærheim et al. (1996) speculate that employees actively seek a type of personality-organization fit with regards to the restaurant industry, where selection into the restaurant industry is based partly on this more extroverted personality. It is possible that the high levels of alcohol use are related to this extroverted personality type, as those who scored in the higher third with regards to extraversion were especially at high risk for heavy drinking compared to those who scored in the

lower third (Kjærheim et al. 1996). Similarly, Nusbaumer and Reiling (2002) suggest that the occupational availability of alcohol might be important in the recruitment of heavy drinkers to the occupation, as heavy drinking behaviors were associated with “enjoyment of the social setting” and “enjoyment of mixing drinks,” suggesting extroversion.

Although important, focusing exclusively on the personal characteristics of the restaurant population would completely ignore other elements particular to the restaurant industry that have enormous implications on the worker, such as workplace stress and workplace culture. Personal characteristics such as age, marital status, and personality type certainly could play a role in contributing to high levels of alcohol use, but these alone cannot account for such high levels. For instance, there are other industries whose workers likely share some of these personal characteristics common to the restaurant industry who do not have similar levels of alcohol use, such as workers in retail within the customer service sector (Best Buy, Circuit City, etc.). Furthermore, the cessation of heavy alcohol use discussed by Chilcoat and Breslau (1996) that occurs from the late 20’s to the mid 30’s as adult roles come into play does not appear to occur as much in the restaurant population, as the “older” workers interviewed in this study continue to drink heavily. This is further evidence that there are other elements contributing to these high levels of alcohol use.

Workplace Stress

An additional contributor to the high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry is workplace stress. As a bridge into the stress-alcohol relationship, interviewees were asked the specific “likes” and “dislikes” with regards to their job. Of the “likes,”

half of the responses mentioned something about liking the interaction with guests. The next most commonly “liked” job aspect had to do with interaction with co-workers. The money, the flexible schedule, and the active nature of the job were also among the most common responses. Becky puts it best when she states:

I like working with other people, like, I like the co-workers that I have. I like the amount of money that I can make in one night, you know. I like ah, I like working with people, like, in general. Just kind of like, serving people and seeing the different things going on here, different cultures and everything. That’s about all (chuckles).

As for the “dislikes,” there seemed to be a less smooth dispersion of responses, with just over half of the responses including some complaint about management. The following exchange with Jay elucidates some of these issues:

Jay: Management can be a little bit strict sometimes and some of the people that you work with tend to complain a lot.

Interviewer: How is management strict? Can you think of any examples or describe what you mean?

Jay: With ah, some of the rules that I feel don’t need to be applied. Like, I’m a smoker, and that steps into it because they think that they should be able to tell you when you’re able to go do something such as smoke or eat, when you would...what’s better for you because you know your tables better than they know your tables at a certain time. So, just because it’s eight o’clock doesn’t mean you should be able to do something when you’re busy past eight, but fifteen minutes before eight o’clock you might not be as busy.

However, there were other “dislikes” that were also quite common, including the money, the behavior of co-workers (usually involving “gossip”), and the behavior of guests. To this, Brenda’s comments echoed throughout many of the other responses by stating:

Honestly (chuckles), I dislike rude guests, um, guests that are not educated (laughs while speaks) on proper tipping, um...What else do I not like? The corporate rules about certain things with uniform policies and stuff like that, too intense.

When comparing the likes and dislikes of the job, it is interesting that, in both cases, the most common responses concerned interaction with people (be it co-workers, guests, or management) and the amount of money (be it plentiful or sparse). Certainly, in a service industry that centers on interaction with people, it is not surprising to find these to be the more frequent measures for evaluating the likes and dislikes of the job. The enjoyment of interaction with guests, management, and co-workers reported by those interviewed may be a further indication of a more extroverted personality type associated with the restaurant industry discussed earlier.

Turning back to stress, having negative experiences interacting with guests, co-workers, and managers, as well as not making sufficient income, definitely increases levels of stress felt by those within the industry. In fact, nearly half of the responses reported that the job was very stressful. When asked in what ways the job was stressful, there was a myriad of responses. However, by far the most frequent response involved something about being very busy. Other common sources of stress discussed were managers, guests, and co-workers. Malarie provides some insight to the stress of waiting tables by venting:

Um, just like, you have maybe ten tables and all of them got sat at once—I mean (smiling) not really, but maybe like, five of them got sat and you're supposed to be bringing drinks out to every one of them and like, all the food stuff for the other tables and it's just hard to do everything at once and people get pissed off and your managers get pissed off (chuckles)...yeah.

Work in the restaurant industry, however, is stressful in a unique way. As Malarie's experience indicates, working in a restaurant, in general, and waiting tables, in particular, is not only a physically demanding job involving running around all day, but an emotionally demanding job as one is constantly catering to guests, managers, and co-workers simultaneously. Being busy yielded the most frequent response as to the source of stress. However, Malarie notes that it is not necessarily being busy in itself, but it is the repercussions of being busy that are particularly stressful. In other words, it is juggling demands from guests and managers that seems to really take a toll.

The nature of restaurant work demands that servers constantly engage in emotional impression management when interacting with guests. Here, Hochschild's (1983) work on the management of emotions comes into play. In her study of airline workers, Hochschild (1983) shows how, in the public service sector, managers attempt to manage the emotions of the employee, and the employee attempts to manage the emotions of customers. In the restaurant industry, this is certainly the case as the role of server is to create a pleasant dining experience. Being caught in the middle between having one's own emotions rigidly managed and managing the emotions of multiple groups of people can be a very taxing endeavor. This is where Malarie's concern over being busy is relevant—it stresses her out because she is failing to manage the emotions

of her guests as they become upset for having to wait a little bit longer for a refill or to order their food. Furthermore, stress may also stem from Hochschild's (1983) notion of "emotive dissonance," where strain could occur between what the server feels and what the server is portraying to the guest.

Part of the strain from the emotive dissonance felt by the server could have self-alienating consequences. Alienation includes one of three concepts: powerlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangements (Seeman, Seeman, and Budros 1988). One of the potential repercussions of both emotive dissonance, in particular, and the constant management of emotions, in general, could be a sense of self-estrangement or a loss of personal identity with regards to the server. Greenberg and Grunberg (1995) discuss how alienation in the workplace has negative consequences and can lead to problematic behaviors, among which is the abuse of alcohol.

Interviewees were asked how they cope with stress. There were many responses for this particular question, but the most frequent response involved substance use. Of these, three responses involved drinking and three involved smoking cigarettes. The next most common responses involved relaxing, typically articulated as just stepping back and taking a breath.

Finally, interviewees were asked if they believed that alcohol reduced stress. Of the responses, a little over half agreed that alcohol does reduce stress, and a little under half stated that they did not believe that alcohol reduced stress. Of those who said yes, when probed as to why or how alcohol reduces stress, the most common response was that alcohol relaxes. Regarding the relaxation of alcohol, Laura states:

After you work a stressful shift and you go out and have a couple of cocktails and relax—I mean, definitely, it makes you more relaxed...other than, you know, being at work and being stressed out for four hours out of your night, you know. Having a drink definitely relaxes you.

For those who replied that alcohol does reduce stress, this stress-alcohol relationship was so potent that Mona, a respondent who did not drink, confessed the following:

I think that for some people it could because, even though I don't drink, I want to. I mean I want to drink. I want go to the store and grab something and go home and drink but I don't do it. Well, it goes against my religion. But, I can see how other people are driven to it. It's tempting. I would like to.

Mona's disclosure is an extremely telling remark. If the pull and desire to drink alcohol is so strong among an individual who is fundamentally opposed to consuming alcohol, then the pull and desire among those who do not share the same taboo regarding alcohol consumption may be even greater. Furthermore, whereas Mona admits that, though tempted, her religion prevents her from consuming alcohol, what is to stop those who do not share this point of view from turning to alcohol for stress reduction?

The Tension Reduction Hypothesis articulates one of the ways stress is related to alcohol consumption. This hypothesis claims that, under most circumstances, alcohol will reduce stress, and individuals will be especially motivated to drink alcohol during stressful times (Sayette 1999). It is believed that alcohol consumption can result in a stress-response dampening effect, where both individual factors and situational factors determine the extent to which stress-response dampening occurs (Sayette 1999). The

situational factors identify circumstances under which alcohol consumption is most effective in reducing stress, broken down between distraction (using an attention-allocation model where alcohol impairs cognitive functioning, serving as a distraction to a stressor) and timing (using an appraisal-disruption model where intoxication precedes exposure to a stressor whereby impaired appraisal serves to reduce stress) (Sayette 1999).

Both of these situational factors are likely to occur in the restaurant industry, with the availability of alcohol greatly increasing these situational factors. The distraction circumstance is evident as after work drinks are extremely common, serving an attention-allocation function. Mary discusses how:

After a long day of being stressed, you're going to want to drink to relax...It's something to do to calm down I guess.

Likewise, when asked if alcohol reduces stress, Malarie states:

Yeah, yeah we do—Okay, so like, at the end of the shift when we're like, so drained we'll have like a beer, yeah.

Both Mary and Malarie describe how alcohol serves as a distraction, easing a stressful or draining day. The timing circumstance may be less common, especially among the more corporate restaurants, but in cases where employees drink on the job or are allowed to drink with guests, intoxication would then precede or at least coincide with the exposure to the stressor.

Though interviewees identified a variety of methods for coping with stress, the fact that substance use was the top coping mechanism is somewhat alarming. Some perspective to this is provided when considering the interviewees accounts of the stress-alcohol relationship. Over half of the interviewees believed that consuming alcohol will

reduce stress. However, even among those who did not believe that alcohol consumption reduces stress, many admitted that alcohol can indeed reduce stress momentarily. In this light, substance use being the top coping mechanism makes sense: those who believe a substance at least momentarily reduces stress will likely turn to that substance more frequently than others, especially if it is readily available immediately after their shift or even while on the job.

Workplace Culture

The impact of the workplace culture on the consumption of alcohol is powerful and was found to be a leading contributor to the high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. During the interviews, the focus on the workplace culture began with the question of how close interviewees were to their co-workers. The most common response was that relationships were “somewhat close,” followed by “very close.” Laura sums her “somewhat close” relationships with co-workers by stating:

...I have a few good friends I'd say from there. Other ones are kind of acquaintances that you only see at work. But, there's others that I hang out with outside of work.

The overall lack of close co-worker relationships is a bit peculiar. Considering that the majority of those interviewed go out with their co-workers at least once a week, one would expect much stronger and close relationships reported. This could speak to the nature of many these relationships, as they go out for drinks with co-workers on a weekly basis, but engage in little other interaction outside of the workplace. This type of “drinking buddy” relationship is quite common in heavy drinking subcultures (Akers 1973). Liz spoke of the transient nature of her relationships with her co-workers:

Um...actually that's very interesting...because I worked—the other restaurant I worked at was the same company in [names location]. Um, and I thought I had very close relationships with those people because I was with those people for three years. And then when I left, I found out how transient those (chuckles) relationships actually are because you don't see those people all the time.

Interviewees were also asked if they felt pressure from their co-workers to drink. Here, the majority said they did not feel pressure to drink and only a handful said that they did. Of those who did, three stipulated that co-workers do try to get them to go out. Additionally, there were two who said that younger co-workers do feel pressure to drink, and two stated that co-workers, in general, do feel pressure to drink. Although he did not admit to feeling pressure himself, Jay describes:

Jay: Well, they try to get me to go out a lot, but I'm not interested in hanging out with them outside of work.

Interviewer: Do you think others that you work with feel pressure to go out and drink?

Jay: (Immediate) Yes, everyday.

Although Jay and others reported the perception that co-workers feel pressure everyday, the majority of interviewees stated they did not feel pressure to drink from their co-workers, despite the fact that their co-workers frequently ask them to go out. It may be that the peer pressure is less effective because of the transient nature of these relationships. However, as the results from the study show, restaurant workers are still frequently going out for drinks. It may be more likely that the drinking subculture is sufficiently pronounced that overt pressure from co-workers is simply unnecessary. In

other words, co-workers do not need to apply pressure to go out for drinks because other elements in the socio-environment encourage drinking behavior.

For example, as Read et al. (2005) describe, there are both active and passive socio-environmental influences with regards to heavy drinking. Perceived peer pressure is an active social influence, as overt offers to drink are socially normative. However, there are also passive social influences that involve perceptions and interpretations of drinking patterns of others (Read et al. 2005). The perception and interpretation of heavy drinking as socially normative behavior could function as a passive social influence encouraging drinking behavior.

One way in which heavy drinking is defined as socially normative in the restaurant industry is through the everyday discourse among co-workers. When asked how often drinking is discussed at work, the response was staggering. Seventy-five percent said that drinking was discussed “always,” categorized as “everyday.” When followed up as to what is typically discussed, most mentioned something about what happened the night before or something about making plans to go out. Eric captured the essence of most responses:

Interviewer: How often is drinking discussed at work?

Eric: Probably everyday.

Interviewer: Everyday.

Eric: Yeah.

Interviewer: What are some of the things that are discussed?

Eric: How, you know, what you drank last night, how much you want to drink, how you can't wait to get off work and have a beer, where are you going to go

that night to have a beer. You know, stuff like that. How hung-over you are. It's pretty much a daily occurrence (smiles) that someone's talking about it.

Another way in which heavy drinking is defined as socially normative in the restaurant industry is apparent in the frequency of working "hung-over." As to how frequent their co-workers are hung-over, the most common response was "a few days a week," followed closely by "everyday." These responses were quite astounding, as 17 out of 20 interviewees reported that their co-workers were hung-over at least a few days a week. When queried as to how this affected the job, there were a variety of responses, chief of which were that it affected job performance and one's temperament. Becky's response to this question highlights some of these affects of working hung-over:

I think it puts them in, ah, in a really bad mood. Like, they're really tired, they don't want to be there, they're kind of like, really short, like, with guests and um, they're just more interested in going home and going to sleep, maybe eating something—they do talk about it though. They say, "Oh, I'm so hung-over from last night." I think that it affects the job a lot because you got to have personable skills as a server and you're not feeling very personable, you're not going to get the money that you could.

Clearly, the reason for the prevalence of alcohol use in the restaurant industry extends beyond simply the availability of alcohol within the workplace. It is, to a large extent, engrained in the culture and environment. Furthermore, although workers know that being hung-over will result in a rough morning and have financial consequences in less tips earned, 17 out of 20 interviewees said that their co-workers were hung-over at least a few days a week. Together, these occurrences function to create an environment

where heavy drinking becomes a socially normative behavior. It would be alarming to learn that those in other professions came to work hung-over a few days a week and that drinking was a part of the everyday discourse, but in the restaurant industry, these are socially acceptable and frequently occurring behaviors.

How management handles hung-over employees further substantiates heavy drinking as normative behavior. With another overwhelming majority, all but one stated that either nothing was done or that management actually accommodated the hung-over employees. Rather astonishing was that only one mentioned a consequence where the hung-over worker would be sent home. In discussing how management responds to hung-over employees, Tim notes that:

...They don't. Um, I can never say I've seen my general manager hung-over before—well, I've never bothered to ask him either, but you don't ask, you just, you know. You know pretty much by the way a person reacts or, you know, you hear a story from them from the night before. Um, but the manager really doesn't seem to do anything about it. Um, it seems that they're pretty sympathetic.

Management's general tolerance for alcohol use was explored further. Here, all who answered classified their management as either "tolerant," "very tolerant," or "somewhat tolerant." When probed for an explanation of management's tolerance, the most frequent responses were that work and life is simply kept separate and management should not interfere with what employees do outside of work, and that management displays tolerance by allowing an after-shift drink. Malarie describes the tolerance of management by citing the following examples:

I mean, because you can have a beer after work and there's no problem with that and um...I mean, they encourage us to drink, to try the beers, you know, what we're serving and um...we have people come in with a hang-over and unless, I mean, I don't know, unless you're messing up nothing is really done.

Similarly, when asked if management is effective in dealing with drinking-related issues, the response was nearly unanimous, with most stating that management was ineffective. Ironically, the lone respondent who stated that management was effective went on to state that management has drink specials for employees to try to get them to stay after work and drink to make more money through selling alcohol to employees.

Interviewees were then asked to explain further how management could be more effective. Here, the most frequent response was simply that management could be less tolerant. Mary gives a descriptive account of the tolerance of management:

Interviewer: Um, do you think management effectively deals with these issues?

Mary: ...Not really. Most of the time they just look past it—most of the time.

Interviewer: What, if anything, could they do better?

Mary: Do something about it. When that person comes in with alcohol on his breath, send him home. If he does it again, then you fire him. They really don't do that so people, you know, the young people think that it's all right. As long as they just stay clear of the managers, they just...but...

Interviewer: Do you think they should do something?

Mary: I—yeah, if it's a consistency on him coming—or, you know, whoever, mostly it's the guys so—um, come in with alcohol on their breath...ah, yeah, it's not right to be hung-over or drunk at work, no matter where it's at.

In an environment where drinking is a part of the everyday discourse and employees are frequently hung-over, management's general lack of action is puzzling. Management not caring or noticing hung-over employees is disturbing in itself, but management having the same problems and regularly accommodating hung-over employees is even more troubling. In both cases, there is often little to no consequences for employees who come to work hung-over. However, as the interviewees pointed out, being hung-over has the following consequences: hung-over employees are more prone to make mistakes; hung-over employees are tired and cranky; and hung-over employees do not want to work so others are forced to pick up their slack. The lack of action by management legitimizes heavy drinking as there are little to no consequences for being hung-over at work.

A permissive drinking culture is further created by management's general failure to implement drug testing. When asked if their workplace drug tested, 16 replied no, three replied yes, and one was not sure. Many gave explanations for the absence of drug testing, with the most frequent response being that there are such high levels that "no one would work there if they did drug test." The following remarks by Julie reflect this sentiment:

Interviewer: Does your workplace drug test?

Julie: No.

Interviewer: Do you think that they should?

Julie:I think—I'm not opposed to it, but um, I think that in the restaurant industry (chuckles), you would be hard pressed to find employees if you drug tested.

Interviewees were also asked whether their workplace provided substance abuse information to employees. Here, the vast majority said no, four said they were unsure, and only three said information was provided.

To explain management's tolerance towards heavy drinking, those interviewed primarily suggested that there is simply a work/life distinction where managers do not care what employees do outside of work. However, when employees are drinking on the job or coming into work hung-over on a daily basis, the separation between work and life evaporates—the heavy drinking lifestyles of the employees are copasetic with the workplace. The overall tolerance of management towards heavy drinking thus warrants deeper explanation.

One potential explanation for the overall tolerance of management towards heavy drinking is due to a lack of a sustainable workforce. Just as a good job is hard to find, so, too, is a good employee. This is particularly true for an industry characterized by high turnover. Moreover, though restaurant work is one of the few positions where employees can get a job without prior education or experience, the number of competing restaurants makes the pool of skilled and savvy workers scarce. In this way, employers may be hard-pressed to find good help and may therefore be more willing to accept employees who drink heavily.

However, there are other explanations that are plausible regarding the tolerance of management towards heavy drinking. For example, Reiling and Nusbaumer (2006) surveyed licensed servers in Indiana to examine servers' willingness to serve patrons beyond intoxication. Their findings suggested that management's economic motivation and servers' personal drinking patterns were the primary reasons for serving beyond

intoxication (Reiling and Nusbaumer 2006). It may be likely that management not only considers heavy drinking by patrons as economically beneficial, but may also view heavy drinking by employees as beneficial, as well. The notion of an economic motivation for allowing after-shift drinks was brought up in a few of the interviews, highlighted with Liz articulating:

But they also do it because it brings money in, you know, they allow employees...I think that's a huge factor. They—the only reason we started allowing employees to drink at work is because they were going to a different—a restaurant right down the road to drink because it's cheaper. That's the only reason. So, they started making drink specials for us—just for employees so we'll come in and spend money at their bar.

Reiling and Nusbaumer (2006) also discuss how the desire to create a social environment contributes to establishing an accepting environment where heavy drinking can occur. Thus, management may encourage employees to have drinks during or after work with guests in an attempt to increase the sociability of the restaurant.

Drinking as a Socially Learned Behavior

Social learning theory was created by Akers and Burgess as an extension of differential association theory but focuses more on differential reinforcement (Akers 1973). This concept also builds much on classical conditioning as it views deviant actions as depending on positive and negative reinforcement or deterrence. According to the theory, deviant behavior is more likely to occur when it is socially reinforced.

Interpreting the cultural elements of the restaurant industry within this scope, the high

levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry can begin to be explained as a social learning process.

Akers (1973) outlines how heavy drinking behavior can be socially learned, as “Those who drink have been differentially associated with those who present them with definitions favorable toward drinking and with rewards conducive to drinking” (122). The results in this study show how both reinforcement and deterrence are conducive to heavy drinking. Regarding reinforcement, positive reinforcement for drinking is observable in the everyday discourse by co-workers regarding heavy drinking. Almost like a badge of honor, heavy drinking is often bragged about or discussed on a daily occurrence by co-workers. Also positive reinforcement, many interviewees mentioned the social bonding that occurred when going out for drinks with co-workers. James, an interviewee who does not consume alcohol, provides some insight to these dynamics by stating:

Interviewer: How often do you hear drinking discussed at work?

James: Very, very, very often.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

James: Because it gives them something to relate to, it gives them, like, conformity. I think, conformity, you know what I mean. It’s like, “Oh, I did too. I got wasted too last night, that’s odd,” “Oh you got wasted,” you know what I mean.

Interviewer: Do you think that the fact that you don’t go out to drink with them, that that has an effect on why you are not part of these cliques?

James: Ah, it might. I think it might be just because it might make it seem like,

“Oh, he doesn’t drink so he wouldn’t have any fun,” so...But, I’d be viewed differently, I think, if I were to hang out with them.

Unlike positive reinforcement, where the focus is on the addition of a stimulus to reinforce behavior, negative reinforcement concentrates on the subtraction of a stimulus to reinforce behavior. Here, the stress-alcohol relationship serves as negative reinforcement, as many felt that alcohol reduces stress and declared stress as a main reason for the high levels of alcohol use. Finally, the lack of punishment or deterrence (positive or negative) by managers further influences heavy drinking, as there are little to no consequences for coming into work drunk or hung-over. This permissiveness greatly contributes to establishing heavy drinking norms within the restaurant industry.

Ultimately, it is this emergence of heavy drinking constituted as normative behavior that both legitimizes this behavior and also prevents those within the industry from taking action or acknowledging that a problem may exist. Those interviewed did admit that there were high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry, but were somewhat ambivalent as to whether this constituted a problem. When asked whether they felt there were high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry overall, the overwhelming majority said yes, there were indeed high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry, with only two saying maybe, and *none* saying that there were not high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. When asked how high, 17 said “high” (15) or “very high” (2), and only three said “somewhat high.” None replied with “not high” or “not very high at all.”

Interviewees were asked to explain these high levels of alcohol use. There were many responses given, but none more frequent than stress and availability. Malarie discusses these two explanations with the following statement:

Why do I think that is? Um...I don't know, like, when I...this place and the place that I worked at before, when you're serving—I served alcohol at both places, so it's just like, know about it and try it—we used to try wines at my old place and the beers. Like, I could take beer home just to try beer at my place. Um...so there's that and then I think that people—it's not the funnest—I don't think it's the funnest job. People get really stressed out and like, yeah, they want—have like, a beer when stressed.

Ultimately, those interviewed admitted that there were indeed high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. The explanations given for the high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry are consistent with the literature and those given for the comparative difference between the co-workers and friends outside of work: personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture and environment. The interviews provide evidence that it is the collective impact of these three themes that together account for the high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Studies consistently indicate that there are high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry (Larson et al. 2007; NHSDA 1997; Sanson 1999). Although these reports place the restaurant industry near the top of all industries year in and year out, little research has been done to examine alcohol use among restaurant workers. Furthermore, despite these results, many within the industry deny or simply ignore this issue. Perhaps in both cases, the lack of exploratory research and the lack of acknowledgement or action by those in the industry, there is an assumption that the high levels are due to the type of people in the industry: young, extroverted, single, and with fewer responsibilities than workers in other industries. The substance-use literature, however, suggests that there may be other factors influencing these high levels of alcohol use. Specifically, the literature indicates that both workplace stress and workplace culture are also important factors that could contribute to high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry.

Results from this study support previous research, finding high levels of alcohol use among restaurant workers. Moreover, deeper insight was attained through the exploratory focus of the research. The results indicate that a combination of personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture are the primary contributors to the high levels of alcohol use among restaurant workers. The results also support social learning theory, where heavy drinking in the restaurant industry becomes normative behavior, is both positively and negatively reinforced, and lacks significant punishment.

There are several limitations with this study. First of all, although snowball sampling permitted confidential accessibility to an otherwise difficult population to

reach, the lack of a randomized population is a limitation with the current study. Second, the recruitment for the research focused primarily in Southeast Michigan, making the results difficult to generalize to the larger population. Third, recruitment flyers were posted on college campuses, an environment that often sustains a heavy drinking subculture. Last, although the qualitative nature of this research allowed for deeper exploration and description of a sparsely researched area, the lack of systemic measures for analysis regarding personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture to test the research question further and with a larger population is a limitation of this study.

Future research should recruit a more representative sample and incorporate more systemic measures of personal characteristics, workplace stress, and workplace culture. One very important contributor to heavy drinking was found to be the tolerance and lack of action taken by management regarding these high levels of alcohol use. However, the reasons for this remain speculative, as no managers volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Future research is needed that focuses exclusively from the managers' point of view to help provide some insight as to this overall permissiveness.

Limitations aside, this study highlighted some important contributors to the high levels of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. According to those interviewed, being hung-over had a multitude of consequences: job performance is affected as hung-over employees are more prone to make mistakes; overall temperament is affected as hung-over employees are tired and cranky; fellow co-workers are affected as hung-over employees do not want to work, causing others to have to pick up their slack. However, the costs of substance usage have even greater consequences than an error made on a particular food order: It is estimated that substance use in the workplace costs nearly

\$100 billion (Sanson 1999). Moreover, workers who abuse substances are more likely to be absent from work, to be involved in an on-the-job accident, and to file workers' compensation claims than nonusers (Sanson 1999). Furthermore, the far-reaching consequences of alcohol use extend not only to the particular individuals within this industry, but also to the owners, families, and society as a whole.

Clearly, it is in employers' best interest to lower these high levels of alcohol use. However, management's overall tolerance of alcohol use persists, likely the result of a lack of a sustainable workforce and economic and social motivations to employ heavy drinkers. The rationale by managers regarding the increased sociability of the restaurant in relation to employing heavy drinkers is particularly tenuous. To begin with, the sociability of the restaurant depends much more on the personality of the bartenders and servers than whether they can drink heavily or not. Though there may be more "extroverts" in the business, just like any industry some people are pleasant and some people are not regardless of personality type or the amount of alcohol they consume. More important, having employees who are heavy drinkers actually hurts the sociability of the restaurant as hung-over or otherwise "spent" workers are tired, cranky, and just in bad moods.

Attempting to lower the high levels of alcohol use may be difficult, especially as heavy drinking appears to be so engrained in the restaurant industry. However, this research does suggest that more could certainly be done by employers to curb these high levels. Whereas the demographic nature of the employees and the stress associated with working in the industry are difficult contributors to control for, the overall culture and environment (tolerance for hung-over employees, after-shift drinking, on-the-clock

drinking, etc.) of the restaurant is an area where the high levels of alcohol use among employees can be effectively dealt with. Furthermore, implementing drug-testing programs and providing employees with information on substance abuse are two noteworthy means that could also be implemented to deal with these high levels of alcohol use.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

How long have you worked in the restaurant industry?

What is your main position?

Without revealing the name of your place of your employment, what type of restaurant do you work in?

Would you please talk about some things you like about your job?

Would you please talk about some things you dislike about your job?

How stressful is your job?

Could you please explain in what ways your job is stressful?

Would you please discuss how do you typically deal with stress?

In your opinion, does alcohol reduces stress?

Could you please describe how close your relationships with your co-workers are?

How often do you go out for drinks with your co-workers?

How often do you discuss drinking with your co-workers?

How much do you usually drink with your co-workers?

Do your co-workers drink more than your other friends?

How often do you come into work hung-over?

How often do your co-workers come into work hung-over?

How often do your co-workers pressure you to drink?

In general, how often do you drink alcohol?

How many drinks do you usually have when you go out with co-workers?

What do you usually drink?

How often does your mother drink?

How often does your father drink?

What about your siblings or other close family members, in general how often do they drink?

What about your friends outside of work?

Does your workplace drug test?

If so, could you please discuss how your work goes about testing?

How tolerant is your work regarding alcohol use?

Does your work provide any information regarding workers substance abuse problems?

Do you think there are high levels of alcohol use within the restaurant industry?

If so, why do you think this is so?

If so, do you think management effectively deals with these issues?

What, if anything, could be done better?

If not, do you think the restaurant industry gets a “bad rap”?

Would you please tell me your age?

Have you ever been arrested?

Have you ever gotten a D.U.I.?

Are you currently in a serious relationship?

If so, would you please share how serious your relationship is?

Do you have any children?

If so how many children do you have?

Do you have any other comments you would like to share regarding alcohol use in the restaurant industry?

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Today I am asking for your help by participating in research regarding the prevalence of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. For this research, I will be interviewing 20 restaurant employees. Results from the research will be disseminated through my Master's thesis, at professional conferences, and as a publication in an academic journal. The main benefit from your participation is the addition of your experience to knowledge about the prevalence of alcohol use in the restaurant industry. You may personally experience a direct benefit simply from knowing that you have assisted in the generation of knowledge.

Interviews should last approximately one hour. I will request permission to tape-record during the interview, but to do so is completely voluntary. I will be the only person to hear the audio-tape, and the tape will be destroyed after transcription. Your name will not appear on the audio-tape.

The risk involved in your participation is minimal. The only potential risk would be a negative response from your employer should your employer discover your information. That risk is not foreseeable, however, given that you have not been recruited through your place of employment, you will not be interviewed within your place of employment, I will not ask for the name of your employer, and your name will not appear anywhere other than this form. Furthermore, I will only refer to pseudonyms to ensure your confidentiality. In this manner, your participation will be completely confidential.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue without explanation at any time. You may also decline to answer particular questions that I may ask. Refusal to participate does not involve any penalty. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research you may contact me, my supervising professor, or the Administrative Co-Chair of Eastern Michigan University's human subjects committee, whose contact information has been provided below.

Thank you so much for your consideration to participate in this research!

By signing below you are indicating that you have read (or been informed) of the information above and understand the meaning of this information.

Please sign below if you are willing to participate in this research study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview tape-recorded.

Signature _____ Date _____

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Appendix C: Human Subjects Approval

Dear Mr. Rocheleau:

The College of Arts and Sciences Human Subjects Review Committee has read your proposal, "A Mixed-Method Study of Alcohol Use Among Restaurant Workers" and has rated it EXEMPT. An exempt rating means that your proposal does not need further review by the university's Human Subjects Committee. We are, however, asking you to make one minor change to your consent form before collecting data. That change is described below.

In the consent form, please clearly state that you will be using pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. While you make this very clear in the proposal itself, we would like to see it specifically stated on the consent form.

Unless I hear from you otherwise, I will assume that you agree with the above change and will make it before beginning data collection.

Please keep a copy of this email for submission with your thesis.

Best of luck as you continue your work.

Sincerely,
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CAS-HSRC

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