Occupational Stress: A Role Theory Approach to Justifying Deviance and Law-Breaking in a Steakhouse-Buffet

Philip F. Austin
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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OCCUPATIONAL STRESS: A ROLE THEORY APPROACH TO JUSTIFYING
DEVIANCE AND LAW-BREAKING IN A STEAKHOUSE-BUFFET

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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August 2015
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Based upon 20 in-depth interviews with employees who previously worked within the steakhouse-buffet, as well as years of (retrospective) participant observation as a server in the research setting – this thesis explores the nature of occupational stress as it relates to norm-violation and occasional law-breaking associated within the setting of the steakhouse-buffet. The research focuses on restaurant social structure, its unique culture, and the relationships between patrons, servers, cashiers, kitchen workers, and management. With similar eateries found in many towns and cities, this research pertains, at least indirectly, to a wide if not global audience. This thesis integrates aspects of role theory by exploring how actors in the restaurant setting perform a variety of functions that occasionally result in role stress. Styles of norm-breaking and social deviance, including some legal infractions, emerge in what must be seen as a complex, often stressful, and sometimes chaotic social system. The varieties of social deviation found in the steakhouse restaurant that arguably result from the acquirement of role-stresses are cross-referenced with interview respondents’ accounts/narratives. The collected accounts/narratives that have been analyzed provide an argument establishing some linkages between occupational stress and justifications for employee deviance or law-breaking.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primary acknowledgement must be given to Professor Gabriela Wasileski who acted as my major advisor in seeing this research to completion. The remaining professors of my committee, Alida Merlo and Bitna Kim, played no small part in offering continued scholarly advice. I must offer my appreciation for the support of previous co-workers and friends who assisted me in providing information and accounts that were necessary in order to offer important context to this study. My parents Dr. W.T. Austin and Betty Austin, who acted as scholarly proof readers during the early editions of this thesis, should also receive special credit. Needless to say, without such a unique social structure of the steakhouse-buffet where I had worked, this study could have never taken place.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

The restaurant is a window to society. In the field of criminology, the prominent ecological concepts made popular by the Chicago-School scholars in the early half of the 20th century sometimes take a backseat to popular contemporary theories of deviance and crime. However, one cannot downplay the impact of the spatial/ecological environment at the micro-level as we attempt to understand human behavior and social systems (for instance, see: Park & Burgess, 1921; Bates & Harvey, 1975; Ball, 1973). This thesis provides examples of deviance and occasional law-breaking to form a clearer understanding of the way people interact, handle stressful scenarios, and rationalize behavior based within the social-structural framework of a restaurant work-setting.

In a given location, restaurants may vary in their style of service, their expectations of employees, their management or response to situations, and their target demographic of customers. In 1948, William Foote Whyte examined human relations within the restaurant as a unique form of industry. The forms of interaction among employees and customers, the goals and purpose of the organization, and the structural model of responsibilities put in place by management, are significant reasons why the restaurant is an important area of study for understanding behavior and workplace deviance.

Bates and Harvey would describe areas such as restaurants in society as social systems. Social systems reflect the patterned series of interrelationships existing between individuals, groups, and institutions forming a coherent whole. Social structures pertain to “the established pattern of the internal organization of any social group, ranging in
size, and comprised of many intricately related parts to include norms, roles, and positions” (Fairchild, 1967, p293). In order to examine human behavior using a social-structural frame of reference, it is necessary to understand the influence the overall environment (i.e., culture, personality, situation, and interaction) has on a specific micro-level social system—in this case, the restaurant work setting.

Based upon in-depth and semi-structured interviews with past employees, as well as participant observation as a server within a steakhouse-buffet, this research builds upon the perspectives of Bates and Harvey (1975), among others. This ethnographic research explores the social interaction patterns and sometimes stressful scenarios that predictably emerge among employee staff and patrons. Guided by these perspectives and other relevant literature, the on-site examination of this public setting explores the setting of the steakhouse-buffet, not only as a complex social system, but also one that reflects a wide-variation of social deviance and even occasional legal infractions. Consequently, this thesis applies to a variety of academic disciplines. These include: sociology, anthropology, business management, as well as, criminology.

As is more fully developed in the review of literature section (Chapter 2) of this thesis, the study is guided by three theoretical perspectives derived from criminology and sociology. These integrated theoretical conceptualizations build upon one another to provide a more complete picture (or flow of events) regarding stress and rationalization of deviance within the steakhouse-buffet work setting.

First, the micro-ecological nature of the research setting and the influence of the surrounding social environment is carefully examined. Part of role theory includes dysfunction(s) within the social system. By identifying “negative spaces” of the social
setting, this thesis discusses how certain spatial areas (i.e., eco-niches) of the steakhouse setting (i.e., dining rooms, party rooms, work stations, and/or kitchen areas.) are prone to exhibit select kinds of social activity that tend to generate stressful situations and possible norm-breaking. That is, some spatial zones or eco-niches of the restaurant setting emerge as “natural areas” of social deviance as suggested by Park, Burgess, and McKenzie, 1925; (c.f., Whyte, 1948; Bulmer, 1984).

Second, this thesis is concerned with various actors in the restaurant setting. This is characterized in regards to the structure and function of various positions and roles each holds and plays out in the course of a typical day. Bates and Harvey (1975) identified how positions held within a social system contain a number of “roles” which pertain to a specific function or functions held by individuals within a setting’s social system. Consequently all persons within the social system serve some sort of function in order for the system to operate. Positions within the steakhouse-buffet setting include but are not limited to those within the “front of the house” (i.e., customers, cashiers, servers) and “back of the house” (i.e., kitchen workers, and managers). Role Stress refers to personal anxiety associated with the performance of a specific function or functions (Bates & Harvey, 1975). This perspective reviews how various styles of role stress (i.e., role frustration, role saturation, and role poverty) arise as restaurant staff and patrons interact and sometimes conflict with one another when the restaurant swings into operation as a social system.

Third, this thesis aims to provide a link between stresses acquired in a dysfunctional social system (role theory) and justification(s) of any styles of social deviance or law-breaking behavior of restaurant staff. Thus, the third concern of this
thesis attempts to clarify how role-stress can be associated with “techniques of neutralization” (c.f., Sykes & Matza, 1957; Shigihara, 2013). Accounts of interview respondents provide necessary examples of deviance and/or law breaking that seemingly occurred due to the accumulation of one or more role stresses.

**Significance of the Study**

There are a variety of reasons why conducting research on a restaurant would be of potential significance. The first and most obvious reason is that research regarding the food industry pertains to a wide and diverse population. Almost every town throughout the world has some form of eatery or restaurant which can be viewed as a unique social structure. More specifically, in the United States, the prevalence and popularity of buffet style “all you can eat” dining would suggest an even more distinctive social structure based around a targeted demographic (i.e., Sometimes catering to lower socio-economic status persons).

Second, research on the restaurant relates to “practical” problems. How is it that an organization operates smoothly, or awkwardly, while carrying out its function? As a place where local residents gather, the steakhouse restaurant-buffet offers a prime location for observing how members of a locale interact, communicate, and in many ways affect the functions and behavior patterns of employees.

Third, this thesis will add clarification and continued validity to various forms of role stresses previously conceptualized by Bates and Harvey (1976), which have not commonly been evident in criminological theory; thus filling a void in the criminological literature (See also, Whyte, 1941; and Pantaleo, 2011).
The fourth aspect of potential significance is the inter-disciplinary nature of theoretical concepts. This research allows for a refinement of important themes in social science. By applying a role stress perspective commonly located in sociology, and applying such themes to stress and norm-breaking in the restaurant workplace, this research provides further support for integrating sociology and criminology. Therefore, this study adds further clarification to how neutralization theory can be implemented in the restaurant to explain deviant or illegal activity.

Recent literature has shown how individuals can internalize situations that could lead to the use of techniques of neutralization to rationalize theft (c.f., Shigihara, 2013). Based upon prior experience in the work setting, the researcher believes that there is a logical connection to the implementation of neutralization techniques when stressful situations arise. The researcher acknowledges that there may be a number of theoretical perspectives that may apply to the restaurant setting; however, the researcher has a personal preference for neutralization because it can be methodologically adapted to qualitatively explain how and why employees could justify behavior. Finally, the study of the restaurant is timely in that opportunity is present for the researcher to explore such a setting given his on-site work experience.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORY

This chapter presents the relevant literature pertaining to the research problem and explains the theoretical underpinnings that inform the study. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section addresses how the community environment surrounding the research site is related to the micro-setting of the restaurant. The literature on micro-ecology is limited. However, for purposes of this study, micro-ecology pertains to the customs and social dynamics as they relate to the steakhouse-buffet setting itself and to the surrounding socio-cultural space immediately external to the restaurant under study.

In order to capture how a specific social setting interacts with its environment, the steakhouse-buffet will build on the conceptualization of the restaurant as a unique form of industry, and how industries as social systems interact with the larger surrounding environment (Whyte, 1948).

The second section reviews the conceptualization of “role theory” as described by Bates and Harvey (1975). These authors build on the structural concerns or “stresses” as they may or may not apply to positions within a social setting whether small groups, organizations, or communities. Bates and Harvey apply the concept of stress as it relates to the roles each position is expected to perform in order for the social system to function successfully. Role stresses and any subsequent deviant or norm-breaking activity can be viewed as emerging when the fundamental underlying independent variables of culture, personality, situation, and interaction are out of synchronization with each other (Bates & Harvey, 1975).
The third section examines “techniques of neutralization” as described by Sykes & Matza (1957). For this thesis, styles of rationalization are seen as predictive outcomes of stress felt by actors in a social system (i.e., the restaurant) when they experience any assortment of social stress. In their now classic study, Sykes and Matza conceptualize a variety of scenarios that explain the rationalization of deviant or illegal behavior by persons who internalize or self-define specific inappropriate behaviors as acceptable. This viewpoint builds on Edwin H. Sutherland’s earlier perspectives of learning by elaborating on his principles of differential association (1947).

The fourth section examines the recent work of Katherine Pantaleo (2011) and Amanda Shigihara (2013). Their research contains fundamental explanations and definitions of terms and concepts unique to the restaurant industry. The relevant issues and theoretical explanations pertaining to the research concerns of their studies help to provide clarity and support for this thesis and are given special attention.

As is more fully discussed throughout this thesis, the conceptual model of the aforementioned sections will be used to build on one another in order to illustrate an integrated model of rationalizing deviant behavior and occasional law breaking. More importantly, this collection of literature will be used to provide clarity and support for a modern conceptualization and application of role theory within the unique social setting of the steakhouse-buffet.

**Micro-Ecology**

Dating back to the early half of the 20th century, we can see how sociologists were concerned with the social/ecological structure of communities and sub-parts of communities. From the social structure of a city to specific organizations or groups,
ecological features can relate to a range of social levels or what early scholars referred to as “a web of life” (Park, 1936). Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, forerunners of the Chicago School of sociology, were guided by the principle that society was organismic in character…consequently viewing society (the city, for example) as a structure of interrelated parts or “organs” which were functionally dependent upon one another while forming a social system (Park, Burgess, 1921; c.f., Park, Burgess, & McKenzie, 1925). This work was later built upon by George Homans (1950), Ralph Linton (1936; 1955); Talcott Parsons (1951), and Pitirim Sorokin (1962), all of whom wrote of the social-structural makeup of society and its sub-parts.

Later, Donald Ball (1973) highlighted micro-ecology as a focus on specific ecological features or “micro-space” which form “the bounded limits of naturally transmitted communication” (i.e., in specific work settings). The connecting theme between micro-ecological research and the theoretical conceptualizations were introduced by Bates and Harvey in their book *The Structure of Social Systems* (1975). Their work set the stage for analyzing group interaction in a work setting as a specific eco-system comprised of smaller sub-systems – in this case, a steakhouse-buffet.

Martin Bulmer (1984) describes how the research of Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925), illuminates how “natural areas” or “distinctive ecological niches or zones” within an ecological setting may emerge. These natural areas are where people who share similar social characteristics are subject to the same ecological pressures (such as: spatial territory, population size and density, and mobility, etc.). Using the concept of natural areas allows us to understand how spaces within a specific setting can create a life of their own. In other words, the concept of natural area should apply to social systems
generally such as communities, neighborhoods, organizations, or smaller group settings when they are conceptualized as complex sub-systems of the whole.

The work of William Foote Whyte is particularly germane to this thesis. In *Street Corner Society* (1943), Whyte conducted a participation-based study for three and a half years in Boston whereby he immersed himself in a neighborhood street group of young men to examine firsthand the social structure of an Italian slum. Whyte was able to demonstrate the structured and organized system of clique behavior by viewing a group of seemingly disordered young men as comprising, in fact, a well-organized social system. The gang, or street-corner group of men with whom he associated was not a disorganized assembly of persons just hanging out on the street, but they adhered to ecological features of social systems (Whyte, 1943). A few years later, Whyte shifted his attention from the social structure of a neighborhood slum to conduct research on styles of the WW II era work industry and its integral relationships with society. Subsequently, in 1948, Whyte narrowed his research on what he referred to as “one of the most unique forms of industry—the restaurant” (Whyte, 1948).

As a sociologist at the University of Chicago, Whyte was influenced by social-ecological perspectives and related traditions of such contemporaries as Howard Becker, Herbert Blumer, and Erving Goffman. Whyte’s research forms an important back-drop for this thesis because it provides clear examples of human relations research and organizational nonconformity; and sets the stage for a contemporary follow up study of the social/ ecological features of a specific restaurant workplace.

Whyte conceptualized the restaurant as a “combination production and service unit” (1948). He explains how the different forms of industry (i.e., production and
service) apply to the social system of the restaurant. He described how the combination of production and service units of the restaurant differentiate from each other; and, how they influence the interaction among those who occupy all parts of the restaurant as a social system. For instance, each form of industry has its own set of consequences as it relates to human relations. He states, “When we examine any factory or business enterprise, we see a social organization in miniature, a small segment of the total culture, operating within the environment of the society, and often reflecting within itself the stresses and conflicts that exist in that larger world” (Whyte, 1946). This statement demonstrates how his work bridges sociological, ecological, and even criminological perspectives.

Within the social system of a restaurant, Whyte understood that there are a number of intricate relationships between and among those who occupy the setting. In order to understand the development of human relationships within such a social system, he explained that research must “first emphasize how the organizational structure affects the functions, expectations, and stresses among its members” (Whyte, 1946). Whyte continued to explain that:

In almost any organization there can be seen what we call the formal organization. This is what appears on any organization chart, and it is generally shown as a series of positions forming a fan-shaped pattern extending from the president or manager at the top to the workers at the bottom. (Whyte, 1946)

Imbedded in these organizational charts are sets of duties and responsibilities that are put in place by management in accordance with the way management thinks the organization will function most successfully. (For example of how this applies to this study, see fig. 4 on pg. 117)
Whyte goes on to remind us that the restaurant industry has elements of the general organizational features which emphasize interaction among its members. But, as a combination of both production and service units, the restaurant industry does not necessarily follow the traditional structured hierarchical form of interaction. The restaurant differs from a pure production unit (such as a factory) because of the commitment to customer service. This may result in a more complex and adjusted form of coordination to achieve success as an organization. Whyte explains that interaction between members of the restaurant industry differ from, for instance, assembly-line production units. By focusing on interaction between customers and waiter staff (food servers), “the restaurant worker has two bosses—the supervisor and the customer” (Whyte, 1948). This complex relationship of multiple allegiances in the interaction process creates a more complex work structure whereby the customer relationship in the restaurant industry presents novel issues of coping strategies between and among the employees who are directly impacted.

Building upon these observations from William Foote Whyte, a logical transition is made between the relevance of understanding the interaction patterns of the restaurant work setting and applying “role theory” and subsequent structural stresses as conceptualized by Bates and Harvey (1975).

**Role Theory**

Years following WWII, social science experienced a flurry of research on the structure of human groups. The publication by George Homans *The Human Group* (1950), along with Amos Hawley’s *Human Ecology* (1950) and Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Society* (1959), among others, provided scholarly
treatises that were influential in promoting small group research. During this time period, Frederick Bates published a series of articles that provided a conceptual scheme for studying the structural dynamics of human social systems (1956; 1957; 1962). Especially important, and of relevance to this thesis, was his research on occupational role stresses (Nix and Bates, 1962) and social disorganization at the group level (Bates, 1962).

Bates was also inspired by the writings and perspectives of Pitirim Sorokin, the first head of the department of sociology at Harvard University in the 1930s, and the major advisor to Robert Merton, who wrote of adaptations to stress (1938). Sorokin wrote about the group elements that form society which was dubbed an “Inseparable Trinity” (i.e., Personality, Society, and Culture) described as the “componential structure of socio-cultural interaction” (Sorokin, 1962). The work of Bates, along with Clyde Harvey, culminated with The Structure of Social Systems (1975) that lays out a conceptual scheme for assessing potential stresses one might experience in any of a variety of social settings particularly when the setting (social system) experiences some disharmony among interrelated parts.

Most human social activity can be seen as interplay between individuals who occupy various functions (roles) each of which is governed by a set of norms as to how a particular task is to be played out. The social structure of work settings, for instance, can be seen as a rather intricate interaction of specialized functions or roles. It has been shown that one way to understand groups and organizations (in this case the restaurant setting) is to examine how roles held by those within the setting are negatively impacted upon when the building blocks of behavior (e.g., culture, personality, and situation) are out of synchronization with one another (Bates & Harvey, 1975 p347; c.f., Nix & Bates,
These writers developed a conceptual model illustrating the process whereby culture, personality, situation and interactional factors, are independent variables that sometimes coalesce in dysfunctional ways resulting in stresses within a system that can also lead to deviance and law-breaking. System stress and/or norm-breaking become the dependent variables.

In 1975, Bates and Harvey built upon the previous work of Nix and Bates by elaborating upon the consequences of dysfunctional social-structural relationships. For the purposes of this thesis, the possible consequence of “occupational role stress” as discussed by the authors is especially significant. From the model of Nix and Bates (see figure 2 on pg.115), there emerged various types of stresses identifiable in the social organization of a complex group (specifically within an occupation, or a workplace). Bates and Harvey discuss how stress and strain become critical focal points of concern when trying to understand “Maladjustment and its consequences for social change and adaptation” (1975). They conceptualized stress as a system-centered concept where parts of the social system operate in response to problems or consequences that occur between the relationships of culture, personality, situation, and interaction. In order to illustrate how the dysfunction of individual variables relate to stress and strain, Bates and Harvey outlined seven categories of potential individual stresses, and provided explanation of how they theoretically apply to an occupational setting. Each is discussed separately in the following paragraphs/sub-sections.

**Role Conflict**

Following the conceptual scheme of Bates and Harvey (1975), role conflict relates to contradictory cultural norms held by an individual in reference to how a function
should be carried out or accomplished. Culture is defined as containing all the norms, values, customs, and laws applicable to a setting. Roles contain sets of norms that are organized to support or direct an individual in the performance of a specific function within a group. Bates and Harvey described roles as part of culture and depict this process of connecting roles and culture by stating:

Because roles consist of norms, and norms are elements of culture, then roles in their latent state are parts of culture. If two roles are assigned to the same person are in conflict, it means that two parts of culture are inconsistent. Therefore, role conflict represents stress arising out of some internal irregularity or discrepancy in the culture, as it relates to one member of the social system in which the roles are located. (p.349).

It is fully understandable and expected that persons would become conflicted or frustrated by holding mixed sentiments in regards to how to react to situations and how to accomplish certain tasks.

**Role Inadequacy**

This type of stress occurs when a person lacks a necessary personality attribute or disposition in order to carry out a prescribed set of role expectations. Thus, such a situation represents a disparity or misalliance between one’s personality and the cultural roles assigned to an individual. Many do not hold the appropriate personality or temperament to smoothly perform certain functions. For instance, not everyone has the right mental disposition to join the Marine Corps; become a fire-fighter, or school teacher. For this reason, “inadequacy” might be looked upon as simply a matter of how one feels about his/her ability to perform expected functions. It may pertain more exactly to either natural or acquired temperament of confidence or composure when confronting face-to-face with unanticipated circumstances. This particular stress
exemplifies how one is expected to meet the perceived cultural role expectations and match the requisite disposition.

**Role Frustration**

Simply stated, role frustration pertains to stress felt by a single actor because something in the setting is out of sync, or actually missing. Thus, the actor is unable to perform his/her role efficiently, if at all. One may think of cultural roles being played out on a stage. There must be specific physical objects and conditions that are present to form a situational context or backdrop for the function or role to be carried out. If the electricity goes out in a business, it may be more difficult or impossible for expected functions to be implemented. Rather obviously, this would lead to frustration of those working within the business. This rather straightforward concept applies to all occupations when the culture is out of sync with something in the situational frame of reference.

**Role Non-Complementarity**

Sometimes referred to as role non-reciprocity, the concept non-complementarity refers to how roles are usually performed in complementary or corresponding pairs. The same applies with most occupations (i.e., merchants need customers, lawyers need clients, and teachers need students). Importantly, non-complementarity is “a mismatch between the culture variable and the requirements of social interaction” (Bates & Harvey, 1975, p.366). In role non-complementarity circumstances, the conflict involves two “different” actors who are at odds with each other and, therefore, do not interact in a harmonious way. Thus, role non-complementarity involves something being out-of-sync
between different actors—where stresses could result because of a lack of fit between culture and interaction.

**Role Incongruity**

In 1962, Nix and Bates conceptualized role incongruity as “the extent to which the various status attributes such as rewards, prestige, authority, and functional importance which are associated with a role are: (a) out of balance with one another, or (b) internally inconsistent” (Nix & Bates, 1962). In this case, the stress results because of “status inconsistencies” in how functions are performed by a “single” actor (Bates & Harvey, 1975). Similar to the “plumber whose economic rewards are above his prestige level” (Pellegrin & Bates, 1959), it is quite common for persons to experience frustration because they find themselves being compelled to act in a way that is outside their own status, rank or social position.

**Role Saturation**

Role saturation, sometimes referred to as role-superfluity, arises at times when one finds him/herself in a position whereby role-expectations are greater, or more abundant, than can be achieved or fulfilled by the actor. Simply put, when one has excessive functions to perform, he or she may not be able to perform their functions to the fullest potential due to the individual being unable to give proper focus to any one of multiple functions. Multi-tasking has its limits when the number of functions expected by multiple roles by a single actor becomes overwhelming. Needless to say, one who has excessive roles and functions may experience stress related to being unable to perform their functions adequately. Predictably, some occupations, perhaps more than others,
place a single actor in a position of too many functions to effectively accomplish in a smooth fashion.

**Role Poverty**

Role Poverty is the opposite of role saturation and refers to a condition whereby an individual has too few roles to perform and suffers boredom or state of dullness. It is likely impossible to reach a state of absolute role poverty because even an individual who is sleeping or sitting under a tree is doing something. Yet, some conditions may cut one off from his/her normal cultural activities; or, he/she is simply unable to perform a number of the expected routine daily functions as, for instance, when they might pertain to social institutions (i.e., familial, economical, educational, or political). This concept is best described by Bates and Harvey as “when an actor has so few roles to perform in society, and these roles are so simple, they do not take his full energy or capacity” (1975, p.368). Because people are always performing some form of activity, the result of role-poverty can be illustrated when such conditions prompt individuals to invent ways to spend their time.

Bates and Harvey had laid the groundwork for identifying the various structural forms of role stresses that can occur within a social system. They sought theorists of social change to develop models by which research could evaluate how “new behavior patterns may emerge to reduce stress and strain” (1975, p.371). It is predicted in this thesis that the existence of occupational role stresses in the steakhouse-buffet social system will provide a motivation or encouragement for the justification of social deviance and/or legal infractions. Role theory can therefore be conceptualized as a theoretical
variable or construct which arguably encourages or supports the use of “techniques of neutralization” as conceptualized by Sykes and Matza (1957).

**Neutralization Theory**

Edwin Sutherland’s conceptualization of differential association set forth principles describing how one learns to become deviant or criminal (Sutherland, 1947). Specifically, Sutherland’s 4th principle of differential association claims: “when criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing a crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple; and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes” (1947, p.6).

In 1957, Gresham Sykes and David Matza built upon Sutherland’s 4th principle of “differential association” and theorized a process whereby delinquents learn and justify their inappropriate or delinquent behaviors. The term “neutralization” can be understood as a set of internalized norms where traditional social controls are “rendered inoperative”, resulting in the use of techniques that are used to justify or rationalize delinquent actions without damaging one’s self-image (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The techniques of neutralization serve as a critical component of Sutherland’s earlier “definitions favorable to the violation of law” (1947). Sykes and Matza develop five general techniques by which one is able to perceive one’s actions as “acceptable” while maintaining a commitment to the dominant normative system. It is predicted that one or more of these techniques of neutralization will apply in this study of the steakhouse-buffet.

**Denial of Responsibility**

“I didn’t mean to do it” is claimed by some persons who may justify their infractions by declaring that guilt lies in factors outside their control (Sykes & Matza,
This technique is described as denying or downplaying one’s role in a delinquent or criminal act. Outside controls or influences could be such things as: bad parenting, poverty, bad neighborhoods, or faulty peer-relations. Sykes and Matza suggest a symbolic “billiard ball” effect where one is “helplessly propelled” into situations based on such forces (1957).

**Denial of Injury**

The second technique designated by Sykes and Matza describes how one may rationalize norm-breaking as “not really harming anyone” (1957). Why worry about breaking the rules when, after all, no one is actually injured or hurt by the deviant act. In other words, “wrongfulness” is more a matter of whether or not anyone had been clearly or directly harmed by the infraction. Why worry about the theft when a potential victim can well afford to lose a little.

**Denial of Victim**

This technique of neutralization contends that one can justify delinquent or rule-breaking activity by converting the victim into the wrongdoer. Denial of the victim pertains to one mitigating misdeeds by convincing oneself that the wrongdoing is “rightful retaliation” or that those harmed in some way deserve what is coming to them. Sykes and Matza use the Robin Hood analogy as an example of one avenging another (1957).

**Condemnation of the Condemners**

In this case, the rule violator justifies any possible harm by saying that any potential victim is a worse offender. Or, “why blame me when the person or property owner being victimized is also a law breaker and is worse than I am”. Here, the
offending actor shifts the focus from one’s own actions to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of the violations. Sykes and Matza depict this technique as “hypocrites or deviants in disguise” (1957).

**Appeal to Higher Loyalties**

This technique of neutralization refers to how rules sometimes are disregarded due to the demands of loyalty an offender may have to others or groups defined as more important. “I didn’t do it for myself”, as suggested by Sykes and Matza (1957), could relate to how deviant acts may be reflected through one’s commitment to friends, peer groups, or family. For instance, if a bartender has friends who visit him at work, he may find it a reasonable risk at the expense of the work place to be able to “hook up” his friends with free drinks or provide discounts (Shigihara, 2013). This has also been referred to as “sweetheart crime/deviance”, whereby one provides a special service, discount, or pays extra attention to a customer at the expense of a business.

The following section furnishes particularly relevant examples of prior research that has examined the restaurant. Pantaleo (2011) provides her conceptualization of the restaurant as an organization and social system in a community. Pantaleo describes the theoretical perspective of learning theories as they apply to employee deviance. Also set forth in this section is the work by Shigihara (2013) who examines various forms of employee theft by applying techniques of neutralization to interview responses. The works by Pantaleo and Shigihara demonstrate the way comprehensive elements unique to the restaurant industry can theoretically apply to explain behavior.
Restaurant Literature: Pertinent Contemporary Examples

In 2011, Katherine Pantaleo conducted a study which examined employee deviance in restaurants. The purpose of her study was “to further understand specific types of employee deviance within restaurants, such as theft, destruction of property, sexual harassment, bullying, and drug and alcohol use while working” (Pantaleo, 2011, p5). Important to her study, the focus on the diverse forms of deviance is used to clarify the theoretical components of social learning theory (Akers, 1966). Bridging the general definitions of occupational deviance to include the structural/organizational forms, she observes how employees “vent” the frustrations that develop at work.

Pantaleo’s comprehensive examination of the restaurant industry focuses on a wide range of variables. Notably, the impact of technology (blogs and social media) and popular culture/media (television, movies, and books) are useful ways of understanding the public perception of the inner workings of restaurants (c.f., Waiting, 2005; Still Waiting, 2009). In an attempt to link social learning to the multiple forms of deviance that occur, Pantaleo examined the perceived “reactions of management and co-workers” as well as the perceived “attitudes of individuals and co-workers”, who behave in deviant ways in the restaurant (Pantaleo, 2011, p52-73). She conducted her study by administering web-based surveys to assess previous involvement in occupational deviance.

Two major findings are concluded from Pantaleo’s work. First, she found that the components of social learning (imitation and definitions), had been “significantly related to the different types of deviance within all research models” (2011, p122). Second, she clarified that the impact of social learning had not necessarily been associated with length
of employment, but rather the age of the individual, the position that individual held, as well as “shift” that the individual was working. These factors suggest that although some variables are related to employee deviance, the complexities regarding deviancy in the restaurant may very well be linked to the way individuals perceive their behavior. This work would imply that the learning component of restaurant deviance can be expanded to understand how individuals apply learned perceptions, which could then be helpful in rationalizing deviant behavior.

The second contemporary example of literature pertaining to the restaurant is the work by Amanda Shigihara (2013). Through personal experience, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews, the researcher examined how techniques of neutralization are applied by employees to rationalize theft. Shigihara notes that previous research on occupational theft typically focuses on three areas: Retail (c.f., Kamp & Brooks, 1991), Medical (c.f., Dabney, 1995), and Blue collar occupations (c.f., Mars, 1974). However, an important issue concerning many occupations, theft is a particularly prevalent and troublesome issue for the restaurant industry.

Shigihara’s work presents pertinent information which is relevant to the effects that employee theft has the workplace. The National Restaurant Association (NRA) report illustrated that the “restaurant industry loses $15-$20 billion annually due to employee theft” (2006). Furthermore, her work cited how “around 35% of restaurants are estimated to fail because of employee theft” (NRA, 1996; Sheridan, 1997, p55-64). Other facts related to employee theft show that “over 50% of employees steal from their places of employment” (Wimbush & Dalton, 1997, p753-763) and “as much as 75% of employee theft goes undetected” (Applegate, 1990). Because theft is such a major
concern to the industry, Shigihara’s study attempts to link the multiple forms of theft (i.e., time, merchandise, or money) to the different techniques of neutralization.

Shigihara found that employee theft could fall into five categories: Opportunistic-based, economic-based, merit-based, symbiotic-based, and minimizing. By linking interview “accounts” data to the various categories, different techniques of neutralization could be used to explain how an individual rationalizes a specific deviant behavior. For instance, in the case of a “symbiotic-based” account, Shigihara could refer to Sykes and Matza’s “appeal to higher loyalties” technique (c.f., Sykes & Matza, 1957). Shigihara provides the account by an employee who would “hook up” friends, such as “providing special treatment, discounts, at the expense of the restaurant” (Shigihara, 2013); this provides support to the notion that employees can commit deviant acts in accordance to “the demands of the smaller social group to which they belong” (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

The work by Shigihara is important because it lays the foundations for a follow up study using a similar model of interview “accounts” as a way to demonstrate the rationalization process. More importantly, her collection and description of the various forms of traditional and modern techniques of neutralization will be useful in determining which role-stresses (if any) apply to justifications of deviance and/or law-breaking behavior. Table 1 (listed in the appendix on page 112) has been generated from Amanda Shigihara’s collection of definitions and examples that display the various techniques of neutralizations.

Both the work by Pantaleo and Shigihara provide context for enhancing the theoretical backdrop of this thesis. The following chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used for the implementation of this study. By focusing on the prior
literature on restaurants as well as the features of the theoretical perspectives provided, Chapter III describes how the setting, research questions, and data collection strategies are carried out.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY AND SETTING

Building on the theoretical perspectives and relevant literature of the previous chapter, this chapter addresses a variety of sub-topics. These include a description of the research setting (The Community and the Steakhouse-buffet), four research questions, sampling procedures, independent and dependent variables, and data collection processes. Also detailed are the analysis plan, validity and reliability issues, and a discussion of the protection of human subjects.

The Community Setting

The community where the research setting is located is an important feature of this study because the local environment directly influences the kinds of customers and employees who make up the actors within the social system. As previously stated, the restaurant is a window to society. That is, as noted by Bates and Harvey (1975), the influence of culture, personality, situation and interaction regarding social systems includes the community and demographic factors that are present outside of the micro-system under study.

The steakhouse-buffet is located in a university town in southwestern Pennsylvania. The population of the county where the small town is located is approximately 80,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The town of concern is about 30,000 in population when the university is in session. The university brings in a semi-transient (seasonal) population of about 15,000 students and around 1,000 full-time faculty and staff.
Apart from the university, the small town acts as a central hub of activity as the county seat and is mostly supported by agricultural and small business industries. The town represents what the U.S. Census Bureau defines as an “urban cluster” (2013); which is surrounded by what is best reflected as a “rural” population. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania defines rural populations as “density less than the statewide population density of 284 persons per square mile” (2010). Additionally, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s five year community survey on data collected regarding people of all ages in poverty: 2006-2010; the town which can be considered as a mixed rural-urban setting situated within the rural county. In terms of the percentage of people under the poverty level (18%), the town where the restaurant was located was in the third poorest county (out of sixty seven counties) in Pennsylvania. The rural and relatively poor population is of relevance due to the fluctuation of different status folk who frequent the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet depending on time or season. Consequently, the steakhouse-buffet caters to a mixed clientele, but one more heavily weighted toward lower socio-economic status persons.

The Steakhouse-buffet Setting

The restaurant is a large ranch-style one-story structure located on the outskirts of the town (See Photo 1 in Appendix). The building is divided into two distinctive sections—referred to as the “front of the house” and the “back of the house”. The front of the house comprises the customer dining areas, the cashier station, server work stations, the salad bar and the food buffet. The “back of the house” refers to the multiple kitchens (grill, bakery, and hot-bar), storage rooms (dry storage, maintenance, walk-in cooler, and freezer), preparation stations, and office areas (see Fig. 3). The featured
concept of the “front of the house” depicts a rustic, western ambiance with pictures and wall decorations portraying an atmosphere where one can enjoy a flame grilled steak along with an “all you can eat” country-style buffet.

The procedures relating to the buffet component of the steakhouse differ from much of the literature on the restaurant industry which has tended to focus on either fast-food or full-service restaurants (c.f., Pantaleo, 2010; Shigihara, 2013). The buffet component includes a rather unusual payment method, as well as, an open floor of mobility where customers and employees freely move about the dining area. Customers entering the restaurant must place their orders and pre-pay before establishing where they will be seated. Customers are given a choice to seat themselves before moving through a busy dining area to the buffet. The overall floor plan of the dining area was about the size of a basketball court. Approximately five to seven servers worked in the steakhouse-buffet at any one time depending on the time of the day, day of week, and if any special occasion, event, or holiday was occurring.

Another area of concern in regards to the research setting is the formal communication patterns of the business aspect of the restaurant (see fig. 4). Like many business/service models of restaurants, there is a structured hierarchy of communication established by management in order to effectively function. The chain of interaction includes all the actors within the restaurant social system, as well as the process in which important information or business strategies are transferred from management to the individuals who carry out the multiple roles within the steakhouse-buffet. This hierarchical model illustrates how the social system includes expected patterns of formal
guidelines/rules which management applies to the informal atmosphere and the regular interaction that occurs during the work day.

**Research Questions**

Listed below are the research questions which dictate the findings of the study. In order to follow a theoretical model which demonstrates linkages between role theory and the use of techniques of neutralization, the research questions are meant to provide a balanced approach of assessing employee interview accounts and narratives that guide the arguments made and supported by the researcher. Each research question is meant to build upon the findings of the last research question; therefore, the theoretical perspectives which the research questions attempt to portray, address components of the theory by identifying features of the restaurant social system that are of particular concern. The following research questions are listed as follows:

1. *What specific spatial areas (eco-niches) can be identified in the Steakhouse-buffet setting that affect the operation of the restaurant?*

2. *In what ways do the Bates and Harvey conceptual scheme of role-stresses apply to the research setting of the Steakhouse-buffet restaurant?*

3. *What are examples of norm-breaking and/or law-breaking in the research setting?*

4. *In what ways are “stress” related factors associated with “neutralization theory” and how do they apply in the research setting?*
Sample

The issue of sampling pertains to this study in two ways. A major aspect of this project involved the researcher recalling experiences as a participant observer while employed within the research setting; it is important to describe the variety of subjects whom interview respondents refer to in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Because the restaurant was open to the public, anyone who entered the restaurant and who wished to be seated and served as a steakhouse-buffet patron would be included in what is best regarded as the potential research population. Although customers are not directly used as interview respondents, as described in more detail in the data collection strategies section of this chapter, the experiences that relate to customer attitude, perception, and temperament are based primarily on the retrospective use of participant observation.

First, 20 employees who had previously worked in the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet were interviewed. These persons, all of whom are known to the researcher included several servers (n=5), cashiers (n=2), cooks (n=2), and managers (n=2). In what can best be viewed as a “purposive” sample (Maxfield and Babbie, 2011), all the interview respondents are adults (over the age of 18) and included both male and female workers. Only persons who voluntarily accepted an invitation for interview were included in the sample. The interviews had been conducted in places of residence or in public settings such as cafés, taverns, or on the university campus. It must be noted that interviews were not necessarily held to direct and literal transcription, but rather in an informal fashion in some cases paraphrasing and taking notes on napkins and notepads.

Second, customers seated in the dining area were unpredictable and employees who interacted with any particular customer would be dependent to where an employee
was assigned to work (i.e., where they were located within the restaurant); therefore, the customers who are referenced in various employee accounts and who were likewise seated in specific dining areas are best considered as “accidental” or perhaps “convenience” samples (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). Having said this, experience as a participant observer in the research setting was not limited to customers being served by the researcher. That is as a server, the researcher would move throughout the entire dining area and back of the house, constantly participating and observing general steakhouse-buffet activity.

Due to the researchers’ unique insight as a server in the research setting for two years, special attention was given to the researcher’s own personal (retrospective) experiences. Because the samples are related to micro level variables and analysis of a specific work setting, the nature of this sampling does not permit generalization beyond the sample. The focus on illustrating the linkage of research variables described in the next section of this chapter is of particular importance in the future transferability of the data collected in this study.

**Research Variables**

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model and the relationship between the variables (i.e., independent, intervening, and dependent). This illustration is modified from Nix and Bates (1962) (see Figure 2). It incorporates the use of techniques of neutralization as described by Sykes and Matza (1957) as well as more modern techniques discussed in Shigihara (2013) listed in table 1. Discussed in the theory section of Chapter II, the independent variables of Culture, Personality, Situation, and Interaction are referenced as building-blocks of behavior and are necessary for the emergence of the
predicted (intervening variables) “role stresses”. The various role stresses positioned as the intervening variables in the model are expressed through individual examples of the researchers own personal experience augmented with accounts of employees who would work in different positions throughout the restaurant. The dependent variable positioned as styles of “neutralized” deviance and/or legal infractions are expressed as predictable outcomes when the presence of one or more role stresses are present.

![Figure 1. Predicted relationship of behavioral axioms, Role-Stress, and Neutralization.](Adapted from Nix and Bates, 1962)

The accumulation of one or more role-stresses arguably contributes to the use of neutralization techniques resulting in an acceptance of various styles of deviance or law-breaking. There is no single specified neutralization technique that necessarily can be
applied to any given scenario of restaurant activity. Rather, it is predicted that a combination of multiple techniques or perhaps the use of modern techniques of neutralization emerge and may be used to justify employee behavior.

**Data Collection Strategies**

The decision was made by the researcher to incorporate the strategies of participant observation and interviews as a qualitative approach. This had been done because this research is primarily exploratory. That is, rather than testing explicit hypotheses, this thesis explores general research questions. This collection of data could lead to a follow-up study using a more quantitative or survey approach. In order to address the important theoretical relationships regarding behavior (as opposed to a numerical set of instances of deviant/illegal behavior), it is more appropriate to interpret and analyze elements from a qualitative standpoint. This study explores personal accounts aimed at clarifying and identifying theoretical links or relationships of various acquired stresses and justification of one’s actions.

Additionally, because the researcher had two years of previous participant observation (as an employee) within the work setting, the researcher was interested in documenting stories and experiences of fellow co-workers that were persuasive in justifying behavior. The collection of the data required the use of open-ended interviews in order to capture some of the illustrative personal accounts of fellow co-workers. This gave participants freedom to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences. Their accounts are used as exclusive narratives which are instrumental in relating to how and why they would justify inappropriate and occasional illegal work behavior.
Following the ethnographical traditions of Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006), this thesis incorporates two fundamental and equally important strategies of data collection: Participant observation and Interviewing. Each is discussed separately.

**Participant Observation**

The researcher has worked as a server in the steakhouse-buffet for nearly two years. This rather intimate knowledge of the research setting provided the initial motivation for this thesis. Consequently, over the course of the past year, some preliminary field notes were taken along with early theoretical formulations. Unexpectedly, after completing the initial chapters of this thesis, the steakhouse-buffet ceased operations and rather abruptly shut its doors to the public. However, as a research project, all was not lost, only a necessary re-direction. The understanding of the restaurant that was provided through participant observation, and which was anticipated as a continuing venture, is now to be designated as “retrospective participant observation” or “retrospective auto-ethnography” (Ellis, 2010, 2000; cf., Hayano, 1979, Reed-Danahay, 1979). That is to say, the active “participant observation” as a research strategy must, by necessity, cease and be replaced with recollection of prior events recalled from dynamic experiences and from notes taken over the past year. The data were then augmented by the 20 interviews of past employees of the steakhouse-buffet who still reside in the community of the research setting.

**Interviews**

The 20 interview respondents provided in-depth commentary and, in some cases, involved multiple interviews with the same interviewee. The interviews with employees had been used to provide critical “accounts” (Scott & Lyman, 1968) in order to offer a
more comprehensive and rich understanding of the research questions. The more well-informed and conversant ex-employees of the steakhouse-buffet were asked to participate in additional interview sessions. Interviews typically ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. Notes were taken and the researcher recorded verbatim any particularly insightful comments.

In some cases, and when comfortable to the interviewee, it was an option for the conversation to be audio-taped for later precise transcription; however, it was concluded during the interview process that audio-taping respondents would lead to discomfort in discussing sensitive issues. It was deemed advisable to afford respondents the comfort of knowing their responses could not be vocally identified. Coincidentally, by not recording audio, confidentiality was enhanced.

**Data Analysis Plan**

Analysis of the data required a careful examination of all notes taken during the interview process. This included a line-by-line scrutiny of all transcribed notes and dialogue with interviewees. Every comment made by respondents had been interpreted for identification of themes relevant to the theoretical concepts and research questions. The interview schedule created was meant to provide probes and guidance for the respondents (see appendix C, p112). Not every question listed in the interview schedule was posed to every respondent. Selected interview questions for a given employee would often lead to detailed accounts of individualized job or area specific interaction and/or activity.

Since the theoretical backdrop for this study reflects the behavior of individual employees relating to job specific areas within the research setting; their behavior (real or
perceived) is discussed in-depth based upon their personalized accounts. Thus, this thesis acknowledges that “identifiable themes” that emerge from the data (such as: identification of negative spaces in the setting; experiences related to components of role theory; most identifiable forms of deviance and law-breaking) are clearly a blend of auto-ethnography and experiences of the respondents which can be related to theoretical perspectives described in the literature in chapter 2.

Interview respondents were not expected to know if themes emerged; it was up to the researcher to deconstruct interview responses to provide individual analysis of stated accounts. For instance, the researcher would determine if a comment made by the respondent logically pertained to one of the variables outlined in the theory. A same diligent process of thematic analysis was also given to notes and narratives emerging from the “retrospective participant observation” activity (See, for instance: Mills, C. Wright, 1959; c.f., Adler & Adler, 1987).

Validity & Reliability Issues

Qualitative research, and particularly ethnographic data, is presumed to be, at least by the researcher, as very high in validity even if low in reliability (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011). Steps to insure validity had been diligently followed. This included a constant concern for “reflexivity” or “reactivity” of the researcher. That is, special attention was given to making certain no pre-conceived ideas about the research setting influenced comments made by interviewees, or any other respondents. Any biases held by a researcher must not influence respondent accounts of the research setting. Thus, “member checking,” whereby a respondent is given repeated opportunities to observe what is being recorded by the researcher, was provided. Something as simple as the
researcher repeatedly saying to the respondent: “If I understand you correctly, you are saying…”, and giving the respondent an opportunity to verify or correct any interpretation by the researcher (Lewis, 2009). Validity can also be enhanced by the researcher asking the same question in different ways, and/or asking follow-up questions, and carefully transcribing the respondents’ accounts.

In order to heighten the reliability of the data, the researcher precisely documented all notes and explained how decisions were made as to the meaning of the narratives provided by interviewees. Inter-rater checks on coding of notes and respondent accounts were sought. That is, another person (academic) was asked to assess the same data to reach increasingly accurate conclusions and avoid misrepresentation of the data (Lewis, 2009; c.f., Maxfield & Babbie, 2011. The researcher would ask questions such as, “If I were to describe role conflict as… do you think the account of (employee) pertains to the conditions described in the theory?”

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines were followed. A consent form was provided to all interviewees (see Appendix B, p111). Participation in this research was strictly voluntary.
CHAPTER IV
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents findings of the 20 interviews with past employees of the steakhouse-buffet augmented with the use of retrospective participant observation (2 years of on-site experience). The chapter is sub-divided into multiple sections organized around the four research questions. Each research question is described separately; however, as previously noted the research questions build upon one another in order to clarify theoretical perspectives. The 20 interview respondents who had been employed previously at the research setting provided rich and detailed narratives which have been assessed by the researcher in order to provide appropriate examples linking the accounts of the employees to the theoretical models. Participants’ responses are displayed in the following examples in the various sections of this chapter. They provide explanations of pertinent information regarding experiences and opinions that apply to respondents’ individualized role (position) in the restaurant. The narratives of the respondents had been individually selected by the researcher to provide the most relevant context to the concerns of the research questions. Additionally, the different components of the theoretical model discussed in methodology section of this thesis (Model 2), were a particular concern in the development of this chapter.

The findings of this chapter represent two parts of a whole study. First, in order to establish how role stresses occurred in the research setting – the study needed to identify the most apparent forms of negative features that would apply to different employee positions within the restaurant. Features included identifying spatial areas that would affect the function of groups or individuals in the workplace; as well as an assessment of
the various negative interaction patterns that would occur within several identified spatial zones of the steakhouse-buffet social system. Thus, research questions one and two address the “structural and functional” components of the research model that result in the proposed “role stresses” (intervening variable or variables of interest).

The second part of the study aimed to provide any linkages between the emergence of role stress and the use of techniques of neutralization to justify behavior. This was achieved by an assessment of the interview narratives provided in research questions one through three. The researcher focused particularly on the accounts of employees whose experiences or behaviors (assessed and supported with the personal experience of the researcher) are presented in this chapter as the consequences of the accumulation of role stress.

**Research Question 1**

*What specific spatial areas (eco-niches) can be identified in the Steakhouse-buffet setting that affect the atmosphere and/or operation of the restaurant?*

Theoretical perspectives of role theory inherently concern the dysfunction(s) between culture, personality, situation, and interaction within a social system; therefore, research question one was developed in to address the structural components that create stressful conditions or are more prone to stressful scenarios. The data identified three distinctive areas of the restaurant: (1) the exterior of the restaurant; (2) the front of the house (FoH); and (3) the back of the house (BoH). These areas had been further described as sub-zones or eco-niches (such as, cashier station, party room, and hot-bar) through the individualized accounts and narratives of the roles/positions that were associated with the specific zone of concern.
By identifying specific eco-niches, the researcher attempted to reflect how each distinctive area of the restaurant can be further subdivided into zones where different forms of activity exist. Each area of the steakhouse included employee positions that require them to interact and function within certain zones.

Identification of the different areas of the restaurant had been assessed by the researcher to demonstrate how and where areas within or around the restaurant display negative space. Negative space refers to spatial areas where people congregate, public or private, that tend to emerge as distinctive. Sometimes these places are defined as valued and sometimes not. In this case, some areas of the restaurant were viewed or perceived as being more valued than other spaces. In response to research question number 1, after working within the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet for about two years, and after interviewing past employees, unique areas which can be recognized as negative space impact the atmosphere and/or operation of the restaurant as a social system. In the following examples, the exterior of the research setting, the front of the house, and the back of the house are sub-divided and explained in further detail by examining the individual accounts of the positions that interact and function within the various eco-niches.

(1) Exterior of the research setting

According to the employee accounts of the Alex, Nathan, Tom, Joe, and Sarah, there are at least 4 features of the exterior of the restaurant which, to an outsider, may be perceived negatively. The exterior of the restaurant is an important component because it provides the potential customer a first impression of the dining experience. Impressions
are important because they set the stage for the customers’ attitude, expectations, and possibly their overall satisfaction.

The steakhouse-buffet is located in a large rectangular lot adjacent to another restaurant of arguably higher quality. The two lots are adjacent to one another and they share a parking lot which runs directly along the side of the steakhouse. When a potential customer is driving into the parking lot, the customer first sees is a large sign/billboard that lights up the entrance way to the steakhouse. This sign would have the tendency to have flickering lights or missing letters which could negatively impact the customer’s dining expectations. Alex, a male server age 23 working part time at the steakhouse explained:

Although we had a pretty consistent clientele, to an outsider visiting the restaurant for the first time, their immediate impression is probably that the restaurant is not well kept. Like, they wouldn’t be wrong… there were multiple areas in the restaurant that needed to be updated or repaired; but, the restaurant wasn’t doing well enough for them to fix everything. Of course the flickering lights happen to all places eventually, but it is how long it takes for the restaurant to fix its problems which is the real issue.

The second characteristic that a customer may observe is a few employees of the steakhouse smoking cigarettes by the side of the restaurant while on break (as if visually greeting the potential customers as they are entering the parking area). This had been a problematic issue for management since the day the researcher had started working in the restaurant. Tom, a middle aged man, was the general manager of the restaurant. He maintained that it was important for employees who were on break to avoid loitering outside of the restaurant “potentially keeping customers from wanting to eat at a restaurant that looked like it was being run by a bunch of young, shaggy and shady looking characters”. In fact, there were many times that employees would take advantage
of their time outside, especially after the general manager would leave for the night. Joe, a dishwasher in the steakhouse, explained that he would specifically wait for the manager to leave for the night so that he could spend extra time outside. During the time outside, the employees could prolong their experiences, conversing, smoking, using their phones, or partaking in more questionable activities. It was known that alcohol consumption and marijuana smoking were activities that on occasion, some employees would partake.

The third negatively viewed feature of the exterior of the restaurant is more of a comparison to the higher-end restaurant that shared the parking lot. Nathan, a male server age 24 commented:

The place seemed like it just attracted the lower end crowd. Just by driving through the parking lot you could see a stark difference in the cars that were parked outside. On the steakhouse side you would see mostly run down trucks, mini vans, and old rusted cars, while just across the parking lot in front of the other restaurant, you would see Mercedes and BMW’s.

Nathan’s comment addresses the issue where customers, even before entering the restaurant, may have been subconsciously impacted. Although this may not be a norm-breaker for the typical clientele who would frequent the steakhouse (predictably because it caters to a normal or typical lifestyle and atmosphere), to higher-end clientele (those of a higher socio-economic-status) the cars outside could be an indicator regarding where they should avoid eating. In this negative perception, potential customers include a variety of status folk; however, the higher-end status customers who are not from the immediate area (those who do not fit the general demographic of the local community) may decide to keep driving past the steakhouse-buffet in lieu of the nicer looking establishment across the parking lot.
The fourth feature of the exterior pertains to the experience of customers as they are walking up to the entrance/exit way of the restaurant. There are two doors side by side, separated only by a couple feet of wall with a concrete cigarette stand between them. As customers are approaching the front of the restaurant, they may have to potentially avoid a wall of smoke from other customers standing by the entrance way. Sarah, an 18 year old cashier, would be the first to greet the customers as they are walking into the restaurant. In her experience, she noted how sometimes:

Customers who would be smoking outside the entryway would enjoy their last drag on the cigarette halfway in the door before plunging it into the sand filled pot. They would even be blowing their smoke into the entrance way as they walked inside.

This can be viewed as a somewhat unobtrusive measure (indicator of the clientele patronizing the restaurant), that is, they are not breaking the law; however, as Sarah explained, some customers might view this as mildly deviant (smoking so close to the entrance way of a family restaurant).

(2) Front of the House

The front of the house is a term used by those in the restaurant business to distinguish the locations where specific jobs/roles/work functions are performed. For instance, the front of the house pertains to the business component of the restaurant. That is, the front of the house consists of the actors including the customers and the various employees (servers, cashiers, managers) that cater directly to the customers. The front of the house can be divided into select zones that include the cashier area, the hot-bar side, the cold-bar side, the bakery area, and the party rooms. These areas can be further subdivided into specific zones which fluctuate depending on situation (for instance: day of the week, time of shift, number of employees working). Each of these zones of the front
of the house is described separately. Each separate zone is illustrated in terms of its relationship between atmosphere (including any negative spaces) and operation (as it applies to the function of the restaurant social system).

**Cashier Area**

As patrons walk into the restaurant the first structural features inside the restaurant are revealed. Building on the experience of the exterior of the restaurant (and any possible pre-conceived expectation that a customer may have already established), the entryway to the restaurant exposes a somewhat narrow serpentine style walkway winding toward the cashier station. Although a subtle idea, it is worth mentioning the comments made by Nicole (an experienced cashier who would sometimes work as a server) who said:

> Customers who would be waiting in line would almost seem like they were waiting in line for an amusement park ride…they would be squeezed together in a tight area bumping into each other as opposed to a designated waiting area with seats as you may find in nicer upscale restaurant. This might not be a big deal, but to some customers who are impatient, this might make them even more difficult to deal with if they already have a bad attitude before dining. Who is to say a change in the set up would change anything, but the point is that people who are hungry are already at a greater disposition to being in a bad mood. Anything that might make them more irritated or frustrated may become displaced and taken out on those who are taking care of them later.

After customers walk to the register, their food and drink order is taken by the cashier. This poses some structural concern that affects the operation of the social system. Nicole described the way customers order and pay before seating affected the attitude and expectations of customer service. For instance, if and when customers paid with credit cards, the cashier would ask if the customer would like to leave a tip. The tip would be charged to their credit card in exchange for cash (intended to be left on the table for the server after the customer was ready to leave). Whitney, a 22 year old server elaborated on
this structural feature of the restaurant and explained how something as simple as paying after would have such a dramatic effect on her tips at the end of the day. She remarked:

> My biggest problem was how customers would be asked to leave a tip ahead of time before even experiencing my service. It wasn’t fair… there wasn’t any real direct connection between getting money back from the cashier and the service. What would be even worse is when you would have a table that would get money to leave on the table, but because there is no real process for the customer to go through before they decide to get up and leave, sometimes they would unintentionally forget to leave the tip on the table.

Whitney’s remarks are important because they reflect the same or similar sentiment that many servers had shared regarding the payment process. The management had rationalized this process due to the fear that customers who would eat at the buffet could potentially leave without paying. A reasonable concern; however, in many traditional dine-in restaurants the customer pays after eating, as a way of symbolic closure of the business component between employee (server) and customers. Although this is not the only example, it illustrates that the cashier station as an eco-niche can be viewed negatively from the standpoint of other FoH employees.

Apart from paying first, another feature of the cashier station included the ability to work with money as well as provide unauthorized discounts for customers. Since the cashier works with cash, various kinds of theft can occur. This component is elaborated in greater detail under subsequent sections of this chapter.

Additionally, another negative element which affects the general operation of the restaurant includes how customers would usually seat themselves. The researcher recalls how the lack of a “host” (one who leads customers to a specific table/booth or zone) created a less structured restaurant environment or a disorder to the environment that allowed for greater fluctuation in the various dining zones. Specifically, some zones were
consistently busier than other zones. One server commented how “you could see some customers tripping over each other” as they would be moving about the chaotic dining area.

**Hot-Bar Side**

In the steakhouse-buffet, the buffet component offers a mix between hot food items (i.e., wings, meatloaf, soup, and sides), cold food items (salad bar), and bakery items (breads, desserts, and ice cream). A layout of the entire restaurant can be found in the appendix (under figure 3), that illustrates the front of the house and the general location of these areas. Not every zone may be associated with “negative space”; likewise, some zones may have more negative implications than others.

The hot-bar side is situated directly to the right of the cashier area as one enters the front of the restaurant (see photo 2). This front half of the restaurant contains sub-zones which are defined based on the situation (how many servers are “on”; or rather, how the area is distributed among those who share the work space). Also located in the hot-bar side are the server station and the restrooms. Each of the sub-zones can be seen or perceived as negative space. For instance, on a typical week day, three servers (sometimes four) would split the hot-bar dining area into three zones (more zones if more servers on). These zones would change throughout the day, fluctuating based on the busiest times (such as dinner rush around 6-7:30pm). Erin, a 23 year old female server who was also a designated trainer (one who trains new employees) mentioned:

I loved working the hot bar side! It always seemed a little busier than the other sections. Actually, I really just liked closing. Closing the hot-bar side gave me the chance to make the most money. The problem was that it was a little more chaotic on that side…sometimes too chaotic. Besides… closing I didn’t have to roll silverware!
Each worker had different jobs or functions to perform based on their specific assigned zone. For instance, the last server to start his/her shift would also be the last server to leave; this server would be known as the “closer” and have specific duties that would be associated with the “closing zone”. As the day progresses, and after the major “rushes” of customers are finished, the first zone is “cut” (which implies that the area which was once split three ways, is now split between the two remaining servers into two zones). This is relevant because the functions of those who are working within the zones would likewise change along with the shifting conditions in the environment (e.g., various requirements/tasks have to be accomplished before one could end his/her work day). These duties have more relevance in subsequent sections of this chapter as they are associated with stressful scenarios and experiences; such as an employee not finishing their required side work and affecting the duties and functions of other employees.

**Cold-Bar Side**

The cold-bar side of the restaurant, like the hot-bar side, contains sub-zones which can be viewed as specific areas that can be associated with negative connotations. As illustrated in figure 2, the cold-bar side of the restaurant includes: the cold-bar (salad bar); the bakery; the party rooms; and the game room (see photos 3 & 4 in appendix). Similar to the hot-bar dining area, the dining areas of the cold-bar side during a typical week day are split between two servers, sometimes three (one being the “closer”), who must also split party room duties if an occasion requires a room for a special event or a private party.

The salad-bar is maintained by a single employee who is in charge of restocking food items, food preparation, cleaning, as well as other job specific duties. The salad bar
station is located within the dining area directly to the left side of the cashier station. This job is more comparable to employees who work in the back of the house (who make minimum wage and have rather fixed job duties). Dave, one of the employees who worked at the salad bar claimed:

I see it as a job. I really do not care much for it, but in my opinion this is one of the easiest positions in this place, but can get pretty repetitive and boring. The thing I hate the most is being here by myself, but I guess it’s whatever. I don’t really have to deal with as much of the drama that goes on in the back. What sucks is when I have to spend time cutting stuff in the walk-in cooler… I hate the cold but I deal with it anyway.

Dave’s point was simple, although he did not have much commitment to his position; he still considered it to have value. One could consider his perception of taking the good with the bad, but his rationalization was that it did not require too much effort on his part to maintain the cold bar, and the limited interaction among other back of the house workers could sometimes be perceived as positive. Of course, he acknowledged that the cold-bar duty is viewed as a menial job (even among other employees) that some workers would value less than other positions in the restaurant (i.e., lack of meaningful interaction between other employees, repetitive, boring).

Another area of concern is the bakery section. The bakery section is unique because it is situated among the cold-bar side of the restaurant but is somewhat isolated. As a dining zone, the bakery section is distinctive not only because it is smaller, but because it is also connected to the game room and the entrance ways to both the back party room and back of the house (BoH). The researcher recalls occasions when families with children would let their children run around the dining areas (specifically the bakery section) seemingly with little sensitivity for the other families and customers sitting in the same vicinity. Consequently, on occasion there would be accidents related to servers
having to dodge unruly children while trying to balance their trays carrying meals or dirty dishes. This highly mobile customer area also houses the dessert food items and the ice-cream machine. As one can imagine, this section of the restaurant, although more secluded, can be lively and create unique situations on its own.

The bakery section of the restaurant, as an eco-niche, serves not only as a customer dining section but also as a place where employees could congregate when they were on break or not busy doing other tasks. Betty, one of the shift managers who would often manage the BoH explained:

Employees who were waiting around with nothing to do would hang out there. Really, employees are not actually supposed to be seen sitting around, it gives a bad impression to customers. It’s kind of secluded. You know, in the back of the restaurant; but if it ever got busy, then employees who are not doing anything should be out of sight in the party room.

Betty’s comments on the bakery section are important because they show how a manager is willing to bend the rules of the restaurant (allowing employees to hang out and sometimes eat among the customers in the dining sections) based on how seriously she viewed the situation. She would overlook some rules because she felt that some rules were “more so guidelines” and that there is a “grey area” when considering what is appropriate behavior during a given situation. For instance, when she was the only manager working, the researcher recalls the manager letting employees behave and act recklessly around the workplace; whereas, when she was working along with a fellow manager, she would act more authoritarian. This behavior as a minor form of deviance illustrates how minor rules/guidelines would be enforced or overlooked based on the discretion of the individual manager who is working. This example will be further developed and elaborated under subsequent sections in this chapter.
As Betty mentioned, once the restaurant would become busier, and customers would be seated in the various dining zones. Employees who were on break or not doing any important tasks would tend to gather near the entrance of the lower party room. The two party rooms are located directly to the far left of the cold-bar side. The party room is a long room with two main entrances separated with a sliding wall which connects the lower and upper party rooms (see figure 3). The lower room can accommodate around 50 customers and the upper party room could seat around 20.

Under most conditions the party rooms were vacant and scheduled parties would call in advance so the restaurant can plan ahead and have the room cleaned and ready. On occasion, if the restaurant was extremely busy, some customers would sit in the party room due to lack of available space.

Another concern regarding the party rooms relates to the managements’ decision to cater to any party; even if the party was unannounced. For instance, servers who would work on the cold bar side (usually only 2), would be in charge of their individual section/zone as well as manage anyone who sits in the party room. Nathan commented:

There was a lot of uncertainty when you would be scheduled to work on the cold bar side. If there were only a couple (servers) on, there was always a chance that one minute it could be slow and the next it could be slammed. What would be crazy was if we would already be busy with a full section, and then a party could come in that we were not expecting.

What Nathan was implying, is that some places like the party room, are hot spots for unexpected issues depending on the situation. The party rooms as an eco-niche, similar to the bakery section, accommodated a variety of actors (i.e., customers and loitering staff) who would frequent the space. Although, the party room has a specific purpose, it had often been used as a safe haven from the outside world of work. When
employees were in the party room, they could spend their time doing a number of activities (similar to the employees who would be loitering outside behind the restaurant).

As a final note regarding the FoH, “server stations” were located on both the hot-bar and cold-bar sides of the restaurant. In these stations, soft drinks, tea/coffee, and the most common restaurant materials could be found (i.e., trays, napkins, cups, straws, and lemons) that were required to successfully conduct routine work related tasks. These server stations can be described as a distinctive area that may have negative connotations; not because of their purpose, but rather because of their location within the customer dining areas, the buffet atmosphere (“buffet mentality”), and the rules imposed by management to maintain the stations. Given the consistent movement of wandering customers active around the buffet, the researcher recalls how some customers would pose as an obstacle by lingering by the busy server stations; sometimes literally standing in the way of employees who are trying to move between the dining area, the server station, and the BoH.

The server stations are the primary area where servers conduct their job functions; therefore, depending on which side the server is assigned and what time their shift started, determined with whom and where they would work. The five servers among others who had been interviewed for this thesis (Alex, Nathan, Whitney, Erin, and Kylie) provided most of the detail regarding their perceptions and experiences of the restaurant in subsequent sections of this chapter.

(3) Back of the House

Just as with the front of the house (FoH), the back of the house (BoH) is a distinctive collection of eco-niches. These areas differ from the FoH because they
represent secluded areas which have established patterns of interaction. The BoH makes up half of the restaurant and can be viewed as three major sectors (Grill, Hot-bar, and Bakery). As illustrated in figure 2, the three major locations may have sub-zones (such as, Hot-bar prep and Dishwasher) that have different functions within these sectors. The final major eco-niche of the BoH could be considered as the collection of storage rooms, the walk-in cooler, and the freezer which are located at the back of the restaurant. The management room, a small room toward the side entrance, was not considered a major location for this study; however, it must be noted as its own unique space. Each of these locations was described by Jazmine, Justin, Joe, Erin, and Paige who had worked in the specific areas of interest.

**Bakery**

As a continuation of the several eco-niches between the FoH and BoH, one can enter the BoH from either the hot-bar side or the cold-bar side. On the cold-bar side, the BoH entrance is located in the bakery dining area. The swinging door located on the cold-bar side between the BoH and FoH is the entrance to the bakery section. On a typical day there is one BoH employee stationed at the bakery. The bakery position required the employee to manage the entire bakery by maintaining the dessert bar and preparing desserts for the next shift or day. With typically one employee working in the bakery section per shift, interaction patterns among the BoH employees would not regularly allow excess communication between the bakery and other sections of the BoH (typically only moving out of the section to place used/dirty supplies to dishwasher). Thus, the bakery section could be considered one of the more secluded sections in the BoH.
Jazmine, one of the most recently employed before the closing of the restaurant, described her initial experiences in the bakery section of the BoH. She explained:

This was my first job. I really did not have much experience in the restaurant business. I really wanted to be a server but management said it would be better if I learned another position in the restaurant first in case they needed me more somewhere else. I was told many start off in the bakery. At first I didn’t like it. All I did was zone out and do my work, I never really talked to anyone much, but that eventually seemed like a good thing.

Jasmine’s comments on the bakery section are an important foundation to understanding the subtle workings of the BoH. Her section of the restaurant required specific duties and responsibilities that would dictate her expected job functions as well as the various interaction patterns with other employees.

**Grill and Dishwasher**

As illustrated in figure 2, the middle section of the BoH is the Grill and Dishwasher sector. This location can be considered the most chaotic and transient location in the BoH. The area (this middle sector) is split in three horizontal work areas where different job functions are carried out.

The first area of concern is the dishwasher section located in the back part of the middle sector within the BoH. The dishwasher job is a very turbulent position depending on time of day or day of week. In many cases, there would be one dishwasher working at a given time (two if it the management was expecting a busy day). In the restaurant industry, the dishwasher is traditionally one of the most menial positions in the restaurant (typically commanding lowest authority and least valued in terms of similar paid positions). In the case of the steakhouse-buffet, the dishwasher would be in a stationary location in the middle sector of the back of the house and was in charge of the continuous duty of cleaning and organizing all used materials from all areas of the restaurant. At
some point, every position within the restaurant will visit the dishwasher section, thus, making this position one of the highest in terms of interaction among employees (second only to Managers and Servers). Justin, the oldest and most senior dishwasher described the position:

It was crazy. I would literally walk into work with a pile of dishes overflowing the work station. I had been doing it a long time, I really didn’t mind it. I’ve been working dishwasher jobs since I was in high school. It’s an underappreciated job, but it’s also relaxing. I kind of just zone out and next thing you know it’s time to go home. You can tell how important I am when someone else doesn’t do the job right!

Joe, another dishwasher was one of the employees that Justin was referring to. In Justin’s experience, Joe was more of a “slacker” and would spend most of his time joking around with other employees. When interviewed, Joe explained the dishwasher position as:

I really didn’t care too much. To me it was just a job. Some people take their jobs too seriously, I just want to do my work and leave. Working dish is nice because I really have the least amount of responsibility. I couldn’t really mess anything up.

The area between the dishwasher section and the grill is a middle common walkway/work station where different employees would either unload dishes or prepare food. From this location, hot-bar employees, servers, worked together to prepare individual meals from the grill. On the opposite side of the “dish drop-off” would be considered the “meal prep” area. The most common workers in this area are servers who are constantly bringing back dirty dishes from the FoH and putting together meals which are placed under “hot plates” (counter with heating elements on top and bottom), where finished meals are placed for servers to “run” out to customers. Erin commented:

If there was any area of the restaurant that would give me anxiety, the meal prep area was the worst. As a server you were always expected to be doing something. From the grill area, we would be expected to be constantly helping other servers
by putting together meals, cleaning, restocking items, or putting away other’s dishes. We all hated having to do it but we knew we had no choice sometimes when it was busy. Sometimes, one server would be too busy; meaning those who were not pre-occupied taking care of tables and making money would be in the back putting together meals or washing dishes. If you wanted to avoid working too hard it was best to avoid going to the back if you didn’t need to.

Indeed the meal prep area was a highly transient location. The sentiment shared by the server Erin was similar to that of many other servers, including the researcher. As a participant in the chaos within this section of the BoH, the researcher notes how an “expediter” (an employee position whose job is to act as a buffer between the servers and the grill cooks) was a position that could have proved useful during busy hours of business. Severs and managers would assume the responsibility (or additional functions) of “prepping” and “running” meals for servers that were too busy and not able to run the meals for themselves. As a result, taking on the burden of other employees functions would potentially cause an unbalance in one’s quality of work.

The final area of the grill/dishwasher section is the grill. The grill is typically manned by two individuals who share responsibilities and work together to prepare meals ordered by customers. While customers are paying for their food order at the cashier station, receipts are printed simultaneously for both the customer as well as for the grill employees. The grill cooks work together and communicate with servers (over the meal prep area) to make sure orders are correctly prepared. Two grill cooks Ryan and Jessie, were interviewed for this study. They each commented on their experiences of the position and the different functions they were required to perform throughout the typical day.

For this thesis, the communication between the grill cooks and the servers could be considered one of the most important interaction patterns in the BoH. From the meal
prep station, servers would commonly wait for meals to be completed, spending much of the time conversing with those in the immediate area. The wall in front of the entire section included a large window allowing customers to have direct view of the flame grill. This would be used by staff to view the situational conditions in the FoH (how busy it was) from the meal prep area. Being a grill cook was intrinsically a verbally active position and located among the most active areas in the BoH. Good communication between grill cooks and servers was necessary for the smooth functioning of the restaurant. The unique perspective of the grill cooks regarding the inner workings of the restaurant, are revisited in subsequent sections of this chapter.

**Hot-Bar and Hot-Bar Prep**

The last major eco-niche of the back of the house could be considered the hot-bar and hot-bar prep sector. These two sections within this area are perceived by many from the BoH as the most difficult position/job (requiring the most effort). There could be a number of hot-bar employees working at one time, constantly checking the buffet items and replacing old food or empty containers. The hot-bar workers move between the main hot-bar section (food prep, hot-bar buffet, and flat-top hot-bar grill), the grill area (where ovens and fryers are located), and dishwashing area (to drop off dirty dishes). Those who work the hot-bar section of the BoH tend to interact with those in their immediate work stations. When the restaurant is busy, the workers do not typically have any time to socialize due to the demands of multitasking. Four hot-bar and prep workers were interviewed during the current study including two male workers (Jared and Briar) and two female workers (Amber and Mia). They described incidents of high stress and
provided details regarding their perceptions of possible forms of deviance and illegal behavior (described in research question 3 of this study).

**Storage Rooms, Walk-in Cooler, and Freezer**

The final locations remaining in the back of the house are the two dry storage rooms located directly behind the bakery section; the walk-in cooler, entrances located directly behind the hot-bar prep area and from the far right side of the dry storage; and the freezer, only accessible from within the far side of the walk-in cooler. These rooms are organized to quickly locate ingredients and supplies needed for the proper function of the restaurant. All employees at some point are required to use the various spaces for replacing materials throughout the restaurant, often requiring multiple trips. Some food preparation is done in the walk-in cooler (usually by those who are working/maintaining the cold-bar); however, there is no reason for any employee to be in the back (hidden from most activity) for any extended period of time.

Like the FoH, some areas within the BoH are more secluded then others. In the BoH, the storage rooms, cooler, and freezer are the most secluded areas in the building. Depending on the situation, one could commonly find either a few employees working in the back or a vacant space “begging to be taken advantage of”. Paige, another bakery worker explained, “The storage room located behind the bakery would be a common place for people to steal my cookies”. In fact, many employees would blatantly hang out in the back. Servers would be required to periodically visit the dry storage room behind the bakery in order to fill a bucket with ice (one of the side jobs of serving) to bring to the server station. While in the back by the ice machine, servers would congregate to talk,
text, eat, among partaking in other activities that were considered inappropriate work behavior among management.

In summary of the first research question “What specific spatial areas (eco-niches) can be identified in the Steakhouse-buffet setting that affect the atmosphere and/or operation of the restaurant?” three major eco-niches have been discussed. The exterior of the restaurant provides potential customers with an idea of what their dining experience will be, based upon the physical conditions and situational elements of the immediate parking area. Second, the front of the house (FoH) is considered a major eco-niche because the various sub-zones within this section have been identified to display “negative space” (where certain kinds of negative perceptions, rule breaking, or deviant acts may occur). Third, the back of the house (BoH), like the FoH, has likewise reflected negative spaces within the various sub-sectors.

The data illustrated how all three major areas of the research setting, when categorized into sub-zones and sectors, have displayed various instances or perceptions attributable to negative space; some more than others. Taken together, these major eco-niches, along with spaces of concern (such as the manager room, game room, and storage rooms) illustrate the specific spatial areas that affect the atmosphere and/or operation of the restaurant. These findings provide a necessary foundation for the subsequent research questions in this chapter. The next research question will address how “role-stresses” as conceptualized by Bates and Harvey (1975) apply to the several micro-ecological locations within the steakhouse-buffet.
Research Question 2

In what ways does the Bates and Harvey conceptual scheme of role-stresses apply to the research setting of the Steakhouse-buffet restaurant?

Following the theoretical model of “role theory” as outlined in chapter 2 of this thesis, all seven styles of role stress emerged as relevant within the research setting. Each will be discussed separately.

Role Conflict

As noted in the review of literature, role conflict refers to contradictory cultural norms held by a single actor in regards to how a function should be performed. It is fully understandable and expected that persons become conflicted or frustrated by holding mixed sentiments regarding how to react to situations and how to accomplish certain tasks.

In the steakhouse-buffet, the rules of the corporate organization may conflict with the way a worker believes a function should actually be performed when on the job. For instance, the corporate rules for the restaurant are clearly stated in the training manuals and are regularly enforced by management. One is expected to learn and abide by the rules and guidelines set by management. In William Foote White’s 1940s assessment of the restaurant, he described the restaurant as a mix between a production and service unit. In the current study, it is found that as a service unit, some roles within the restaurant (such as the server) have a commitment to both the management as well as the customer. As the employees work throughout the day, there may be certain “shortcuts” or ways to perform functions more efficiently which actually conflict with the policies set forth by management. An individual must balance these commitments. A role-conflict may arise
if an individual suffers stress because of a concern about where to place one’s allegiance.

Kylie, a 20 year old female server remarked:

In order to save money, the management wanted us to stop bringing common items to the customer table unless they asked first. They did this with a lot of stuff. Technically, we were not supposed to get them refills unless they asked; not supposed to get them extra napkins unless they asked; we were not even supposed to get them name brand [A1] Steak sauce unless they asked, and it’s a damn steakhouse! What would end up happening is that customers would feel like we were not giving them good service – as if we forgot to take care of them and they were forced to ask. I understood that I had to follow the rules to keep my job, but I was there to make money. Obviously the best way for me to do that was to provide the best customer service I could. That included doing things before customers would ask me – like getting refills, like getting them stuff they would need.

Although Kylie’s comments described her attitude against the rules of management, her motives were not necessarily with the management as individual actors, but rather her motives represent an inner conflict based on her need to make the most money (rules vs. customer service). In her view, better customer service for possibly a better tip, was more important than a commitment to the guidelines set up by management. To her, performing duties “by the book” could give the customers a misconception of her work ethic as seemingly impersonal and non-committal (i.e., customers asking themselves, what are the servers even here for)?

**Role Inadequacy**

The concept of role-inadequacy refers to the type of stress that occurs when a person lacks a necessary personality attribute or disposition in order to carry out a prescribed set of role expectations. Thus, such a situation represents a disparity or misalliance between one’s personality and the cultural roles (i.e., functions) assigned to an individual. In the case of the steakhouse-buffet, it is clear that some individuals
working in different locations of the restaurant lack the appropriate personality, temperament, or mental disposition to perform certain functions.

For instance, when new employees are hired, they are hired on the basis of certain attributes such as: past experiences, future ambitions, as well as positive references by current staff. When new employees are hired, there is a trial period during which trainers and management monitor new employees in order to assure that they are able to handle typical on-the-job requirements. Some people are just not suited for certain positions within the restaurant.

In the steakhouse-buffet, positions within the “front of the house” required employees to be able to display a natural or acquired temperament of confidence or composure when confronting face-to-face unanticipated circumstances. Therefore, if a situation arose where an employee felt like he/she did not have the ability to perform expected functions (such as having to talk to unruly customers about concerns that may be out of their control), then the stress of role-incongruity was more likely to occur. Betty, one of the shift managers of the restaurant stated, “I hated talking to customers. I really just don’t like people”. Her personality, communication skills, or at least her negative attitude regarding the customers, could be considered qualities that were not beneficial for her specific job duties. As manager, Betty would regularly deal with customer concerns, gripes, and complaints; however, her attitude and demeanor towards the customers was anything but exemplary. Betty continued to comment how some customers would make her so annoyed that she would lock herself away in the manager room until there was an issue that simply could not be avoided.
Role-inadequacy also applies to the steakhouse when employees are hired for the wrong reasons or under the wrong conditions (i.e., not enough experience; perceiving the job as “temporary”, or not taking the job seriously; or getting hired for a position based on a “who you know” basis). For instance, the cashier/server Nicole explained how the actions and behavior of some of her fellow employees affected the operation of the restaurant. She stated:

I had been working in the restaurant industry over the 5 years that I have been in college. I have seen many waves of new employees who would be hired for the wrong reasons. Instead of hiring quality employees who would work hard and value their job, the management would hire new workers in bulk, hoping that there would be a few that are good and decide to stay. In fact, a lot of the time the new hires would look shady (as if they were pulled straight out of a rough neighborhood and forced to work). Management should have had a more selective hiring process. It didn’t do the restaurant any favors to have employees who didn’t care about anything. Sometimes people would get hired for positions just because they had other family members working there. Even if they didn’t have the experience, management would let them work in positions that should have been given to those who had earned it.

Nicole’s experiences regarding the hiring process highlights how some employees are assigned to work in positions which may not have been suited for their individual personality and skill set. While there are multiple concerns regarding the unexpected closing of the restaurant, the hiring process remained a relevant issue throughout the restaurant’s final days. In subsequent sections of this chapter, a relation is drawn between teamwork and the ability for the restaurant to operate smoothly. This relationship relates to those who have the necessary experience, attitude, and ability needed for the position they were hired to perform.

**Role Incongruity**

As noted in Chapter 2, Bates and Harvey described role incongruity as the result of “status inconstancies”. These status inconsistencies are the result of how functions are
performed by a single actor (individual) who is experiencing stress. This stress occurs because individuals find that they are being compelled to act in a way that is outside their self-perceived status, rank or social position.

Geographically, the steakhouse-buffet was located toward the edge of a university town that catered to people representing various social statuses. Some customers who are in town from the surrounding rural communities (typically from lower socio-economic statuses), dine at the restaurant and treat the employees with disrespect (many of whom are students at the university and actually perceive themselves as having a higher status than the customer). Men dining after working at a local lumber yard, power plant, or with the natural gas companies, would sometimes harass wait-staff, buffet attendants, and managers. Alex discussed some examples in detail and explained how some customers would treat staff in disrespectful and sometimes deviant ways. Alex Explained:

I couldn’t believe the nerve of some customers. Even though I would go out of my way to serve them some of them (customers) they would act like my service wasn’t worth their time. A lot of the customers were lower class and I come from a family that values education and manners. I’m finishing my college degree and I would get customers who didn’t even finish high school treating me like shit. They would bark orders at me sporadically even if I was busy taking care of other tables. They would even be annoyed at me if I didn’t drop what I was doing to take care of their needs first. My favorite (sarcasm) was when I would ask them a question and they wouldn’t answer or even look up at me. They couldn’t take time away from stuffing their face to answer me when I would ask them if they wanted a refill – sometimes just holding up or angrily shaking an empty cup. Of course the best was when I would ask if anyone wanted a refill and when I went back to deliver the drinks to the table someone else would ask for another drink.

Alex made the distinction between the “lower class” status of the customers and the poor way they would treat him. To Alex, the customers’ “disrespectful” attitude was targeted toward him because in the restaurant, the customer has the unique power
position over some of the staff. Alex’s hourly wages as a server were lower than minimum wage – placing greater emphasis on his customer service to get a tip.

When some customers would not allow him to perform his role as a server smoothly (by ignoring him or barking orders while he is helping other customers), Alex admitted that he felt that they were “beneath” him and “why should he respect them if they don’t show the same towards him”. His disposition toward the customers had been based upon his perceived social status outside the restaurant. When he was working, customers who (on the outside) would be considered a lower social status, would take advantage of the power opportunity over him and other staff. As Alex contained his inner feelings toward the customers that he would cater to, he felt that he sometimes had to act in a way outside his normal social status. Thus, the unique customer/server relationship played a factor in his overall ability to function smoothly when he felt that he was being disrespected by customers who were below his own social status.

**Role Frustration**

Role frustration pertains to stress felt by a single actor (individual) because something in the setting is actually missing or beyond his/her control. Thus, the actor is unable to perform his/her role efficiently, if at all. In the steakhouse, the many parts that come together that allow the restaurant to function can be threatened by any number of issues. Since one can argue that a list of all possible problems in the setting is varied and complex, all interview respondents were asked to provide a quick story or example of what the worst case scenario for them would be. For instance, respondents were probed with the notion of how their individual position could be most affected by something going wrong or something missing in the setting.
The bulk of the respondents answered that “the power going out” was probably the most common “worst case scenario”. The restaurant had back-up generators to keep the freezers running, but they were known to be faulty. If the power went out, most functions within the restaurant would be impossible - almost all the equipment in the kitchens was electric.

Other common responses included: (Dish) “if there was no hot water” or “if the dishwashing machine stopped working”; (Hot-Bar) “if we would run out of common buffet items”; (Grill) “if there were not enough steaks/meats “pulled” (or thawed), or “if someone came into the restaurant during the last minute before closing the grill”; (Bakery) “if someone the shift before forgot or did not prep enough items for the next shift”. The servers (for whom the bulk of the comments relating to role frustration were collected) related to any situation that could cause the customers to become angry or upset.

The connection between a setting that is dysfunctional and customer satisfaction is a primary concern for servers due to the nature of their economic relationship. Issues such as the missing items, temperature of the dining area, the quality of food, the volume of the radio speakers, and even issues between customers, are some of the typical features of the restaurant that are sometimes outside the control of the server and influence role stress. If conditions exist outside an employee’s control, they can affect the ability to perform his/her functions and frustration can to occur. This concept applies to all occupations when the culture is out of synchronization with something in the situational frame of references.
Role Non-Complementarity

As previously stated, Bates and Harvey described the stress of role non-complementarity as “a mismatch between the culture variable and the requirement of social interaction” (1975, p366). This concept which refers to “corresponding pairs” implies that two or more individuals do not “complement” each other. Similar yet differing from role-conflict, role non-complementarity differs because it involves at least two people who are at odds with each other (over how something should be done). Because this stress relates primarily to “social interaction”, role non-complementarity applies stress felt because of a lack of fit between culture and interaction.

Two employees, who work in a given location such as a grill worker from the BoH and a Sever from the FoH, might be at odds with each other based on the quality of a customers’ meal. If good teamwork is not fully achieved, and employees may not be able to work harmoniously with each other, and role non-complementarity stresses are likely to occur.

Role non-complementarity, as explained to interview respondents, was commonly perceived as personal “drama”. Because the work environment created cliques and friend groups, various personal and professional relationships would sometimes collide with each other as individuals had different views on how things should be done. Inevitably, when a problem occurred between people in the setting, gossip and “taking sides” could create issues resulting in employees not working well with others. The server Kylie had been at odds with a manager about the greeting process (setting up new customers who would sit in her section). She explained:

Management was always arguing with me because I wouldn’t do things the way corporate wanted me to. They would threaten to give me less shifts if I kept
ignoring them. It just didn’t make sense to piss off the customer when your money is based on how well you take care of them. I get that management was trying to save money at every corner but don’t tell me how to do my job when it literally affects my money.

Role non-complementarity also occurs simply because there is no other person willing or prepared to accept or respond to the opposing individual’s specialized function so that a role can be enacted or performed. This researcher recalls his own experience of being at odds with management. One of the rules for servers, in regards to customers’ meals, was that any prepared meal was to be “run” (taken) to the customer table. Although useful if the server is too busy, this could be detrimental to a server’s tip if he/she is not perceived by the customer as busy yet the meal is run to the table anyway.

The researcher as a server in the steakhouse-buffet understood the “buffet mentality” of customers and the pre-conceived notion that “they (the servers) are not really necessary”. As a quick point, this was simply not true because the servers would be constantly doing work behind the scenes that the customers do not always see. In fact, the customers had usually been too preoccupied with their food to really be paying close attention. Only when customers were anxiously awaiting their meal order would they be consciously looking to see if the server has forgotten about their food. The researcher believed that the customer perception was one of the most critical concerns when working for a tip. If the customer “felt” like the server was not doing anything or did not deserve a tip then there would be a greater chance for them to “stiff” (leave no tip), or leave a reduced tip (not proportional to the typical 10-20% of total bill). When meals are run (for the server) as opposed to the servers taking out their own meals, the customers might wonder who they are tipping. Or they might perceive the servers as nothing more than “glorified bus boys” (table cleaners) who are less deserving of a good tip. Many of
the customers did not even know that servers made a fraction of minimum wage (in this case a server would make $2.83 an hour whereas minimum wage was $7.25). Between servers, it would not be uncommon if their paychecks would be very little after taxes had been taken out; assuming they would get a paycheck at all. Servers made all their money directly from tips from tables. The concern over money could be perceived as the reason for most conflict; consequently, the relationship between the researcher and the manager had been strained following the argument over running meals to the customers. The researcher recalls how the customers (whose meals were “run” for him by the manager), proceeded to stiff (leave no tip) after their meal. The researcher and the manager never worked well together again.

Another example of the concept of non-complementarity is illustrated between two employees who worked together in the same position. Jared, a hot-bar cook from the BoH, had been in a relationship with one of the other hot-bar employees. When their involvement ended, there was a lack of communication between the two during the work day. They could not separate their personal lives with their work lives and the operation of the restaurant suffered. In this case, the two employees were not willing to interact with each other; thus, the result was two employees who did not complement each other’s functions. In the restaurant there can be any number of combinations of interaction patterns that affect the way individuals communicate and function. When interaction patterns are negatively influenced, role stress is likely to occur.

**Role Saturation**

Role saturation, or having excessive functions to perform, was a common form of role stress in the steakhouse-buffet. Too many functions or too many expectations would
influence most if not all positions within the restaurant. One consequence of this stress is a lack of quality work by a single individual. “There is simply not enough time or effort to go around” said Mia, a female hot-bar cook. Mia explained how there were sometimes too many things for her to do. As a hot-bar worker, she had to constantly replace the amount and variety of food that the line of customers excessively loaded onto their plates.

When the restaurant would get busy, servers explained that their expected functions would be strained. When a server’s section is full, responsibilities may exceed the capabilities of an individual to take care of all his/her customers to the fullest potential. Whitney described situations where she would have to take care of her serving duties (catering to the customers), her side work (job specific responsibilities), as well as anything else other busy servers may need (teamwork related duties). Whitney claimed:

> During the lunch and dinner rushes, there would be times where I was overwhelmed. Depending on your section, one minute the section could be slow and the next overcrowded. When multiple tables sat down at the same time, I would be running around trying to do everything. Sometimes it was just plain impossible. Regardless you would be expected to handle it, attempting not to make any mistakes. The worst is if you had to take on the party room at the same time your section was full.

Needless to say, as detailed by Mia and Whitney, one who has excessive roles or one who has too many duties could experience stress related to being unable to perform their functions properly.

**Role Poverty**

The opposite of role saturation, role poverty occurs when an individual has too few roles to perform and likely fills the void with pointless, deviant, or occasionally law-breaking activities. In the opinion of this researcher, this particular stress is arguably the stress that provides the most opportunity for an individual to commit deviant or illegal
acts. Role poverty seems to bring clarity to the timeless adage “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” As an example, cashiers who were not busy could not be too far from their station; therefore, if it was not busy, cashiers would spend their time in different areas of the front of the house (FoH) sometimes getting in the way or distracting others as they are trying to perform their own functions. The cashier Sarah mentioned:

Sometimes it would be so dead [not busy/slow] that I would have nothing to do but talk or eat. Sometimes I would even bring my school work with me so I could work on it in the party room when I wasn’t really needed.

Although Sarah’s comments regarding the slow periods of the work day may seem reasonable in some instances, her behavior and her attitude was regarded as inappropriate because she was getting paid by the restaurant to be working; not spending her time with non-work related activities.

The seven styles of stress that have been discussed set the stage for research questions three and four. The next section concerning research question 3, details various accounts relating to deviance and law breaking activities within the steakhouse.

**Research Question 3**

*What examples of non-criminal social deviance and/or law-breaking exist in the research setting?*

As illustrated in figure 2, the seven role stresses can be viewed as intervening variables. That is, they can be seen as a link between the 4 behavioral axioms (i.e., culture, personality, situation, and interaction) and the dependent variables of either conformity or deviance/law-breaking. Response to research question three outlines a variety of styles of “non-criminal social deviance” as well as, “law-breaking” that are associated with, or exacerbated by the role stresses. The two categories will be discussed
separately; each category will include a discussion of three major behaviors that had been identified to emerge within the restaurant setting. The three major (common) behaviors relate to various forms of theft, drug and alcohol use, and behaviors resulting from the positive or negative influence of verbal/non-verbal interactions.

**Non-Criminal Deviance**

The three major (common) behavioral responses (Forms of Theft, Forms of Drugs & Alcohol use, and Behaviors resulting from verbal/non-verbal interaction) emerged from the data to illustrate non-criminal deviance. Each will be discussed separately.

**Non-criminal theft.**

Although theft is commonly viewed as criminal behavior, certain forms of theft exist that may not truly be considered as law-breaking. In her work, Katie Pantaleo (2010) outlined how theft can be generally categorized into: theft of time, theft of food, and/or theft of supplies. While theft of food and supplies is considered a marginal violation of law, certain forms of on-the-job pilfering can be seen as expected or even normal (especially among restaurant workers). A person working in the cold bar section occasionally taking a grape might not consider such an act a true violation of law (possibly a violation of policy). Such policies which are set up by management to deter pilfering or “shrink” (natural or expected loss of supplies) may be overlooked depending on the disposition of selected managers on duty. Frank one of the shift managers admitted:

I don’t think it’s fair that corporate allows us managers to eat for free but not let the employees eat for free. Whenever possible, if we are not busy, I don’t really care if people eat.
Frank’s comments are in direct contrast to the policies from the corporate management. Many employees shared the disposition of the manager Frank. As previously noted, employees had to be careful which manager was working. Other managers who did not approve of discretionary eating, while “on the clock” (eating while getting paid), would “write up” (or take note of) those who were breaking the rules. If an employee was “written up” too many times, he/she would be eligible to be permanently relieved of his/her workplace duties (fired).

Theft of time (or temporal forms of theft) includes behaviors of employees which take advantage of their “time” while at work. In other words, employees who are spending their time other than working are technically stealing time from the employer (“time is money”). Employees who are hiding in the party room conversing with other employees, using their phone or eating food are engaging in forms of temporal theft that would be considered non-criminal deviance.

**Non-criminal drugs and alcohol use.**

Admittedly, drug and alcohol use in the restaurant has mixed views and is somewhat of a grey area when understanding whether someone is breaking the law. Obviously, if an individual only has alcohol on his/her breathe, it might not be criminal but would definitely be deviant if the job of the employee is dealing with customers (Back of the house vs. Front of the house).

In the research setting, drug and alcohol use by employees was not uncommon. Employees who worked in the back of the house could more easily hide alcoholic beverages while working and still function. Employees who worked in the front with customers would have to use more secretive measures to hide their use. Determining
whether alcohol use in the restaurant would be considered criminal or deviant would depend on variables such as the age of the consumer, how “public” or exposed the behavior is to others in the vicinity (alcohol was not served in the restaurant, employees or customers who would be drinking would have to bring it in from the outside), and/or how any altered behavior affected other employees or customers.

For example, the grill cook, Jessie, kept a flask of liquor in his car to sip on while taking breaks. “I was never really drunk. It was just nice to have a little buzz to make the time go by faster”. Because Jessie was over 21, his actions were not technically “criminal”; however, he violated restaurant policy by consuming alcohol while working.

**Deviant verbal interaction.**

In the steakhouse-buffet, there are at least two major methods of non-criminal interactions that affected the way employees reacted to situations. It is argued in this section that any combination of deviant verbal or non-verbal interaction patterns (i.e., between employees or between customers and employees) were influential in shaping employee’s attitude and decision making process.

First, deviancy in the form of verbal interaction can take multiple forms. For the purposes of this thesis, two common forms of non-criminal verbal interactions (i.e., gossip and inappropriate conversation) emerged from the data. Gossip (spreading rumors or repeating stories that an individual had overheard) was common among employees in the research setting. Throughout the work day, employees would regularly converse with one another; inevitably talking about non-work related topics. Gossip would have negative effects between employees; it influenced teamwork and the ability for some employees to get along with others. For instance, a bakery worker, Paige, was known to
tell stories about others; even if she did not have any evidence to prove that the story was true. Amber, a hot bar employee, commented on Paige spreading rumors about her personal life.

I hated her. It’s like she never learned how to keep her mouth shut. We used to be friends and worked well together, but ever since she spread rumors about me, we stopped getting along. Her presence offended me.

Amber had taken great offense to Paige’s actions and would refuse to associate with Paige when she was working. This example of the breakdown in teamwork was detrimental to the smooth operation of the workplace.

A second example of deviant interaction relates to inappropriate conversations. While gossip could be considered an inappropriate conversation, more general conversation topics (between customers and employees or between co-workers) could be considered as inappropriate for the workplace. Topics include (but are not limited to) issues such as: political ideology, religious ideology, racial prejudices, sexual practices, and relationships. While many of the aforementioned topics are not necessarily deviant, they are considered “hot button topics” because they do have a tendency to elicit strong emotional responses. Many hold strong and diverse opinions relating to many “hot button” topics. Conversations or arguments relating to opposing viewpoints of inappropriate conversation topics proved to be influential in the breakdown of teamwork or the ability for some employees to work in a congenial manner.

The shift manager, George, was notorious for discussing racial stereotypes. Most of the individuals who frequented the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet were predominately white (Caucasian); however, there were employees who represented a mix of races/ethnicities, some of who were offended by George’s comments.
A final example of verbal non-criminal deviance which affects the smooth functioning of the restaurant social system, relates to customers who become obsessive or gain a particular interest in an employee. The server Kylie explained how certain customers would regularly request her as their waitress. Some of these customers that would request her service would leave disproportionate tips (sometimes more than their entire bill), as well as occasionally bring her chocolates and flowers. This behavior which was perceived as flattery by some co-workers had become a problem for the attractive server. From Kylie’s standpoint, the customers who were excessive in their efforts to gain her favor were described as “stalkers”. Kylie commented on one of her stalkers by explaining how he would come into the restaurant specifically looking for her. If he was informed she was not working, he would leave the restaurant. She remarked:

He was creepy! If I was working he would always make me feel uncomfortable. I don’t think he realized that the only reason I would talk to him was for tips. Sometimes if I was lucky enough to see him coming in before he saw me, I would hide in the back and have the cashier tell him I was not working.

Kylie’s comments illustrated how her perception of some customers was dictated by their actions. While there are numerous examples of customer deviance, in the restaurant the “stalker” is a marginal term that bridges the narrow gap between deviant and illegal behavior. For the purposes of identifying non-criminal deviance, the stalker is not stalking in the criminal sense; however, by his actions, he caused the employee to feel the need to hide. This example shows how deviant interaction between customer and employee can occasionally affect the operation of the restaurant as a social system.

Similar to the concerns related to inappropriate conversation between customer and employees, inappropriate conversation between employees also were present in the research setting. The cashier, Sarah, recalled one example where one of the managers
would attempt to “hit on her”. She stated that “he would always try to tell me vulgar jokes, or say things that would actually make me feel uncomfortable. He was almost as old as my dad. I didn’t want to get him in trouble. I didn’t think of it as a big deal.”

**Deviant non-verbal interaction.**

In the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet, there are at least three examples of non-verbal cues/actions that emerged from the data which could be considered deviant. First, as part buffet, the restaurant operates with a general expectation that customers will handle buffet items with respect for others. This expected “buffet etiquette” includes some common sense behaviors such as avoiding contaminating the food (i.e., coughing or sneezing, using wrong scoops or tongs to pick up buffet items). If a buffet item is taken, it should not be placed back with the “fresh” food. If it touches the patron’s plate; this would be considered a violation of buffet etiquette.

A hot-bar employee, Jared, described a situation where a customer at the hot-bar had taken too many pieces of grilled chicken off the buffet only to put some of them back with the other pieces of chicken on the bar. Jared explained:

> Once I saw her put the chicken back on the buffet from her plate I almost lost it. You see, one of my responsibilities was to make sure the hot bar was always fully stocked. I had just made a new batch of grilled chicken, and you know, out of all the buffet items the chicken takes longer than most to make. Not to mention meat is more expensive then say, pasta. Once food touches a customer plate it is considered contaminated. I was shocked when I saw her put it back; I couldn’t see which ones were the ones that she had thrown back in. I stared at her furiously, didn’t say a word then had to dump the new batch of chicken into the trash. I hoped to embarrass her in front of the other customers. It was like she had never eaten at a buffet before.

Jared’s account of the customer who put food back on the buffet table is a form of customer deviance because it directly impacted the operation of the hot-bar workers.
Another example of non-verbal deviance includes the accounts of servers who have the responsibility to respond to customer concerns. Whitney provided a detailed account where a customer in her section (in direct view of the hot-bar) was bothered by the lack of professionalism and sanitation of the employees cooking the food. Whitney elaborated:

While making my rounds among the customers in my section, I was stopped by one of my tables who were disgusted by how one of the hot-bar cooks was wearing his pants that were so low on his waste that you could see his underwear. The customer told me ‘I can’t enjoy my food when I am forced to stare at his crack’. I was embarrassed and immediately corrected the fellow employee.

Whitney noted that because the employee was not properly dressed according to restaurant policy (violating health/grooming guidelines); it negatively affected the perception and attitude of the customer.

A final example of non-criminal deviance includes the act of “stiffing” (leaving no tip). As described in Kylie’s comments, servers work for tips. In the U.S. it is customary or at least common practice to leave a tip for your server. Servers in the research setting had been known to dislike aspects of their job; however, a comforting feature of the position is leaving at the end of the day with cash. Therefore servers, who are motivated solely by money, would obviously become stressed if a table (or multiple tables) stiff.

Criminal Behavior in the Research Setting

Theft.

In the research setting, most criminal behavior can be related to theft. The theft of money, food, supplies, and time are the most common examples of theft that emerged from the data. The first and most obvious example is stealing cash. Positions in the
restaurant that work in direct contact with money are at the highest risk for temptation to offend. These positions include the cashier, the servers, and the managers. For each position there are certain structural checks (for some positions more than others) to provide accountability if anything went wrong. For instance, daily sales would be recorded from the cash register. If the money in the register did not match the amount that had been recorded, the cashier would be held accountable for the missing money. Likewise, management would be held accountable for maintaining accurate inventory counts as well as managing daily ledgers and depositing checks to the bank.

Management is also in charge of holding onto paychecks and cash from an arrangement with a local oil/natural gas drilling contractor. Another example of how theft of money could occur is through a manipulation of certain records. Arrangement with the drilling company included a free buffet meal for its employees in training. The drilling employees would have to have their meal identification card with them to sign their name on a daily meal paper. The paper with the signatures would be used to determine how much money (cash) would be given to the server. The agreement included an arranged tip of $1.80 per employee. If a server had 5 drilling employees in his/her section they would sign their name next to the drilling employee name. Management would use this list to determine a sum of cash to be paid to the server as a tip (exp., #of names signed over an unspecified period of time x $1.80).

There was no specified timeframe when this payment would be available. Management would commonly say “we’ll have it for you whenever they (the drilling company) approves or has the money”. “It did not make much sense” declared a server Jay. He explained how the management would continuously dodge the conversation if the
topic included the cash that was supposedly owed to the server from the drilling company. Jay declared:

It would be common for (the drilling employees) to stiff because they ate for free. The only way anyone would see anything from them is if they were a girl. Most of the (drilling employees) were guys and they were kinda cheap. They actually make a lot of money even though they come in looking rough. They liked to flash it to show off in front of the girls. So, because I never got tipped from them I was always waiting from management to give me my money. They kept saying it would be coming soon but never paid me. I had come to find out that the manager had been fired about a month later for stealing the cash that was supposed to be paid to the servers.

According to Jay’s explanation, the drilling company arrangement posed two interesting concerns. The first concern involved the gender differences and the way the customers would act. Second, the method of accountability and oversight that was in place to avoid a misuse of management privileges was problematic. The management committed theft because the management team members were the only ones who would have access.

A final example regarding theft of money is stealing tips from tables. There are a few ways theft of tips can occur. Customers walking by a table with money near the edge could be tempted to quickly take the cash. A fellow server who is helping to clear another server’s table may take some or all of the cash; if the other server or customers are not looking. Stealing money may also occur from someone’s personal belongings (i.e., stealing from purses and jackets). Jay described another time when he was victimized:

I had been working over Thanksgiving which was one of our busiest times of the year. I had put all my money in my jacket that I had collected over the previous two or three days (over 300 dollars). I put my jacket with all the other people’s personal belongings feeling relatively secure about leaving my stuff there. We never really had too many problems with people stealing money. Of course, whenever I went back to my car at the end of the night I had realized that the money was missing. I never trusted that place again. I felt stupid for leaving my stuff there with so many shady people that worked there.
In the steakhouse, there are other forms of theft that do not directly involve cash. The stealing of food and supplies would be a common form of theft in the research setting. One of the structural fallacies of the research setting was the lack of video security. In fact, security cameras were nonexistent in the research setting. The closest to video monitoring was a single “live stream” baby monitor that was aimed toward the cashier station. This created an environment that was controlled by direct supervision. If a certain manager did not care for the policies/rules, then there would be no other form of oversight of an individual who might be stealing food or supplies. This form of theft had been evident both subtly and obviously. In some cases, people would “sneak” items from the back storage areas in their hand bags or jackets. In other cases, employees openly would take supplies or food. This would be highly dependent on which manager was on duty.

Erin described a time where she witnessed one of the managers purposefully taking inventory incorrectly. “Taking food off the buffet was one thing, but it was another to steal an entire steak” Erin claimed as she portrayed the situation:

What would happen is in the normal course of daily events, if a customer steak is burned or returned, it is recorded as a loss. I remember the time (the manager) marked a couple of our most expensive cuts of steak as overcooked. At the end of the day (the manager) and one of the cooks used the supposedly ‘burned steaks’ to make a free customized sandwich. Although she was a shift manager she was not supposed to be taking steaks from the cooler. If corporate found out she was making food she could have gotten fired.

The final major example of theft is the theft of time. As previously discussed in terms of deviance, the theft of time is usually not a criminal act but more of a violation of policy. In the case of the restaurant, theft of time would become an illegal activity if it involved the fraudulent claim of time worked such as not clocking off for breaks or in
between shifts; or (servers) not claiming proportionate tips in order to manipulate to avoid paying higher taxes and earning a bigger paycheck.

Alex recalled being told by one of the trainers; “if you wanted to make the largest paycheck, just claim how many hours you worked by $5”. Alex explained that by this logic, a server who makes ($2.83 an hour) and claims $5 multiplied by a 6 hour shift, should only claim around $30, because it would be what he would have made on minimum wage. Although it was likely that a server would not be making over $10,000 a year that would make income tax avoidance a real concern, it was still a manipulation of federal records which can be viewed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as law-breaking behavior. It would be a bigger concern to some servers to not claim at least minimum wage (even if they did not make enough throughout the day). If the management would see that a particular server was not claiming enough money, it would be grounds for a reevaluation of whether the server could handle the responsibilities of the position. That is to say, if a server is not doing well enough (not making enough tips), it is reflected in the dollar amount that the server claims for tax purposes at the end of the day. Thus, if one does not claim enough tips, then it looks as if the server is not doing what they need to be doing or not doing their job properly. This could be grounds for termination.

Drugs and alcohol.

Described in previous sections of this chapter, the use drugs and alcohol had been present in the research setting. Because illicit use/possession of drugs is illegal by various federal, state, and local definitions, any and all examples of drugs in the workplace would
be forms of illegal behavior. Some employees were very open about their use of drugs or alcohol while at work.

The same manager who had stolen the cash from the drilling company employees previously had served time prison for illegal drug sales. As previously noted, the hiring process of some employees overlooked some concerning risk factors. Stories about experiences while using various substances were common side conversations among certain employees. For example, hot-bar employee, Briar, recalled how a new hot-bar trainee showed up on her third day of work while high on painkillers. Briar stated, “…She was so slowed down that she couldn’t even function. She kept messing things up and couldn’t even hold a normal conversation. She didn’t last very long”. Briar’s account of the fellow employee was just one example how drugs affected individuals in the workplace.

**Forms of harassment.**

The final form of criminal/law-breaking behavior includes multiple forms of harassment. If the behavior of customers or employees/employers becomes inappropriate, it could be construed or perceived as harassment. The most serious and common form of possible harassment would be sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in the research setting was a “grey area” which is difficult to define. It is possible for an individual in the research setting to perceive behaviors of employees or customers more sensitively than others. For example, if an inappropriate conversation had gone so far as to make another feel unsafe, then one’s actions can be viewed as more law-breaking than deviant. Because individuals handle situations differently, it was commonly an issue that would be dealt with (mediated) privately or without the use of law enforcement.
A second form of criminal/law-breaking behavior relates to bullying. This form of harassment was against restaurant policy and would not be tolerated in the work place. If there were any concerns, it would be the responsibility of the victim to report to a supervisor such as a manager. When asked about situations related to bullying, respondents admitted that when it came to situations like bullying, they were more likely to confront the individual personally rather than seek legal action. For the purposes of this thesis, the only forms of illegal-behavior that are concerned regarding harassment are the forms of behavior that occur during the course of a typical work day. Therefore, another other common form of criminal harassment that relates to cyber bullying (which could affect still affect an individual while in the work setting) but was included in this.

**Research Question 4**

As illustrated in model 2, one of the dependent variables attempts to demonstrate the link between role-stress related deviance and law-breaking and the way restaurant personnel rationalize such acts. Research question 4 is stated as follows:

*In what ways are “stress” related factors associated with “neutralization theory” and how do they apply in the research setting?*

The stress related factors were identified in the research setting through the personal accounts of past employees. The review of some of the personal accounts in previous sections of this chapter implies certain rationalizations which employees used to justify their behavior. In order to address this research question each of the role-stress factors (i.e., role-conflict, role inadequacy, role incongruity, role non-complementarity, role frustration, role saturation, and role poverty) were augmented with the interview
accounts which demonstrated the way each of the role-stresses had been present when individuals would express deviant or illegal behavior.

**Role Conflict and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking**

As previously stated, situations involving role conflict would consist of individuals who hold contradictory cultural norms regarding how a function should be performed. For instance, when Kylie explained her difference in opinion regarding the way management wanted her to perform her serving duties (in the role conflict section of research question 2 of this thesis); she consciously deviated from the guidelines to provide a more favorable service to her customers. The inner strain of commitment between customers and management influenced Kylie to make a rational decision weighing the costs of poor customer service vs. disappointing/upsetting management.

Kylie acknowledged that management was only interested in “saving money” and the worst case scenario would be for her to have been “written up”. According to Kylie, she was “working for tips” and “it’s the customer that really pays me, not the restaurant”. She wanted to increase the amount of a potential tip. Kylie felt that the management’s methods of saving money were in direct conflict with her ability to provide the best customer service. Therefore, in this instance in the research setting, role conflict illustrates a link between situational stress and the process of rationalization.

Based upon the context of the research setting and the situation presented in Kylie’s example of role-conflict, her deviant response was justified through her accounts. There are various traditional as well as modern techniques of neutralization that can be applied to Kylie’s justifications and situational rationalization.
According to Sykes and Matza (1957), “Denial of Injury” and “Denial of Victim” would best fit for her actions; with Kylie choosing to disobey management policy, Kylie felt that there was no physical victim or that nobody would be harmed if she were to bend the rules. Modern techniques of neutralization, “Defense of Necessity” (Minor, 1981) and “Denial of Necessity of Law” (Coleman, 1985), would also be considered as appropriately applied definitions of neutralization. Kylie did not view the policy as just (i.e., that it hindered her ability to provide better customer service), and she felt that she was better off working directly for tips from the customer because “they are the ones who really pay us; not management”.

**Role Inadequacy and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking**

In research question 2, role inadequacy had been explained as, the type of stress that occurs when a person lacks a necessary personality attribute or disposition in order to carry out a prescribed set of role expectations. Role Inadequacy had been illustrated in the research setting as it applied to the personality and disposition of management and how certain employees who did not have the necessary experience to handle job specific requirements/duties.

The example of deviance and/or law-breaking associated with this form of stress included actions which affected the ability of certain team members to interact/work/function smoothly together. This stress was also influential in creating a negative stigma or attitude toward individuals who were not able to “do their jobs”. This stress highlighted some of the structural concerns regarding the hiring process, which could also be linked to dysfunctional hiring practices (structural practices which create/enhance stressful situations).
For instance, when the manager Betty stated “I really just don’t like people”; she acknowledged that she did not hold the appropriate temperament and patience required to communicate effectively with unruly customers. This was known by the staff (as well as the researcher), and negatively affected the operation of the restaurant when customer related issues could no longer be handled from other service positions. Servers and cashiers learned to avoid going to certain managers (who would inevitably exacerbate the problem) when they needed help. This obviously caused stressful situations if there were no other managers on duty. The researcher notes, because of her inability to handle some aspects of her role/position, her credibility as a manager had been negatively affected. Her attitude and behavior provided a foundation for other employees to disregard/disrespect her comments or concerns or any rules that she had imposed.

Sykes and Matza (1957) would argue that this stress could be associated with “condemnation of the condemners”. If employees have less respect for those who are supposedly “in charge” or “making the rules/policies”, they are more likely to rationalize any deviancy or law-breaking based solely on the rules established by the “authority”. “Don’t tell me how to do my job, when you can’t even do your own”!

**Role Incongruity and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking**

As noted, role incongruity relates to “status inconsistencies” and how an individual may experience stress based upon “being compelled to act in a way that is outside their self-perceived status, rank or social position” (Nix and Bates, 1962, p10).

Previously, Alex had described how some disrespectful customers would treat him and other staff. Alex explained how he would act as if the customer attitude did not
bother him; however, over time disrespectful customers would eventually “get under his skin” – sometimes result in a change in his overall attitude. Alex remarked:

Throughout the day it was like my attitude went from being really upbeat and positive to being worn down and pissed off. It was noticeable and was even expected. If you wanted to get my best service, it was best to come in early before the customers would get under my skin. I started smoking cigarettes again because of that job. The customers sucked. I felt like they probably didn’t know any better. They came from the sticks.

Alex admitted that the problematic customers were his biggest difficulty and accounted for his lack in effort and his negative attitude at the end of the night. Because Alex perceived himself as higher social-status than the customers he was serving, it did not take long for him to alter his temperament/mood throughout the course of the work day. When asked how he could see this impacting any deviance or law-breaking activity in the workplace. Alex responded:

Customers alone would not necessarily motivate me to do anything. Maybe for some, but I never really felt the need to lash out on anyone. I mean we have all heard terrible stories of customers upsetting a server and the server retaliating by doing something to the food. While that could happen, I don’t think I could ever bring myself to do it. If I did, the customer would have really had to have been an ass-hole.

Alex re-directed the question to say that because he might not necessarily bring himself to “mess with a customer’s food”; he could understand how, in some cases, a server would do something similar if a customer was being unreasonably rude. In his statement “If I did, the customer would have really had to have been an ass-hole”, shows how his perceived actions could be related to Cromwell and Thurman’s (2003, p535-550) “justification by comparison”. If Alex were to commit any form of deviant/illegal acts based on this stress, it would be in relation to negative interaction and/or a form of
deviant or illegal behavior, and a justifying his actions based on what he “could have done”.

**Role Frustration and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking**

Role frustration occurred in the research setting when an individual felt stress because something in the setting was out of synchronization or actually missing. When probed, interview respondents generally claimed that a power outage would be the “worst case scenario”. Each position in the front and back of the house explained what they thought would be the worst situation that could happen in their position which would affect their ability to function properly. Employees responded by stating claims such as: (Dish) “if there was no hot water…I would end up going half-ass on some of the dishes…I couldn’t spend all my time scrubbing one pot”; or (Bakery) where “someone the shift before forgot or didn’t prep enough items…It would stress me out because I had to do twice the work”. As expected, many workers admitted to a general willingness to cut corners (or see themselves committing some form of deviant/illegal act) if they felt something was out of their control. Robert Agnew even mentioned in his book, *Pressed into Crime* (2006), a linkage between frustration and theft.

The examples of stress that resulted from role frustration were influential in the willingness of some employees to deviate from expected role-functions. These examples can be related to the technique of neutralization “denial of responsibility” (Sykes and Matza, 1957), because the individual could justify his/her deviance or perceived deviance on conditions/situations that were outside of his/her control.

Responses to role frustration or the stress resulting from them can also be recognized as “defense of necessity” (Minor, 1981, p295-318). Employees could

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rationalize responses to role frustration stress by feeling that any deviant/law-breaking action could be justified because it was necessary. For instance, if a stressed out worker feels that it is necessary for them to drink, smoke, or use drugs on the job because they “need it to deal with the stresses” of the job.

**Role Non-Complementarity and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking**

Examples of role non-complementarity were demonstrated in the research setting when employees would be “at odds with each other over how something should be done”. Because this form of role stress relates primarily to social interaction, any deviant or law-breaking behavior that results from non-complementarity will have to do with a “lack of fit between culture and interaction”. Workers who could not work harmoniously with each other would inevitably have a breakdown in effective communication and poor teamwork resulted.

Interview responses displayed the way employees who were at odds with each other would tend to find others in the work setting that shared their point of view. This would result in cliques that would entice the spreading of inappropriate conversation (i.e., gossip). As explained in research question 3, verbal and non-verbal behaviors included a range of both deviant and illegal behaviors; intensified by the perception that some workers may “have it out for each other”.

Similar to role-conflict, justification for deviance and law-breaking behavior could be described as the “denial of victim” (Sykes and Matza, 1957). In the case of co-workers who do cannot work/function well together, deviance or crime directed toward an individual was viewed as “deserving”. For instance, consider the comments made by Amber regarding the spreading of rumors by a fellow employee. Amber explained that
other co-workers began to take her side. Eventually Paige (the co-worker who was spreading rumors) had felt alienated from other co-workers because they began “to gang up” on her. In essence, the other women in the research setting admitted that they would purposefully tease her and make her feel unwelcome. They would use the “awkward silence treatment” (not saying a word whenever the person is present), and talk about her behind her back loud enough that she would know they were talking about her. Eventually, they began to pressure her to give up her shifts. Paige eventually decided to quit; one week she was there and the next she was no longer on the schedule.

Amber who remarked that “she [Paige] deserved it”, implied that she felt no empathy for the fellow employee who had been once been her friend. The definition for the technique “denial of victim” includes those who believe (claim) that the victim possibly deserved the punishment; Amber seemed to illustrate this rationalization technique as a response to the acquired stress of role non-complementarity.

**Role Saturation and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking**

The stress of role saturation was identified in the research setting as occurring when an individual had too many functions to perform or too many expectations for a single role. As noted, when positions in the restaurant were overloaded with too many functions; there were fewer opportunities for any direct deviance or law-breaking. However, employees such as Mia and Whitney explained how too much work would affect their attitude. Mia who worked in the hot bar would feel overwhelmed. Mia admitted (like many other employees) that her attitude would become more hostile throughout the shift. She claimed:

> It is probably because I would get the feeling that no matter how hard I worked, it would never be fast enough. The faster I worked the faster the customers would
take the food. I would zone out and feel like a broken record; doing the same thing over and over again. I felt like the restaurant owed me. Without people like me the place would have shut down a lot sooner. Honestly, that place (the steakhouse) would make anyone stressed out if they were told to do all the things we were expected to do.

Mia’s account of her behavior and the expectations is her direct justification that links excessive functions and the feeling of “entitlement” (Coleman, 1985). Mia also described that many other employees felt the same way and would feel like they “earned” or were “owed” by the restaurant for their hard work. In Mia’s example, her hard work entitled her to engage in deviant behavior. She would take food off the buffet and take extra-long breaks.

In Mia’s opinion, she believed that “everyone who was expected to do more than they could handle would have felt the same” as her. This also illustrated the use of the technique “everybody does it” (Coleman, 1985). The claim, “everybody does it”, may apply to many if not all situations in the research setting. However, in the case of role saturation, most respondents were able to provide situations where they experienced too many functions and expectations. Likewise, they shared a common belief that “everyone would get stressed out if they had too much to handle”.

Role Poverty and Justifying Deviance and/or Law-breaking

Finally, role poverty included all behaviors that would occur when individuals had too few role expectations. The opposite of role saturation, employees who suffered from role poverty displayed the most opportunity to commit deviant or law-breaking behaviors. In the restaurant setting, there are many reasons why an individual might be influenced to behave in a particular way. However, role poverty would seem to be the most influential. In every position (with the limited oversight that occurred), employees
who were exposed to role poverty tended to commit (or admittedly “if they wanted” could commit) the most serious forms of deviancy and/or illegal behavior. All three of the major forms of deviance and law-breaking behavior (as they relate to theft, drugs/alcohol, and verbal/non-verbal interaction) can be related to not having something (more meaningful or work related) to do.

Role poverty could be perceived as positive or negative depending on the context or role/position within the restaurant. For instance, a situation can have different implications depending on whom it is applied. If customers are scarce, then positions such as the server would be negatively impacted since functions and economic incentives are based primarily on having customers for whom to provide service. Likewise, if customers are scarce, a cook in the back of the house might feel influenced positively because he/she is getting paid the same rate while performing fewer necessary functions – “just doing the bare minimum”.

The following chapter provides a summary of the collected data. It also discusses the strengths and limitations of the study, and implications for future research. There is a final epilogue that includes final thoughts of the study and some of the general conclusions of the researcher.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This thesis has discussed several theoretical perspectives that emerged from data regarding the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet. After working in the research setting for almost two years, the researcher was interested in the various ways employees would rationalize deviant and sometimes illegal behaviors. In particular, he was interested in the structural features of the restaurant that seemed to negatively affect the perceptions and attitudes of the employees. The researcher predicted that an accumulation or excessive exposure to these “negative features” could be influential in providing justification for individual employees to rationalize forms of deviance or law-breaking.

After a review of modern and classic literature that explained micro-settings (ecology) and the composition of interrelated parts that make up a given social system, the researcher determined that Bates and Harvey’s *The Structure of Social Systems* (1975) would provide a useful illustration of the way the “negative features” could be manifested in the form of situational strains that they conceptualized as “role stress”. Role theory emerged from early studies examining social systems, while simultaneously building on the inspired work of Sorokin (the major advisor to Robert Merton who in 1938 wrote about adaptations to stress). Bates developed a conceptual scheme to assess potential stresses one might experience in any of a variety of social settings and examined how the series of interrelationships (i.e., culture, personality, situation, and interaction) existed between groups and individuals.
As previously noted, in order to examine human behavior using a social-structural frame of reference (in this case the steakhouse-buffet), it is necessary to understand the influence the overall environment has on specific micro-level features of the social system. Thus, role theory applies when dysfunction(s) relating to culture, personality, situation, and interaction – coalesce in ways that may result in role stress.

Explained in chapter 3, model 2 illustrated how the research variables would integrate to form a relationship model of role stress and neutralization. This model adapts the conceptualization of role-theory as independent and intervening variables. Essentially, in order to address the initial points of interest for the researcher, this thesis had to be a mixture of two separate parts forming a single study. First, to establish how role stresses occurred in the research setting, the researcher found it necessary to identify the most apparent forms of negative features that would apply to different employee positions within the restaurant. Features included: identifying (structural) spatial areas that would affect the function of groups or individuals in the workplace; as well as an assessment of the various negative interaction patterns that would occur within several identified spatial zones of the steakhouse-buffet social system.

The second part of this study involved identifying and assessing the rationalizations that employees could use to justify behavior. After reviewing some literature that had examined deviance and law-breaking in restaurant social settings, the researcher sought to build upon studies that illustrated how techniques of neutralization could emerge in the restaurant. It was the goal of this researcher to establish a connection between acquiring multiple role stresses and the use of techniques of neutralization. At no point of this project had the researcher been interested in developing a model of causality.
(i.e., cause and effect), but rather to present a more heuristic model which simply clarifies/illustrates relationships between variables. In other words in this unique setting, the researcher believed that stressful variables acted as intervening links between individualized role-stresses and some justifications for job-specific deviance and occasional law-breaking.

To address the concerns as an ethnographic study, the researcher conducted interviews with 20 employees who worked in different positions within the restaurant. Located in the appendix, an interview schedule was used in order for the researcher to conduct interviews that lasted roughly 30 minute to an hour. With the use of question “probes”, in a relaxed conversation style interview, respondents provided detailed accounts/narratives of their experiences. Employee names have been changed in order to protect their identity; likewise, careful measures were taken to secure documents and notes containing any collected information. The data from the interviews were augmented with the use of retrospective participant observation which the researcher could accurately recall or had witnessed during a typical work day. The prior experience of the researcher as an employee in the research setting was very useful in providing appropriate context to the accounts/narratives collected from interview respondents.

Four research questions were developed to identify as many of the features that would address theoretical perspectives of role-theory and techniques of neutralization. Accounts of interview respondents had been recorded and assessed for each research question as they were applied to model 2. The findings of the four research questions are outlined here in simplified format.
1. Research question one (RQ1) asked “what specific spatial areas (eco-niches) can be identified in the steakhouse-buffet setting that affect the operation of the restaurant?"

Response to this research question provided a basis for subsequent inquiries. That is, it is necessary to understand the overall description of the setting in order to make sense of the more specific social interactions that occurred within the steakhouse-buffet. The setting reflected three major spatial areas. These were: (1) the Exterior of the research setting, (2) the Front of the House (FoH), and (3) the Back of the House (BoH). Once inside the steakhouse-buffet, a series of more specific spatial areas were identified as: Cashier station, Party room, Bakery, Server stations, Dining areas, Kitchen areas, etc. It was found that ecological principles associated with micro-ecology were, in fact, suitable and valuable in setting forth the general organization of the research setting. The manner that the steakhouse-buffet was organized into spatial areas or zones was found to influence the overall operation of the restaurant. The personal accounts demonstrated that the organization of the setting into the niches or zones sometimes was viewed in negatives ways (or “negative space”) and occasionally led to dysfunctional operation of the restaurant.

Identifying the different spaces was necessary because it helped to provide depth and context to the way the negative space could influence the emergence of role stress. The data collected for (RQ1) assessed the accounts of employees who depicted how certain spatial areas could either positively or negatively affect their perception and/or attitudes of actors within the social system (both employees and customers).
2. Research question two (RQ2) was designed to demonstrate the "ways the conceptual scheme of role-stresses applied to the research setting of the steakhouse-buffet?"

It was a primary concern of this thesis to determine if, in fact, the early role-theory of Bates and Harvey that flourished in the early decades of the 1960s and 1970s still proved relevant today. The answer must be yes. The seven styles of role stress (i.e., conflict, inadequacy, incongruity, frustration, non-complementarity, saturation, and poverty) could all be identified in the restaurant setting in some form or manner and provide a logical or at least applicable way to describe the many anxieties that tend to flourish in this unique steakhouse-buffet setting. The data documented in the findings of this research illustrated individual examples of how each role stress could emerge when the parts of the steakhouse-buffet social system would attempt to operate in response to problems or consequences that occurred between the dysfunctional relationship(s) of culture, personality, situation, and interaction.

The data provided accounts of multiple positions (most detailed accounts relating to serving roles) within the workplace that experienced situations that related to the several stresses; however admittedly much of the data was supplementary to the personal experiences of the researcher. The individuals who were interviewed and provided critical examples of role stress in the workplace were asked follow-up questions that would be necessary in documenting their justifications for behaviors detailed in research question 4.
3. Research Question three (RQ3) asked: *What examples of non-criminal social deviance and/or law-breaking exist in the research setting?*

Building off of the many styles of deviance and law-breaking found in the work of Pantaleo (2010), research question 3 was developed to identify and categorize the three most apparent forms of behavior in the steakhouse-buffet (i.e., various forms of theft, behavior related to drugs and alcohol, and situations relating to verbal/non-verbal interaction). (RQ3) was necessary in order to provide a common link between stressful features of the research setting and the justifications that employees would use to rationalize deviant or illegal behavior. Interview respondents provided detailed accounts of deviance/law-breaking that they had witnessed; as well as deviance/law-breaking that they could expect (or understand to occur) if conditions existed that provided opportunity for certain behaviors to emerge.

It is not surprising that a series of personal accounts were found to portray non-criminal social deviance and other accounts represented examples of actual law-breaking. This is likely true of all social settings, but was found to persist in the stressful setting of the steakhouse-buffet with its numerous instances of stressful scenarios. Both models’ 1 and 2 set forth predictable linkages between the role-stresses and either conformity or non-conformity (i.e., social deviance or law-breaking). The models revealed that a relationship appears to exist between stresses and behavioral outcomes. Although the data from the personal accounts were not expected to prove any absolute cause and effect relationships between stresses and behavioral outcomes, the models were found to be suggestive in presuming that the “role-stresses” can logically be positioned as intervening variables. Over the past several decades, the criminological literature has failed to clearly
recognize this relationship, especially in regards to the Bates and Harvey discussions set forth in 1976. Even more suggestive from the data would concern the use of opportunity to commit certain acts. Opportunity could be in the form of the location within the restaurant where the employee was working, time of day, how busy the restaurant was operating, who was in charge or managing, etc. Consequentially, by identifying the most commonly apparent forms of deviance or law-breaking in the research setting, justifications and reasoning for certain behaviors had been further described by respondents.

4. Research question four (RQ4) asked: *In what ways are “stress” related factors associated with “neutralization theory” and how do they apply in the research setting?*

This question attempted to demonstrate a link between the way “stress related factors associated with neutralization theory” would apply toward the rationalizations that employees would use to justify deviance and/or law-breaking discussed in research questions 1-3. As previously stated, the responses provided by interviewees while answering questions related to RQ1-RQ3, were used to chronologically assess their justifications for behavior. For example, in response to RQ2 where the respondent described scenarios relating to definitions of individual role stresses; role saturation for instance (having too many roles or functions to perform), respondents stated that when they would feel like they were overworked or being taken advantage of by the organization/structure/management of the workplace (i.e., too many work shifts, bad section or zone, having too many customers to handle, etc.), they would feel more inclined to use the stressful situations as an excuse or justification for behavior.
In many cases respondents perceived behavior in response to stressful situations as normal. Some respondents simply stated they would do certain behaviors because “Everyone else was doing it” or “they could easily get away with it” – simply describing the names of some techniques of neutralization without even knowing. This provides support for the work Building upon the methodology used in Shigihara’s (2013) work relating interview accounts of restaurant employees to the use of techniques of neutralization to rationalize theft; this thesis identified several features/conditions that were consistent with various styles of neutralization (c.f., table 1).

From hindsight it is perhaps true that this last research question could have been omitted. As an afterthought however, the personal accounts of individuals who had worked in the steakhouse-buffet did provide discussions that make the link between role-stress and the ability to rationalize rule-breaking both feasible and probable. Again, this was not meant to stand as a proof of the link between stress and neutralization theory, but as a demonstration of its likelihood. As ethnographic data, these questions provide a backdrop for more theorizing and research.

**Strength of the Study:**

This study provides a rich descriptive data set that can arguably only be obtained through participant observation. Although this study stands alone as a research project – this thesis, as a collection of in-depth interview data, can provide the basis for future survey research. After an exhaustive review of the literature, specific studies of role theory using the restaurant as a research setting failed to emerge as academic sources. Therefore, a notable strength of the study is that it provides a neglected connection or linkage between the building blocks of behavior (culture, personality, situation, and
interaction) and subsequent outcomes that can be either conformist or devious (law-breaking) behavior. Thus, the introduction of the role stresses that were given substantial coverage in earlier decades… have been shown to still have effectiveness (or utility). The research adds clarification to exactly how various styles of rationalization or neutralization can emerge.

**Limitations of the Study:**

As a qualitative study, this research does not allow for generalization to larger populations. This is a characteristic of most qualitative research. This also means that as a single “independent” researcher, the findings are limited to the interpretations of the researcher. Thus, the question of “reliability” of the data can be problematic. Another researcher may find something different; however, the “validity” (at least for the researcher) is not questioned. That is, the data to the researcher is absolutely valid. The researcher had experienced the research setting (through participant observation) and believes that what was experienced was accurately portrayed. Thus, the research is high in validity and low in reliability. This is why “replication” by other researchers is important.

**Directions for Future Research:**

As mentioned periodically throughout this thesis, future directions for the research would include building upon the research variables as they relate to similar work settings. Applying the theoretical perspectives to similar work settings could be described as supporting data through “transferability”. Of particular interest to the researcher, would be to use this data set (research report) as a foundation to assess in greater detail the effects of individual variables used in the model. Looking at individual role stresses
(such as role poverty), could be useful in developing a more complete model of behavioral causation using structural-functionalist perspectives. This can be applied to a variety of work settings where similar structural conditions are present.

On another note, the concept of greater opportunity to commit certain behaviors could be a logical theoretical variable that could be greater emphasized in future research pertaining to select role stresses and micro-settings. Differential opportunity theory as described in Cloward and Ohlin’s *Delinquency and Opportunity* (1960), could be used to further clarify the attitudes of employees regarding deviant/law-breaking behavior. Likewise opportunity can be greater clarified in its role in the use of techniques of neutralization among restaurant workers.

**Epilogue:**

At the conclusion of the study, the researcher reflected on his experiences in the restaurant. Friends and colleagues would ask questions like “if it was so bad, why did you stay there for almost 2 years?” An interesting question – which may actually serve as a research question in a follow up study – the answer truly lies in the comradery that was established among co-workers. It was during the times when we didn’t have much to do (role poverty) where co-workers would get to know one another, sharing stories, cracking jokes, and even suffering together. There were times where the suffering that was associated with the restaurant could be overlooked based upon the other incentives that might be present. For the researcher, there was nothing like leaving work at the end of the night with cash in hand. As a server, there might have been stressful situations that would occur; however, servers would typically make more money than other positions (even
managers). Aside from the economic incentive, management did well in providing employees with work schedules that appealed to their individual availability.

The restaurant had been described as “one of the most inconsistent places” and employees would regularly note how one day it could be very busy the next it would be “dead slow”. As an “inconsistent” work setting—mindsets, perceptions, and attitudes of employees would be relative to any number of social or structural factors. It is the opinion of this researcher that the restaurant could be viewed as a unique sub-culture that illustrates the general attitudes and culture of the surrounding society (that of a poor urban cluster, farming/university environment). However, the sub-culture of the restaurant also reflects a different set of norms and values that are not necessarily different from the rest of society, yet norms and expectations become relative to either (1) how much incentive there is to commit some form of deviant behavior, and (2) the right amount of opportunity to commit any deviant or law-breaking acts.

It somewhat makes common sense to say that if one is stressed out on the job, then they may be more likely to use that stress as incentive to commit some form of deviant act. Or, if there is ample opportunity for one to commit some form of behavior (be that stealing food from a buffet because it is easy or nobody would care; or taking money from the cash register or safe because you are the only one who has access; or doing personal activities or work while clocked in; or hiding in areas of the building where nobody can see you, etc.), then one is likely to view their behavior as normal (rationalization) if there are no major structural restraints (serious and/or watchful management, video cameras, etc.) from keeping employees from committing acts that are against company policy or downright illegal. Deviant actions were not only ignored but
in some cases were accepted and glorified (i.e., management purposefully counting inventory wrong to make steaks for free, or employees drinking and smoking with each other in the parking lot). Due to the examples of occupational stress and the justifications for various behaviors provided throughout this thesis, a follow-up study focusing on role stress, opportunity to commit deviant/illegal acts, and workplace sub-culture – would be a logical advancement in the criminological/sociological literature on workplace crime and deviance.

The researcher is aware that there is no real answer or way to fully understand (or identify) all the features present that influence behavior; however, by targeting certain structural conditions that influence stress, this thesis can be used to understand features in a restaurant setting which can be avoided or taken into account to develop a more functional or crime/deviance resistant work place.
REFERENCES:


UK: Berg.


counties, school districts and municipalities. Washington DC.


Appendix A

Definition of Important Terms and Concepts

Front of House – Front half of restaurant which includes dining features such as tables/booths, buffet items, server station, cashier station, restrooms, etc.

Back of House – Back half of restaurant which includes all food preparation stations, dry and cold storages, freezer, management office, dishwasher station, and all supplies for maintenance.

Role – A role pertains to a specific function or functions held by individuals who have positions within the social system of the setting. Consequently all persons within the social system serve some sort of a function in order for the system to operate. Positions within the steakhouse-buffet setting include but are not limited to: (customers, cashiers, servers, hot-bar workers, cold-bar workers, baker, grill cooks, dishwashers, and managers). Each position will include a set of roles that have a set of functions and terms which may be unique to its part of the social system.

Role Stress – Personal anxiety associated with the performance of a specific function or functions as conceptualized by Bates and Harvey (1976)

Micro-ecology – For the purposes of this study, the term of micro-ecology applies to a sub-section or “eco-niche” of the research setting where small group interaction takes place and specific roles are carried out.

Social Structure – (Fairchild, 1967)
(1) The established pattern of internal organization of any social group. It involves the character of the sum total of the relationships which exist between the members of the group with each other and with the group itself.

(2) A general term for all those attributes of social groups and types of culture which make them susceptible of being viewed as composite or complex wholes, made up of interdependent parts. Two kinds of social structure may be distinguished from each other in the abstract:
   (a) The division of social groups into part-groups and ultimately into individual members or persons, often differing from each other in role and status.
   (b) The division of a type of culture, i.e., the total body of culture of a society or group, into constituent elements such as folkways, mores, culture complexes, institutions, and beliefs.

Social System – The patterned series of interrelationships existing between individuals, groups, and institutions forming a coherent whole.

Crime/law-breaking – For the purposes of this study, crime (or legal infraction) is defined as a violation of a formal/written code or law.
Norm(s) – A behavior expectation. How one is expected to behave in a social setting.

Norm Breaking – The violation of a rule for which one is expected to behave.

Non-Criminal Deviance – Norm breaking that is not in violation of a codified law.
Natural Area – Distinctive ecological niches or zones in which people share similar social characteristics because they are subject to the same ecological pressures (c.f., Bulmer, 1984; Park and Burgess, 1925).

Rural Area – Defined by the United States Census as inhabitants of incorporated places of less than 2,500 and residents in the open country or unincorporated territory. “Rural” encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

Urban Cluster (UC) – Population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000.

Urban Area (UA) – Population of 50,000 or more.
Informed Consent Form

Occupational Stress: A Role-Theory Approach to Deviance

in a Steakhouse-Buffet Restaurant

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between occupational stresses of employees in a steakhouse-buffet setting. Additionally, this study seeks to identify any links between theoretical literature in sociology and criminology, as it pertains to acquired "role-stresses" and the use of various rationalizations of norm-breaking or perceived illegal behavior. Participation in the study by agreeing to be interviewed will take about 30 minutes of your time. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or Indiana University of Pennsylvania who sponsored this study. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the interviewer. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence. In all questions to you, we emphatically stress that no information is desired that may identify any person or agency with illegal activity or wrongdoing. Your response will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

Project Director:  
Phil Austin  
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Project Supervisor:  
Dr. G. Wasilewski  
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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730)
Appendix C:
Interview Schedule/Probes:

(A) Demographic and Basic Information:
1. Were you a minor (under the age of 18) at the time of employment?
2. What was the nature of your work? (i.e., server, cashier, cook, management, dishwasher)
3. Did you work more than one position?
4. Are you a native of the area?
5. How long did you work at the steakhouse buffet?
6. What work shift (time) did you typically work during the week? Explain
7. Have you worked in food service or the restaurant industry before? If so, what kind of work did you do previously?

(B) Exploratory Questions relating to the study:
   a. Describe the nature of your work station/work area.
   b. Describe the nature of your social interaction within the work setting.

(C) Questions Related to the Independent Variables:
1. (Socio-Cultural Structure)
   a. What are some rules that guided your typical work day at the restaurant?
   b. Would you say that the expectation of your work was highly structured?
      Can you provide any details how it was structured?
   c. What would be a typical goal that you would like to achieve during a normal work day?
2. (Personality)
   a. What are some things that you liked about your work position?
   b. What are some things that you did not like about your work position?
   c. How could personality of a fellow employee or the personality of a customer affect the course of your work?
3. (Situation)
   a. Could you talk for a while about the physical features of the restaurant?
      i. Was it well maintained?
      ii. Were necessary always available?
      iii. What kind of physical features went wrong?
4. (Interaction)
   a. How did you feel about the workplace “social” environment? – Tell me about the typical customers?
Questions Related to the Intervening Variable:

1. (Conflict) – Did any of your personal thoughts on how to perform certain duties conflict with the way you were told/taught something was supposed to be done? Explain.

2. (Inadequacy) – Are there any examples of employees who did not have the disposition to be working in their particular job? Can you provide detail?

3. (Incongruity) – How did you feel about your social status while working within the restaurant?

4. (Frustration) – How often would things seemingly go wrong during a typical work day at the restaurant? Can you elaborate on some specific examples/situations?

5. (Non-Complementarity) – While working with others in different positions or locations within the restaurant, can you recall any stress that resulted from negative interaction(s)? Can you please explain?

6. (Saturation) – How often would you feel overwhelmed in the workplace? Can you talk about some of these times?

7. (Poverty) – Were there many times where you had nothing work related to do? Can you explain? What would you typically fill the void with?

Questions related to the Dependent variables:

1. Can you describe or provide any examples of activities in the steakhouse buffet that were upsetting, or inappropriate, or illegal?

2. Can you describe any excuses an employee might use to justify any kind of inappropriate or illegal behavior?

3. Why do you think some people (employees or customers) might break the rules of the workplace?

4. In your opinion, how influential are stress related factors in the way they impact people’s decision to follow the rules of the work place?
### Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sykes and Matza (1957)</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial of Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>When people deny culpability for deviant behavior due to forces beyond their control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial of Injury</strong></td>
<td>When people view their behavior as not causing any great harm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial of Victim</strong></td>
<td>When people claim the victim deserves the punishment, or the victim is physically absent, unknown, or a vague abstraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Condemnation of Condemners</strong></td>
<td>When people shift the blame to those who disapprove of the deviant behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appeal to Higher Loyalties</strong></td>
<td>When people assert that they are deviating for the demands of smaller social groups to which they belong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klockers (1974)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metaphor of the ledger</strong></td>
<td>“I have built up a surplus of doing good”, “I can afford to break a few rules”; doing good or bad is like a “balance sheet”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor (1981)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defense of Necessity</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Drawn on when people contend that they need to deviate for various reasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleman (1985)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Denial of Necessity of the Law</strong></td>
<td>Applied when the law is called unfair or unjust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Claim of Entitlement</strong></td>
<td>When people believe they deserve the gains of the crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everybody else is Doing it</strong></td>
<td>Is employed when people state that others also deviate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cromwell and Thurman (2003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justification by Comparison</strong></td>
<td>Is drawn on when deviants explain that they could be doing something worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postponement</strong></td>
<td>When deviants suppress guilt by not thinking about the deviant acts committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapted from Shigihara (2013)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2: Model of behavior causation

A. STRUCTURE
Independent Variables

SOCIOCULTURAL STRUCTURE
1. Normative, expected or idealized behavior (system of goals, attitudes, and value)
2. Ideal social structure, role definitions, etc.
3. Basic unit: social norm
4. Broader units: role, position, station, etc.

PERSONALITY FACTORS
1. All attributes of actors, biological as well as psychological
2. Includes such things as capacities, drives, self-conceptualizations, etc.

SITUATIONAL FACTORS
1. All factors surrounding behavior over which actor has no control, excluding personality factors and sociocultural structure.
2. Economic, political, geographic conditions, etc.

B. FUNCTION
Consequences of Social Interaction

SOCIAL INTERACTION
1. Organized, patterned real behavior.
2. The pattern or regularity of concrete human behavior as abstracted from all human behavior or social interaction.

Social Organization

Deviant Behavior

1. Role integration
2. Role Stresses
   a. Role Conflict
   b. Role Inadequacy
   c. Role Incongruity
   d. Role Frustration
   e. Role Non-complementarity
   f. Role Saturation
   g. Role poverty
3. Anomie
4. Readiness to change occupations, residence, or community.
5. Degree of role fulfillment
6. Level of role-satisfaction
7. Occupational Change
   a. Social Organization
   b. Sociocultural Structure
8. Others

Adapted from Nix and Bates (1962)
Figure 3:
Overhead Layout of Steakhouse-Buffet
Figure 2: Hierarchy of Interacting Roles within the Steakhouse-Buffet
Photo 1:
Exterior of Restaurant
Photo 2:
Cashier station facing hot-bar dining area
Photo 3:
Cold-bar dining area facing center of restaurant
Photo 4:
Bakery section facing game room & ice cream machine