Personality of Servers: What Kind of People Wait Tables?

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Pacific University

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Tamara E. Tasker, Psy.D.

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Big Five Inventory (BFI), personality, food service industry, servers

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PERSONALITY OF SERVERS: WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE WAIT TABLES?

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
HILLSBORO, OREGON

BY
EMILY M.R. SZELIGA

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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APPROVED:
Tamara E. Tasker, Psy. D.
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This study investigated personalities of servers in the restaurant industry. Using the Big Five Inventory (BFI), the five dimensions of personality (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness) were measured in 21 servers who participated in the study. Hypotheses regarding dominant personality dimensions, and the relationship between years spent working in the industry and personality were tested. The results showed servers exhibiting high levels of Conscientiousness and Openness, with no support for a relationship between years working as a server and the five personality dimensions. An interpretation of the results is presented. Suggestions for future research are aimed at gaining a precise understanding of the personality of servers in order to maximize productivity, profitability, and minimize employee turnover.

Key Words: Big Five Inventory (BFI), personality, food service industry, servers
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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Five Traits Measured by the Big Five Inventory

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals may be categorized in many ways, including: height, weight, physical attractiveness, intelligence, motivation, similarities, likes and dislikes, and personality attributes. “A major purpose of industrial psychology is to categorize individuals. Such categorization is used for selection, training, classification, and promotion decisions” (Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1997, p. 224). Personality, in particular, is of interest because of its predictive ability in the domains of job satisfaction, job performance, career success, and customer orientation (Barrash & Costen, 2008; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002; Day, Bedeian, & Conte, 1998; Furnham & Zacherl, 1986; Hogan & Ones, *Handbook of Personality Psychology*, Ch. 32, 850-851; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Judge & Erez, 2007; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001;). Understanding the role of personality in organizational settings has become an increased interest in the last decade or so (George, 1992). The purpose of this paper is to study personality in the workplace, specifically among servers in the restaurant industry.

The food service industry in this country employs an estimated 13 million people, or in other terms, 9% of the U.S. workforce. Nearly half of all adults have worked in the restaurant industry at some point during their lives, and more than one out of four adults got their first job experience in a restaurant. Furthermore, the restaurant industry is expected to add 1.8 million jobs over the next decade, with employment reaching 14.8 million by 2019 ([http://www.restaurant.org/research/ind_glance.cfm](http://www.restaurant.org/research/ind_glance.cfm), retrieved February 22, 2009). At the same time, restaurants also have a notable failure rate, and there is a high turnover rate of employees in restaurants. Parsa, Self, Njite, and King (2005) report
about 30% of restaurants will fail within their first year of business; ranking number one in rate of failure when compared to all other retail businesses (including furniture warehouses, food stores, jewelry, sporting, and apparel stores). In addition, small, independently owned operations have a significantly higher failure rate than chain-restaurants (Parsa, et al., 2005). Employee turnover rates average around 85% in restaurants both in fast-food, and full service operations (http://www.restaurant.org/rusa/magArticle.cfm?ArticleID=169, retrieved February 22, 2009). “The root causes of many business problems and failures lie in the executives’ own personality traits” (Sharlit, as cited in Parsa, et al., 2005, p.308). However, given that restaurant servers have direct contact with the customer, and are responsible for carrying out the duties that are enforced by the supervisor, manager, or boss, how does personality of servers play a part? The current study seeks to investigate the personalities of servers, as well as understand any trends in personality within the foodservice industry, and report correlations between server personalities and demographic information regarding the server population.

Over the last half century, there have been many attempts to organize personality and the appropriate traits that summarize the construct (Digman, 1990). The emergence of the ‘Five Factor Model’ (FFM) came about as early as 1949, when Fiske provided interpretations of the language of personality. As Digman delineates in his writing, Tupes and Christal (1961) found correlations with the factors described by Fiske. And, Norman (1963) corroborated the work of Tupes and Cristal, as well as Fiske’s findings. For the next 10 years, there continued to be elaborations, factor analyses, and structures derived from self-ratings, ratings by peers, and ratings by psychologists; most of which validated
the robustness of the five factor solution to the theoretical structure of personality. In 1981, Goldberg coined the term, “Big Five”. The five factor theory, formulated and tested through the development of questionnaires by Costa and McCrae (NEO, 1985; NEO PI-R, 1992), serves as an explanation of the role of the Big Five factors in describing personality. The Five Factors, or Big Five dimensions, are: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness (Costa & McCrae, 1992). John, Naumann, and Soto (2008) briefly describe the Big Five factors in the most current lexicon. Extraversion is conceptually defined as an energetic approach to the world, sociability, assertiveness, activity, and positive emotionality. Ambition is another component of extraversion. Agreeableness includes traits such as being sympathetic, altruistic, modest, kind, and affectionate. Conscientiousness describes socially prescribed impulse control that makes possible goal directed behavior, planning, organizing, following rules, and being thorough. Neuroticism implies traits such as tense, moody and anxious; its contrast is emotional stability, and even temperedness. Finally, Openness includes having a wide range of interests, being insightful, original, and creative and imaginative.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Personality in the Workplace

The Big Five have been shown to be reliable, and replicable, factors of personality (John & Srivastava, 1999). Also, the Big Five model has been validated as a robust model of personality cross-culturally (Denissen, Geenen, Van Aken, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Hofstee, Kiers, de Raad, Golberg, & Ostendorf, 1997; Worrell & Cross, 2004), appeared in over five different languages (Digman, 1990), and is stable over time (Costa & McCrae, 1988). The Big Five model is intended to capture the five factor model and it has been widely used in studies looking at personality in job settings over the past 15 years (Barrash & Costen, 2008; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Judge & Erez, 2007; Judge et al., 2002; Mount et al., 1998). In keeping up with the advancing research, application, and understanding of personality, John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991) constructed the Big Five Inventory (BFI; see also Benet-Martinez & John, 1998). The reason this measure is commonly used in the workplace is because it is a brief questionnaire, and has been proven to be psychometrically sound (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; John et al., 1991; John & Srivastava, 1999).

Findings through research using the BFI in the workplace have been illuminating. Much of the research in industrial/organizational psychology has been dedicated to looking at personality in the workplace in conjunction with job satisfaction, and job performance. Many of the outcomes of such research have pointed to a correlation between particular personalities, as conceptualized by the Big Five, and greater job performance and satisfaction. More specifically, the Big Five personality dimensions
have been studied in particular job contexts, among people holding various roles in the workplace and different titles.

Barrick and Mount (1991) conducted a meta-analysis looking at the relationship between personality dimensions (as measured by the Big Five) and job performance (as measured by job proficiency, training proficiency, and personnel data). The researchers studied five occupational groups including: professionals, police, managers, sales, and skilled/semi-skilled. The researchers predicted that occupations in which employees have frequent interaction with customers or fellow employees (such as management or sales) would be related to the personality dimensions Extraversion and Agreeableness. Another prediction was evidence of a relationship between Openness to Experience and the performance criteria, training proficiency.

The predictions were proven to hold up except for the hypothesis about Agreeableness. The data gathered from their study did not support the hypothesis that Agreeableness is related to certain occupational groups. “The results for Agreeableness suggest that it is not an important predictor of job performance, even in those jobs containing a large social component…Thus, it appears that being courteous, trusting, straight forward, and soft-hearted has a smaller impact on job performance than being talkative, active, and assertive” (Barrick & Mount, 1991, p. 21). Interestingly, Extraversion was also a predictor of training proficiency (as hypothesized, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience were also significantly correlated to Training Proficiency). The results showed that Conscientiousness related consistently to all job performance criteria for all five occupational groups included in the study. For the other personality dimensions, Extraversion proved to be a predictor for all performance
criteria in two occupational groups: managers and sales - groups that involve social interaction. Openness and Extraversion were valid predictors of training proficiency in all five occupational groups. For both managerial jobs and sales jobs, interaction with others is a significant portion of the job. In essence, traits associated with Extraversion such as sociability, gregariousness, talkativeness, assertiveness, and activeness would naturally lead to effective performance in these jobs. The researchers concluded, based on their data, Extraversion was a valid predictor across three job performance criteria in the aforementioned occupations. And, job performance in all five of the occupations is related to the personality factor, Conscientiousness.

Hurtz and Donovan (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of four previous studies (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Mount & Barrick, 1995; Salgado, 1997; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991) that investigated the Big Five as predictors of job performance. Hurtz and Donovan reveal a potential threat to construct validity that exists in the four previous meta-analyses. The reason for the posed threat is mostly due to the fact that the data included in the analyses was not derived from Big Five measures. Additionally, construct validity may have been threatened by the fact that the researchers did not address relations between Big Five and contextual performance.

Hurtz and Donovan (2000) provided an analysis that includes a review of the criterion-related validities of the Big Five personality dimensions. Furthermore, the researchers focused on context versus task. They provided a confirmatory analysis of the relation between job performance and the Big Five personality constructs. The scales used by Hurtz and Donovan were those that were developed specifically according the five-factor model. The results provided by Hurtz and Donovan are consistent with the
results provided by Barrick and Mount (1991). Conscientiousness was found to have the highest validity of the Big Five dimensions for overall job performance. Subsequently, it may be expected that Conscientiousness consistently adds a fraction of explained variance in job performance across occupations and across criterion dimensions.

Judge et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis that investigated the relationship between traits from the five-factor model of personality and overall job satisfaction. Judge et al. (2002) used the meta-analyses by Barrick and Mount (1991) to guide their research. Studies they included had to have used either Barrick and Mount’s classification system for personality traits (the Big Five) or direct measures of the Big Five traits, such as the NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As for job satisfaction, inclusion in the meta-analyses hinged upon whether the assessment tool was a global measure of satisfaction (as opposed to satisfaction measured with reference to specific facets of the job), and studies needed to be measured at the individual level, not at the group level.

Judge et al. (2002) found that Neuroticism was the strongest personality trait correlated to job satisfaction. Conscientiousness and Extraversion closely followed. Conversely, they found that Agreeableness and Openness to Experience were weakly correlated with job satisfaction. It is notable that the categories of occupations used in this meta-analysis were similar to those analyzed in Barrick and Mount’s (1991) research. The groupings were as follows: professionals (e.g., engineers, attorneys, teachers, doctors, etc); police; managers (ranging from foremen to executives); sales; and skilled and semi-skilled (e.g., clerical, nurses aids, flight attendants, grocery clerks, production workers, etc.). They concluded the three personality traits that have the greatest
correlation with job satisfaction, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion, might influence mood at work, emotional stability and relationships in the workplace, which may in turn highlight intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and satisfaction that high performance affords.

Mount et al. (1998) investigated more specifically the Big Five and performance in jobs involving interpersonal interactions. The researchers point out that work environments in which employees are required to interact more frequently with other people, there are two basic trends: working in dyads and working in teams. In the service sector, employees mostly work in dyads; these employees primarily interact with customers who are external to the organization. The second trend may be seen in organizations and other workplaces that increasingly organize employees into teams; workers act interdependently with each other.

Personality styles of people who work in jobs involving interpersonal interactions have been investigated by a number of researchers. Hough’s (1992) meta-analysis provided results concerning the Five Factor Model constructs and teamwork. It was found that Agreeableness, two Conscientiousness facets, Achievement and Dependability, and Emotional Stability (which represent traits that are the antithesis of those that are used to describe ‘Neuroticism’ in the Big Five and Five Factor Model literature) are related to ‘teamwork’. Overall the results reported by Hough indicated that the best predictors of teamwork are Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability. In sum, those individuals who are more reliable, achievement oriented, diligent, helpful, open-minded, secure, and well-adjusted are able to cooperate and work more effectively with others than those who do not strongly identify with these
characteristics. Similar to these results, Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, and Mount (1998) found that teams who had greater scores on personality factors Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability were judged to be better performers than teams with lower mean scores on these factors.

Dunn, Mount, Barrick, and Ones (1995) conducted a study with managers who make hiring decisions and used personality attributes as defined by the Big Five to evaluate overall hireability of potential employees. The six occupations included in the study were medical technologists, insurance sales agents, carpenters, licensed practical nurses (LPN’s), reporters, and secretaries. The LPN job involved more social interaction than the other occupations in this study. The researchers reported Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Agreeableness were the most important factors when hiring LPN’s based on personality attributes. Mount et al. (1998) cited the work of Barrick and Bretz (1996) who studied work teams in manufacturing plants and presented the findings at a conference. The most important personality traits when working in teams, as found by the researchers, are: Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Agreeableness.

The collection of the aforementioned findings which provide evidence that Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Agreeableness are consistently related to an employee’s ability to work with a team, engage with others and cooperate informed the hypothesis made by Mount et al. (1998): Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability will be positively related to performance in jobs involving interaction with others. They also hypothesize that Agreeableness and Emotional Stability will be stronger predictors of performance for jobs that involve teamwork than for those that involve dyadic service interactions.
The researchers grouped samples into two types of jobs: service oriented (dyadic interactions) and teamwork oriented. The dyadic service jobs are: residential counselors, residence hall advisors, grocery store cashiers, service representatives, newspaper employees in the circulation department, banking employees in loan operations, and telemarketing representatives. The teamwork jobs are employees in manufacturing plants, organized in teams. They used the Personal Characteristics Inventory (PCI) to evaluate the Five Factor Model of Personality. Supervisors provided ratings of employees’ overall performance.

What Mount et al. (1998) found supports their first hypothesis; Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability are related to overall performance in jobs involving interactions with others when performance is evaluated by supervisors. Agreeableness was the best predictor of interaction with others, as rated by supervisors. Their second hypothesis was supported when the researchers found that Emotional Stability and Agreeableness were more highly correlated with jobs involving team settings than jobs involving dyadic interaction.

More recently, Barrash and Costen (2006) specifically investigated the Big Five construct, Agreeableness, and its relationship to customer satisfaction in the foodservice industry. The authors of this paper theorized that using a measure to evaluate service employees when hiring in the foodservice industry will lead to higher customer satisfaction, thus increasing customers’ return to the restaurant, and increasing profitability of the establishment. Specifically, the researchers evaluated servers’ Agreeableness and its relationship to customer satisfaction, and studied the importance of Agreeableness on the customer’s willingness to share their experience with other people.
The researchers hypothesized that when a service provider is friendly and sympathetic (Agreeable), the customer will show increased satisfaction and they will be more willing to share their experience with other people.

What Barrash and Costen (2006) found was in support of their hypothesis. The customers’ word-of-mouth promotion of the establishment, and their satisfaction, was directly positively influenced by the Agreeableness of the server. However, they also found that unfriendly and unsympathetic service (lower scores on Agreeableness) did not significantly negatively impact the customer’s word-of-mouth promotion of the restaurant.

Customer Service and Personality

According to Chiat, Carraher, and Buckley (2000), the quality of a company is inextricably linked to the quality of the service they provide. The people who make this association are the customers, who judge the quality of the business by the quality of customer service. Therefore, customer service is important in the overall opinion of the business that is held by the customer. And, according to Brown et al. (2002), personality is linked to customer service orientation. Recent research, including Brown et al. and Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, and Sideman (2005) have focused on discovering which aspects of personality are most important in the service industry and how personality plays a role in a service encounter. Susskind, Kacmar, and Borchgrevink (2007) found that in the food service industry, how service providers consider their guests is strongly related to guests’ satisfaction with the service in the restaurant.

Alge, Gresham, Heneman, Fox, and McMasters (2002) showed that hiring employees who have certain interpersonal skills improves the overall performance of the
organization. The Big Five personality traits have been shown to be linked to customer service orientation in individuals who work in the service industry. Specifically, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness have been associated with customer service orientation (Barrick, & Mount, 1991; Brown et al., 2002; Hurley, R.F, 1998). However, what remains unclear is which component of service is most impacted by personality. Bitner, Booms, and Tetrault (1990) pointed out there are two aspects of service: the relationship aspect and the core aspect. The relationship aspect entails how exactly service is delivered. The core aspect is what is delivered. In a restaurant setting, the relationship aspect of service would be how the server and customer connect, and how the relationship feels – for example, is the server kind and willing, or rude and brief? The core aspect of service in a restaurant would be the quality of the food the server brings to the customer. Iacobucci (1992) claimed that the relationship aspect, or the personality of the server, has more influence on customer satisfaction than the core aspect- the quality of the food - when in the context of a restaurant.

Jobs that involve interactions with others are different from other jobs due to the fundamental requirement for developing positive social skills and relationships. In settings where personality traits are strong predictors of job performance, the result is an increased need for cooperation and teamwork. Hogan, Hogan, and Busch (1984) define service orientation as a helpful, attentive, and cooperative demeanor. Likewise, these words are used to describe the Big Five personality dimension, Agreeableness. Similarly, these are words that one may use to describe successful servers in the restaurant industry. Mount et al. (1998) concluded that Agreeableness is a particularly important predictor of job performance in jobs that involve teamwork, cooperation, and interdependent
interactions. The researchers claim that agreeable team members are helpful, trusting, and friendly; hence they work well with others.

Hogan et al. (1984) found that cooperation facilitates service performance. Interestingly, in the service setting cooperation is essential in order to provide the service. However, there is an element of competition necessary for the dyadic relationship to function. Servers and diners have somewhat different goals. For example, a restaurant server’s goal is to provide quality service, while attempting to up-sell menu items. The diner’s goal is to receive quality service, enjoy the food, and ultimately feel satisfied paying for what they received both in quality of food and service. Therefore, service providers who are precise, responsible, approachable, and receptive are more likely to be successful (Mount et al., 1998). This description is similar to the construct Conscientiousness, and suggests that service employees who show conscientiousness provide higher quality service.

Present Study

There is a dearth of literature specifically addressing personality as a construct in the food service industry, even though the industry is growing and many people seek employment in restaurants at some point during their lifetime. With the growing popularity of studying personality in organizations, it appears that empirically studying personality in the food service industry, particularly personalities of servers, seems needed and useful for both organizational and individual concerns. Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to investigate personality among restaurant servers.

Restaurant servers are unique in that they regularly work both in dyadic relationships and as part of a team. They interact with customers, providing customer
service, and they must also interact with their co-workers, managers, supervisors, etc. The studies reviewed above have shown that the traits of Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness bode well for people working in teams, as well as in customer service jobs. The presence of these particular personality characteristics has been shown to predict job satisfaction, performance, and quality of service. However, in the food service industry, the restaurant server is encouraged to be loyal to the employer as well as to the customer. Servers are encouraged to be contributing members to a team, as well as work effectively and efficiently in the dyadic relationship with the diner.

What Barrash and Costen (2008) found was that even though Agreeableness of food servers had a positive impact on customer’s satisfaction, and word-of-mouth promotion of the restaurant, lowered amounts of Agreeableness did not negatively impact customers’ satisfaction. This informs one of the hypotheses in the present study. That is, Agreeableness may not be a prominent facet of servers’ personalities. Furthermore, the research conducted by Mount et al. (1998) provided evidence that Emotional Stability is more positively correlated with performance in team settings than in service settings. That is not to say that servers in the restaurant industry, due to their role as a customer service agent, would score lower on Emotional Stability (or reversibly, higher on Neuroticism). However, it may mean that servers in particular would not necessarily score low on Neuroticism, particularly in light of the trend of restaurant employees to exhibit high rates of turnover.

John et al. (2008) point out that those who experience a high rate of burn out and job changes, also exhibit high Neuroticism. Given the previous research, and findings related to personality and organizations, the hypotheses for the present study are:
H1: There is a trend among restaurant servers to emerge higher on Extraversion and Conscientiousness.

H2: Servers, who have been working as such for a longer period of time, over 10 years, will score higher on Neuroticism and Conscientiousness.
METHOD

The hypotheses were tested in a study of food servers who work in the restaurant industry in the greater Portland, Oregon metropolitan area. Participants in the study were specifically servers who work at non-chain, middle to upper scale restaurants. The restaurants were chosen based on their reputation, price range, and willingness to comply with the researcher’s proposal of the study. The researcher spoke with the managers or owners of the chosen restaurants in order to ask permission to invite employees to be participants in the study of personality of food servers in the restaurant industry. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the managers and requested their participation by distributing the study materials to the servers. Ultimately, five restaurants agreed to participate. The total number of server responses is \( N = 21 \).

Servers were given a packet that included an informed consent form, the Big Five Inventory, and a demographics questionnaire. They were asked to complete all the forms, and submit them to their manager, who in turn, returned the completed forms to the researcher. To maximize privacy, servers placed the completed Big Five Inventory and demographics questionnaire in a separate envelope, and the signed informed consent forms were returned separate from the surveys.

Participants

Originally, the researcher was interested in analyzing data from servers who reported they work more than 20 hours per week. Participants who reported they work more than 20 hours per week made up 71% of the sample, and those who reported working less than 20 hours per week made up the other 29% of the sample. However, given the small sample size (\( N = 21 \)), and the fact that due to the economy, servers’
working hours have been cut, the researcher decided to use all of the participant data that was collected in the data analysis. Among the participants, 33% reported they have been working in the food service industry between 4 and 10 years. Another 33% reported they have been working in the industry between 11 and 15 years. Therefore, the majority (66%) of the participants have been working in the industry anywhere from 4 to 15 years. Fifty seven percent of the participants claimed they have been working specifically as a food server for 4 to 10 years. Participants who have been working as a server for more than 10 years comprised 29% of the sample size. There were no participants who were younger than 18 years old. The majority of the participants ranged in age from 23 years old to 27 years old. This age group comprised 38% of the sample size. Twenty nine percent of the participants fell within the age range of 28 and 32 years old. Thirty three percent of the participants are men and 67% are women. Seventeen participants identified themselves as Caucasian. Three participants identified themselves as Asian or Pacific Islander. And one participant identified as Multiracial. More than half of the participants (57%) reported their highest level of education is having a Bachelor’s degree. Sixty nine percent of the participants responded either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree a little’ to the question, ‘I like my job as a server?’

Measures

**Big Five Inventory (BFI)**

The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was used to measure the traits of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness in participants. This measure was chosen because it is brief and clear, well researched, and is used prevalently in psychology and industrial-organizational research. The items are short sentences, and
the measure itself is concise. The BFI is a 44-item self-report inventory that uses a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). It has been proven to have construct validity (John et al. 1991; John & Srivastava, 1999; Judge & Erez, 2007) and is reliable. The alpha reliabilities of the BFI scales typically range from .75 to .90 and average above .80 (John et al.; John & Srivastava, 1999).

Demographics Questionnaire

A demographics questionnaire was included in the study. The questionnaire was created by the researcher. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain additional information about the sample. Items on the questionnaire were inclusive of age, gender, race, and level of education, among other information. Additionally, the questionnaire sought to gather information about the server in terms of their career. Questions pertaining to number of years working in the food service industry, number of years employed as a server, and job like or dislike were included in the demographics questionnaire. The information gleaned was used in conjunction with the scores on the BFI to investigate correlations and other relationships between the variables. For the analysis of the data, the items on the demographics questionnaire were numerically coded in order to run statistical analyses and draw conclusions.
ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The primary method of analysis was using SPSS and evaluating the results of the BFI and the demographics questionnaire completed by the participants. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the variables measured by the Big Five Inventory.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of the Five Traits Measured by the Big Five Inventory (N=21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Neuroticism</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agreeableness</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Extraversion</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conscientiousness</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Openness</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To address the first hypothesis, BFI data was entered into SPSS. The data show that servers who participated in this study overall emerged higher on scores of Conscientiousness and Openness. This finding provides partial support for the first hypotheses, that servers emerged higher on scores of Extraversion and Conscientiousness.

Before the second hypothesis could be addressed, some of the data had to be re-coded into new variables. The demographic question regarding how many years a participant has been working as a server in the industry had to be re-coded to reflect either more than 10 years or less than 10 years. Likewise, the demographic question regarding how many years a participant has worked in the food service industry was re-coded in order to create two groups, those who have worked more than 10 years in the industry and those who have worked less than 10 years.

The second hypothesis in this study was addressed by using SPSS to run a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The reason for using a MANOVA is because there is one independent variable: the amount of years working as a server in the
food service industry (either less than 10 or more than 10); and two dependent variables: 1) the Neuroticism score obtained from the BFI scale, and 2) the Conscientiousness score from the BFI scale. The analysis was conducted to determine if there is a relationship between working in the food service industry as a server and the scores on Neuroticism and Conscientiousness facets of the BFI. There were no significant differences found on measures of Neuroticism and Conscientiousness between the group of servers who have been working less than 10 years in the industry and servers who have been working more than 10 years in the industry, Wilks’s $\lambda = .91, F(2, 18) = .86, p = .44$.

Following this finding, analyses were run to determine if there were significant differences between groups on any of the five traits measured by the BFI (Neuroticism, Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness). A MANOVA was conducted to investigate differences between participants who have worked as servers for more than 10 years compared to servers who have worked less than 10 years on all traits as measured by the BFI. The independent variable is the number of years worked in the industry. In this analysis, there are five dependent variables represented by the five traits measured by the BFI. Again, there were no significant differences found between the two groups of servers on any of the traits, Wilks’s $\lambda = .78, F(5, 15) = .87, p = .52$.

A final MANOVA was conducted to determine the effect of working in the food service industry, in any capacity, on the five dependent variables (Neuroticism, Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness). The independent variable is the two groups (comprised of participants who endorsed working in the industry for more than 10 years, and those who have worked in the industry for less than 10 years). And, the dependent variables are the five traits. No significant differences were
found between groups, Wilks’s $\lambda = .75$, $F(5, 15) = 1.001$, $p = .45$). Overall, support for the second hypothesis was not found.
DISCUSSION

In this study the personality of servers who work in the food service industry was evaluated. The main purpose of this study was to (a) investigate the dominant personality styles of servers, and (b) find out if the length of time working as a server in the industry is related to personality, as it is measured by the Big Five Inventory. The overall results show that servers score highest on Conscientiousness and Openness. These results only support half of the hypothesis that servers emerge higher on Extraversion and Conscientiousness. The results show no significant relationship between years worked in the industry as a server and personality types. After further analysis of the data, the results show no significant relationship between years worked in the industry (in any capacity) and personality. Therefore, the data does not support the second hypothesis that length of time spent working as a server in the food service industry is positively related to outcomes on the Big Five Inventory, specifically on measures of Neuroticism and Conscientiousness.

Previous research has shown that Conscientiousness is a consistent, and valid, predictor of job performance and job satisfaction (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Judge et al., 2002) across a variety of occupations. It appears that the traits associated with this dimension of personality are valuable in accomplishing tasks in the workplace. Servers in this study showed a high degree of organization, persistence, and motivation as measured by the Conscientiousness scale on the BFI. It may be suggested that such characteristics are suitable for achieving success as a server in the food service industry. A server’s job includes keeping track of a number of customers at once, multitasking, and selling the products in order to earn tips,
and maintain employment. Also, as Hough (1992) noted, Conscientiousness influences success when working in teams. In the restaurant industry, teamwork is necessary for success of the business (Ingram & Jones, 1998). Servers not only must be able to work with other restaurant staff, they are responsible for developing positive social relationships with customers (Mount et al., 1998). Therefore, the current finding that servers score highly on Conscientiousness is in line with previous research, and makes sense given their involvement with others on the job, and the necessary quality of such interactions.

The results from the current study show servers as scoring high on Openness as well. The implications for this finding may be connected to the nature of the food service industry, particularly with regard to servers. It is known that the industry shows high rates of employee turnover and failure rates (Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991; Parsa et al., 2005). Openness is a label that encompasses traits such as: intelligence, curiosity, open-mindedness, and creativeness. Barrick et al. (2001) report that employees who exhibit high levels of Openness also show increased willingness to take on new learning experiences. Therefore, servers who score high on this facet of the Big Five may seek out a variety of jobs within the industry, thus explaining high employee turnover. Among the participants in this study, 66% reported working in the industry for at least the past four years, some reported working for as many as 15 years. Fifty seven percent reported they have been working specifically as a server for 4 to 10 years. Over the course of a lifetime of working in the industry it is presumed an employee will seek out work in any number of restaurants. Servers, who exhibit particularly high scores on Openness may be eager
and curious for new learning experiences, thus change jobs within the industry frequently.

Another implication of servers emerging high on Openness is that they may be more easily trained on the job. Openness has been shown to be predictive of training proficiency of employees in the workplace (Barrick and Mount, 1991). McCrae and Costa (1987) reported this personality dimension has the highest correlation of any of the Big Five dimensions with cognitive ability, suggesting an ability to learn as well as motivation to learn. Thus, servers who show high rates of Openness may be more easily trained in the tasks required of the job. The fact that servers who participated in this study may have scored highly on Openness may be related to their level of education. As previously mentioned, the participants in this study reported more education than the average employee in the food service industry.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size. Data was gathered from 21 participants, which limits the generalizability of the results. It is suggested more data be collected in order to increase the power of the study, and potentially find statistical significance in the data. In some aspects the sample appeared to be representative of the demographics among servers in the food service industry; in 1998, the industry saw 78% of servers were women, and 59% were under the age of 30 years old (http://www.restaurant.org/rusa/magArticle.cfm?ArticleID=410, retrieved July 5, 2009). However, among the participants in this study, more than half had a bachelors degree, or higher. Whereas the typical employee in the food service industry (71%) has the equivalent to a high school degree, or less. Additionally, the sample consisted of
predominantly Caucasian women. As of 1998, the industry is seeing an increase in employed minorities, specifically among Hispanic and African Americans. (http://www.restaurant.org/rusa/magArticle.cfm?ArticleID=410, retrieved July 5, 2009). Therefore, it is recommended more data be collected to ensure a more thorough representation of the more various demographic profiles of servers.

It would be useful to investigate how job performance is related to personality profiles of servers in the food service industry. For example, Hurtz and Donovan (2000) reported Openness affected performance in customer service jobs. This may help managers, and others who do hiring for restaurants, to screen for employees who may prove more successful doing the work. Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) point out that most managers understand that optimal service is an outcome of having successful and productive workers in positions that require direct customer contact. In the same vein, it will be important for the food service industry, to minimize employee turnover and increase success rates of restaurants. Future research into which personality factors contribute to retention of servers may be useful. Additionally, it may be important to gain an understanding of how time spent working in the industry impacts servers’ job satisfaction and productivity.

A precise understanding of personalities among servers, and what traits are related to success in the industry will serve to positively impact all those involved. Links between job satisfaction, productivity and performance, and personality among servers in the industry may be fruitful areas to conduct further research. Gaining more insight as to what personality structures influence the interactions between customer, server, and the
manager, may serve to more fully understand the impact such relationships have on the industry in general.
References


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Appendix

Demographics Questionnaire
Please circle the answer that best fits for you. Your honesty and completeness are appreciated.

1. What is your gender?
   a. Man
   b. Woman
   c. Intersex
   d. Transgender

2. What is your age?
   a. 18-22
   b. 23-27
   c. 28-32
   d. 33-37
   e. 38 or above

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   a. Grammar school
   b. High school or equivalent
   c. Vocational or Technical school (2 years)
   d. Some college
   e. Bachelor’s degree
   f. Master’s degree
   g. Doctoral degree
   h. Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)
   i. Other (please specify) ____________________________
4. How would you identify yourself?
   a. Arab
   b. Asian or Pacific Islander
   c. Black
   d. Caucasian or White
   e. Hispanic
   f. Indigenous or Aboriginal
   g. Latino
   h. Multiracial
   i. Would rather not say
   j. Other (please specify) ______________________

5. What is your current status?
   a. Partnered
   b. Married
   c. Single
   d. Divorced
   e. Widowed
   f. Separated

6. How many children below the age of 18 do you support?
   a. 0
   b. 1
c. 2  
d. 3  
e. 4  
f. More than 4

7. For how long have you been working in the food service industry?
   a. Less than 1 year  
   b. 1-3 years  
   c. 4-10 years  
   d. 11-15 years  
   e. 16-20 years  
   f. More than 20 years

8. For how long have you been a server (waiter or waitress)?
   a. Less than 1 year  
   b. 1-3 years  
   c. 4-10 years  
   d. 11-15 years  
   e. 16-20 years  
   f. More than 20 years

9. How many hours per week do you work as a server?
   a. Less than 20 hours per week  
   b. Between 20 and 40 hours per week  
   c. Over 40 hours per week
10. I like my job as a server?

   a. Agree strongly
   b. Agree a little
   c. Neither agree nor disagree
   d. Disagree a little
   e. Disagree strongly

   Other (please specify)__________________________________