

Fall 2013

Stress Alleviation, Talk Types, and Self Perceptions on the Front and Backstage

Andrea N. Jackle

Follow this and additional works at: http://pilotscholars.up.edu/cst_studpubs



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Citation: Pilot Scholars Version (Modified MLA Style)

Jackle, Andrea N., "Stress Alleviation, Talk Types, and Self Perceptions on the Front and Backstage" (2013). *Communication Studies Undergraduate Publications, Presentations and Projects*. 63.

http://pilotscholars.up.edu/cst_studpubs/63

This Student Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication Studies at Pilot Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Studies Undergraduate Publications, Presentations and Projects by an authorized administrator of Pilot Scholars. For more information, please contact library@up.edu.

Running head: STRESS ALLEVIATION, TALK TYPES, AND SELF
PERCEPTION ON THE FRONT AND BACKSTAGE

Andrea N. Jackle

Stress Alleviation, Talk Types, and Self Perceptions on the Front and Backstage

Organizational Communication Capstone Project

University of Portland

Fall 2013

Supervised by Alexa Dare, Ph.D.

I understand that in the interest of shared scholarship the University of Portland and its agents have the non-exclusive license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media in perpetuity. Further, I understand that my work, in addition to its bibliographic record and abstract, may be available to a wider community of scholars and researchers through electronic access.

My junior year in college, I was fortunate enough to land an on campus job. An on campus job allowed flexibility and convenience for my schoolwork, as well as the ease of transportation, I could just walk to work from class and visa versa. I worked in my school commons as a barista in their “coffee cart.” Learning to make coffee had even led me to my current job as a barista with a major coffee company today, but that is not important to this.

Being a student worker led to many questions for myself. How was I supposed to act with my peers? Would my peers look at me differently? Could I express frustrations? How did my co-workers feel? And then I was given the opportunity to research an organization and the people with in it, and the idea struck me. I could visit my old organization without being a member, and having my own questions clouding my brain.

I wanted to not only go back into this organization I had once been apart of, but I wanted to look at how members of the organization communicated using both their professional front stage and their private backstage.

Rationale

Everyday when we go out in the world we are actors in society. Many times as people we play certain roles (student, professor, sister, friend, etc.) and while we are always ourselves, it is a version of ourselves that we are putting on depending on the scenario we are in. Dramaturgy is a theory or perspective that explores the use of roles that people play (Jacobs and Slembrouck, 2010). But it

looks at these roles in a way that looks at two spheres that people perform in, front and backstage.

Instead of focusing heavily on all the roles that one person can play (which would expand way beyond the means of this paper) Erving Goffman's theory of front and backstage looks at how a person acts in the two spheres, a 'more' public one and a 'more' private sphere. Ellingson (2003) discusses that "this is particularly prevalent in service professions, where some team members prefer that the audience not be able to view the backstage, and others prefer ease of movement between the two regions," (pp.104). Theoretically it is helpful to study the mannerisms and patterns that people display, for the purposes of my paper I hope to look at people's behaviors in the customer service industry and employees uses of Goffman's stages.

Customer service makes up a huge aspect of the workforce that everyone interacts with, whether being in customer service yourself or going to an establishment that you are the customer at, we all interact with people in such an aspect. Since customer service reaches such a vast amount of people, should we not know as much as possible about it? Understanding the management styles of people, more particularly in my case students, in a customer atmosphere and how they manage their front and backstage is crucial to our understanding of impression management in such a position. If we all interact with customer service in one way or another as a being in its own right, then again we should know as much about it as possible to best understand it.

Review of Literature

I looked at research that analyzed the use of front and/or backstage behaviors of people in their own settings, be it work, personal or recreational. I noticed a variety of themes throughout the literature. I noticed themes in emphasis on spatial importance and the definition of it and its importance. I also noticed contentions with developments of potential new stages, and how the interactions of the stages are important.

Following the true traditions of a literature review, I will attempt to organize my findings from the broad (or abstract) studies to the more narrowed and specific studies. I will begin by discussing Jacobs and Slembroucks' (2010) article on linguistic ethnography; moving on to then both Atkinson (2011) and Thornborrow's (2012) articles on journalism; then discuss Ellingson's article, as well as Harter and Sadowsky's reviews, on healthcare; look at Vaughan's article in the classroom; discuss Wilson's article about a rugby team; and finish off with Coates discussion of women. I will clarify this organization more as I move into each subject.

Spatial Contentions

First, Jacobs and Slembrouck (2010) attempt to look at several studies of linguistic ethnography and its interactions with different lenses in preceding studies. The portion of their paper that I honed in on was over the discussion of front and back staging. They begin to note trends in this lens that are changing, "what most of the research reported in this issue seems to have in common is the blurring of the boundary between frontstage and backstage," (pp. 234). Their

research also helped point toward another trend where, “attention has been drifting away from the frontstage activities of particular professional groups,” (pp. 237) which helps me to focus my own research more toward backstage or take a different aspect on frontstage. The last key aspect I want to take away from their research in order to utilize my own is regarding the definition of staging, “what is front and what is back partly depends on the researcher’s perspective” (pp. 236.)

Second, two separate articles discuss staging from a journalistic perspective; the first is Atkinson in 2011. The research looks at the McDonaldization of television news, the different styles for management and more narrowly the “demarcating backstage and frontstage elements of journalistic performance” (pp.102). He discusses the organizations’ need for cost-efficient delivery of commodities to demographic groups as being the commercial performances’ main concern. He explains how, “This approach values backstage management and management skills over policy and professional skills,” (pp.105). This article helps relate the managing aspect of journalism’s use of back staging. The research looks further into how this media model is related to a popular fast-food chain, “McDonaldization draws on four Weberian principles of instrumental rationality: efficiency, control, predictability, and calculability,” (pp.105). Well demonstrated here in relation to journalism, the context can be translated across many other contexts, much like the McDonaldization concept beyond fast-food chains.

The second article looking at journalism through a front/back stage lens is Thornborrow and Haarmans’ published in 2012. The pair defines the backstage

as, “the place where the performer can reliably expect no member of the audience will intrude,” (pp. 378). But the two note very early on that the conservative understanding of backstage is evolving, with the conversationalisation of the public sphere resulting in, “less clear demarcation between ‘back and front regions’ and in the legitimization of media access to the backstage domain,” (pp.378). This they say is bringing the public audience into the actors’ private sectors. They report on instance of backstage coverage encounters that show personal perspectives on events. They discuss how “moments of backstage, unscripted talk and behaviour are made available to us by the cameras and built into television reports,” in a particular instance (pp. 379).

Their insights give me the perspective of how backstage use has evolved for television production to give viewers a more personalized experience. The “recontextualisation” of backstage moments show small talk and private interactions in a way not utilized in media production before in editing. Again allowing viewers into a more private viewing of the production process, deformalizing the backstage. In the service environment this exists with open kitchens, and lowered walls, giving the customer the opportunity to see more clearly the servicers environment.

Development of Stages

My third area of review is in the healthcare industry, more privatized than that of the producing journalist industry, hence narrowing the scope of front/back stage. Ellingson’s (2003) focus is on the clinical teamwork in the regions off-limits

to patients, geriatric's own backstage. When Ellingson began research she notes that the, "backstage communication in the clinic is crucial to accomplishing teams' patient care goals," (pp.96). She discusses the various types of communication that occur in the backstage including but not limited to, informal impressions, information sharing, request for opinion, checking progress, offering of impressions, and request for reinforcement of a message. She expresses the line between fact and impression as being "somewhat slippery" and why they need to request reinforcement.

Another act that occurred backstage was the maintaining of professional and collegial relationships, and relationship building. Ellingson referred to "life talk," which included talks about interests, families, vacations, house buying, clothing etc., which also occurred in the backstage. What she wants to draw the most attention to, is that unlike typical research this, "ethnographic study reported here demonstrates that the clinic backstage, not just team meetings, must be recognized as a site of teamwork," (pp.109). She also emphasizes and even helps to support the joining of front/back stage, "an embedded teamwork approach blurs the boundary between the frontstage and backstage of health care delivery, and hence reveals both as performative," (pp. 111).

For my own research what I take away from Ellingson is the variations of backstage talk and yet again the blurring of the front/back stage separation. The reviewers of Ellingson's book *Communicating in the Clinic: Negotiating Frontstage Backstage Teamwork* published in 2005, pick up on much of what I have noted about her article. Harter (2007), reiterates the need to see front and

back stage as closely related, “theorizing backstage and frontstage as separate spheres obscures the vital connections between them,” (pp.701). While the other reviewer, Sodowsky (2005) defines the space Ellingson did her research, “backstage was defined as the space in the clinic that is off limits to patients and families, and frontstage was any area where the staff and patients met,” (pp. 305). Her review helps to remind me that the definition of space is crucial in all research, especially staging research.

Another aspect of staging research that drew my focus is Vaughan’s (2007) research on teachers in and out of the classroom. Vaughan’s research hopes to delve deeper than typical research to looking at the classroom being the frontstage. She actually says for teachers, “their frontstage may actually be meeting their colleagues and maintaining a professional identity, while backstage may be their classroom persona,” (pp.175) a view not previously explored in research. Not only does she lend the idea to look at where the different stages could be set, she also brings in another dimension, “somewhere between the...frontstage and... backstage lies the area of mediated interaction which has as its goal the facilitation of professional development and reflective practice,” (pp.174). This mediated interaction gives a new special dimension to my understanding of potential research on front and backstage.

Contentions of Spatial Interaction

Now one of the more localized areas of research on front and backstage that I read about is Wilson’s (2013) research on a rugby team. Wilson spent much of his research also focusing on leadership, which is beyond the scope of

my own research. His focus was to “contend” that physical space was not what made interaction front or backstage but the “stances taken in interactions, and the participation framework involved,” (pp.180). Wilson focused on how backstage could be used to negotiate actions that would later be in the frontstage (discussing plays or practice routines). Or how one player may be backstage in one scope, and frontstage in another. That on wider scales the perspective of staging could change and adapt. From his research I captured the importance of how, “the participants move seamlessly between front and backstage events as the participation framework changes,” (pp.182). So when I go to perform my own research I will attempt to be flexible in my understanding of how actors may weave in and out of the various (potential third stage adapted from Vaughan) stages.

Lastly, my review brought me to the works of Coates (1999) research on women. This research focuses on individual transcribed conversation and then analyzes them on a continuum of front and backstage perspectives. Interestingly she looks at a poem that won a popularity contest, despite it’s main theme being the overthrowing of feminism constraints. Which leads her into the premise of her research, “It is undeniable that one of the burdens of being born female is the imperative to be nice,” (pp.66). Her entire research is based on how women’s’ front stage is their “nice and carefully controlled” demeanor when backstage with their close friends they “behave badly.” She goes on to explain that the personal conversations are acknowledged to be backstage activity but that does not necessarily mean during, “interaction with friends we are not performing, but the

distinction between performer and audience is blurred: there is a sense of 'all-in-together' and failures in performance," (pp. 68). She continues to explain that women frequently talk with one another about their failures in the frontstage, or how their performances were perceived. This aides in my research with her example of how two women were discussing their personas at work through customer interactions. I can utilize this when looking at how people discuss their frontstage interactions in a backstage atmosphere.

In conclusion I can draw many tactics and inferences from the research of the above-mentioned articles. This includes where staging is seen to take place, the physical space of the spheres. I'll also be able to look at how some staging aspects lend to giving audiences perspective into the backstage. Based on Ellingson's research I will look at the different types of talk that occur backstage. Based on reviews of Ellingson's work I will look at the different areas stage can occur and emphasize the importance of the scene.

Another aspect I will keep in mind during my own research is the third dimension of stage that Vaughan hinted at in her own research. This lends to Wilson's research and how I will also take note of how actors move throughout the front and back stage fluidly.

However, a limitation or contention that I experienced with this study was in research on student workers themselves. Literature that was found consisted of psychological implications that were far beyond this paper. Other literature looked at student participation in research but none focused on students that were employed. I will go into further details about this later.

Research Questions

1. How do front and backstage performances alleviate stress for student employees?
2. What are common types of talk in front and backstage performances in an all student employed environment?
3. A. How do student workers think they are perceived? B. Do they communicate their perceptions in their backstage talk?

Methodology

The Scene

The research was done at the “Coffee Cart” located in the front half of the commons at the University of Portland. The area has no back room. It is a rectangle with only one entire wall at the back of it and three counters surrounding the remaining three sides. The people who work behind the counter are all students. They are responsible for serving coffee, tea, and other similar crafter beverages to the customers of the commons (students, staff, faculty, visitors, etc.). One side of their cart displays cookies and breakfast pastries (when facing the cart this is to the left). The long side that is parallel to the wall has a pastry case, the registers, the back of the espresso machines, drip coffee dispensers and the hand-off plane. The right side of the cart has a half swinging door for the employees to enter and a condiment bar where sugar, cream,

napkins and straws are set out for customers. This area is busiest during breakfast, lunch and dinner when there is an influx of students coming to grab meals.

This was an area of interest to the researcher because it is one of the places where student employees are most interacting with other students, as their customers. This was a place where co-worker-to-co-worker interactions, as well as provider to customer interactions were happening on a constant basis, with all parties being students. These two types of interactions were the predominate area of focus for the study.

Procedures

The researcher had been a previous employee and went to speak with an old manager about observing within the scene a couple times and talking with the employees. Once the manager cleared the interaction the researcher began speaking with people about interviewing. All three people that were spoke to agreed to have an interview and are hence included in this research.

Participant Observations

According to Lindlof and Taylor's *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (2011) the pair stresses, "social processes are not just something they [qualitative researchers] study in others. These processes can also be something they personally experience, so they can better understand the experience of others," (pp.134). Their explanation of research and the involvement of a qualitative researcher emphasize the importance of the researcher to be a part of the scene and organization.

The researcher of this study also conducted two observations that led to two more participants to be included in the study, though they were not individually interviewed. To observe, the researcher engaged in participatory observations, for the most part being within the scene and actively watching and listening, while occasionally asking questions and engaging the employees. During the observations the researcher took field notes and later added headnotes.

Qualitative Interviews

Again from Lindlof and Taylor (2011) the importance of qualitative interviewing is noted for its emphasis on depth, quality and value, over the implications of quantitative research and its emphasis on numbers. Lindlof and Taylor explain more eloquently, “Qualitative interviewers often try to emulate the form and feel of talk between friends. When it goes well, an interview does provide some of the same enjoyment—and the same sense of connection—as an intimate conversation,” (pp.172). Again they discuss getting more at the heart of a person in a conversation, then just the persons’ statistics.

So for this research process, this research conducted each one in a quiet place the interviewee chose. The interviews began with an informed consent form and the interviewee choosing a pseudo name. The interviewees were then asked roughly twenty pre-determined questions and any probing or newly thought of questions that occurred on site. The interviews were recorded. Later they were transcribed and then coded to make the data more comprehensible.

Ethical Steps

With the help of Lindlof and Taylor, the researcher was given pretense and understanding of the best way to act ethically. In this particular situation the “conflict between researchers and participants over whose interests should be more important at a particular moment,” (pp.140) had to be handled with particular delicacy, as the researcher had previously been a member in the organization.

All participants were over they age of 18 and not included in any vulnerable groups discussed in class. They were given background knowledge on the researcher’s intent, as well as the description within the informed consent. With the use of pseudo names they are protected confidentially. As well as having the recorded interviews locked under a file so their identities cannot be discovered. Another ethical step that was taken, the research removed leading questions from the interview protocol. The observations were done with approval from the organization to ensure that the researcher was not behaving unethically.

Findings

After much research and “ah-ha” moments, the process of interviewing and observing the student workers of the commons began. Three distinct questions guided the research process through three interviews and two observations. Themes for stress management, talk types, and self-perceptions were ultimately what arose and are going to be discussed below.

Stress Management

The initial question driving this research was: How do front and backstage performances alleviate stress for student employees? There was no doubt that student employees experienced stress while working. But the way they handled that stress was not clear. Throughout the interviews and observations several main aspects of front and backstage performances made stress management clear: (1) Employees ability to decipher preferred tasks and work type, (2) their perceptions of customers, and (3) their understanding of customer flow.

First, student employees demonstrated their use of stress management through their ability to determine preferred tasks and the different types of work they encounter. By being able to break tasks up and determine which they like the most, they demonstrated a way of minimizing the stress of more difficult tasks. For instance, Rosie a third year employee expressed a situation where two tasks were split up by two employees preferences:

When we open up at 10 I don't typically do register, just because there are other people who would prefer to not do coffee so I'll do coffee. Which is fine because I like doing coffee myself, and I don't particularly like doing the register.

Rosie demonstrates a way in which workers split work for their preferences and hence ease of stress. But work stress is also managed through the workers ability to determine the different types of work they do. Cecilia, a second year employee explained why working back register is not preferable:

Interaction with co-workers is really nice. Cause like when you're by yourself at the back registers you're not like talking with anybody.

You're just like standing there at the register trying to go like as fast as possible.

Cecilia's depiction demonstrated how the isolation and need to go "as fast as possible" created stress. She also articulated that she can use her seniority to avoid such tasks, "I don't get pulled back because I've been working there longer." Cecilia's ability to notice this as an undesirable task and her use of seniority demonstrate ways of minimizing stressful tasks. The stressfulness of tasks is minimized by having someone to talk with or by avoiding being placed in tasks that are more difficult like back register.

Stress Alleviation

Second, student workers demonstrated ways of alleviating stress by articulating their perceptions of customers. Among the three student workers that were interviewed, all expressed challenges and stress with customer interactions. Cecilia explained how she manages such challenges,

"You just have to go with it. You can't get bogged down with, oh this person was rude to me or they had such a complicated order, kind of thing. You just give them what they want almost, cause like that's what we're paid to do."

Here Cecilia articulates an attitude of managing stress when interacting with customers, "just... go with it" and not letting interactions "bog" you down. She demonstrates a way of coping with stressful interactions because that's what she's "paid to do."

Third, student workers alleviate stress through their preparation and understanding of peak times and customer rushes. For example, during the first observation Rosie and Jane (a first year employee) talked about students lining up outside the doors before open. They demonstrated an understanding of needing to brace for the rush to come. As a manager went to unlock the doors they even decided which tasks to each other would take as the rush began. Their division of tasks links back to Rosie's comment and the initial way of alleviating stress, work type and preferred tasks.

In summary, the student workers both discussed and demonstrated their ways of managing stress. Through task division and comprehension, understanding of customer interaction, and preparation for peak, student workers demonstrating a multitude of ways to minimize, if not completely alleviate, stressful situations.

Types of Talk

The second question influencing the research was: What are common types of talk in front and backstage performances in an all student employed environment? As the literature had shown performances both front and backstage contained many different natures of talk. This reined true in the case of student workers. During the research process two types of talk became evident: (1) talk about customers, and (2) talk about school.

One popular talk that was exhibited between the student workers and demonstrated in their interviews was their talk about the customers they served. Between transactions employees would turn to each other and hurriedly whisper

any tidbits they chose to share with one another. During the first observation an employee “break the rules” by using a student's numbers instead of their physical card. After said student walked away the employee turned to the other and said she did not understand why people could not remember to bring their cards.

Another example of employees talking about customers was during an interview with Mordecai, a fourth year employee, where he explained how conversations could go with fellow employees after negative customer experiences. He said:

“We turn ‘Uhh did you see what that person did kind of thing ‘I can’t believe their so demanding’ and you know that kind of thing. I don’t know cause you never know the fun thing is that you never know anyone’s name really either. So like that’s all we have, these weird nicknames for weird drinks and habits people have, cause we don’t know anyone’s name. But you definitely remember how, how they approach you and everything so, people think they’re being anonymous but no not today.”

In this example Mordecai explained how student employees interact with each other during experiences they feel are negative. But furthermore, he also explained how he perceives customers to think of themselves, this “anonymous”-ness that he describes. The employees not only talk about the customers, they remember the way they act.

A second popular kind of talk that was exhibited was employee’s talk about school. This was noted during the second observation when Jane, a first

year employee began talking about a test grade she got back. Minion, a fourth year employee, and Rosie offered some advice and briefly touched on their own experiences with test difficulty. Jane continued to express concern with her interactions with the professor and the poor test grade.

Another example of this type of talk was demonstrated in all three interviews. With Cecilia she brought up homework load in regards to challenges discussed with coworkers:

“Mmm I feel like it’s mentioned sometimes. Like just having to do schoolwork but like you feel like you have to be at work. But sometimes its like, I won’t go into work because I know I have to do stuff, and I’m sorry but I have to finish this before certain time.”

Here she not only demonstrates the type of talk, but also how talking about school can lead to people missing parts of work shifts.

This style of talk was also demonstrated in Rosie’s interview in regards to how she plans her schedule around work and homework. She talked about this in terms of how she speaks to co-workers about her time:

“Its harder for me to work weekdays because I use week nights to do homework. And so it would interfere with that time of wanting to do homework and not doing anything after class for a little bit. If I did work then I would just be exhausted when I got off work and it would be too late at night to wait awhile and then do homework. Whereas on the weekends I worked nights, or now I work mornings so I have half the day where I can do homework. Sort of like it

makes it much more like I have structured time blocks of when I can do homework”

Rosie demonstrates how work and school become types of talk in her daily life.

Lastly, school talk was also demonstrated in Mordecai’s interview.

Mordecai was talking about how he sees school and work as a priority challenge:

“When you’re going to work, knowing that you have other things you need to do, like I have a test tomorrow, I should be studying but I can’t cause I have to work. Or like feeling sick and stuff, it’s just hard you know. You make yourself go. And we’re told we’re supposed to be students and responsibilities as an employee too. And people constantly tell us to prioritize but it’s hard to. When it comes down to it, it’s really hard to make those decisions.”

Mordecai looked at school talk as a way to discuss priorities and struggles with school and homework load.

All in all as demonstrated by the literature, backstage talk exists in a multitude of places, but the type of talk that occurs varies. Types that existed in this scene included talk about customers and talk about school.

Perception as a Student Worker

The third and final question emerged during the research process: A. How do student workers think they are perceived? B. Do they communicate their perceptions in their backstage talk? Through their use of backstage talk and interviews, student employees’ self-awareness became of notable significance.

So much so, the third research question was added after a conducted interview. They presented their perceptions through multiple fields including: (1) employee tension, (2) talk about customers, and (3) their understanding of the divide between full time employees and student workers.

One example of how student workers think they are perceived when talking about employee tension was demonstrated during Mordecai's interview. He discussed how he feels he perceives other student workers under tension:

“So, stupid employees I guess. Haha like you get in a flow doing things a certain way I guess. And then a lot of times there's people that come in that don't know what they're doing or do something totally different than you in a different way. And just totally messes with your flow of work. And it can be really frustrating when you're trying to like get stuff done and somebody is doing something that's just totally contradictory or just backwards of what you think you should do.”

Here Mordecai talks about the thinking things should go a certain way, the “what you think you should do” kind of orientation. Untrained employees messing up his “flow” taint his perception of workflow and how he fits into that.

Another example of how employees see themselves is demonstrated in the way they talk about their interactions with customers. During Cecilia's interview she expressed a time where a customer had complained about their drink, “I remember one time somebody thought I made their drink wrong. But I didn't, I think I forgot to stir it actually but...” She remembers this time as a

mistake by the customer's part that she had not actually made the drink wrong but the ladies request was unusual. She perceives herself as in the right of this situation, and expresses that in her way of talking backstage.

Lastly, employees demonstrate their understanding of self through their talk about the divide between full time and part time employees. Mordecai expressed how he depends on full time employees for knowledge or support when student employees are not dependable. He expressed:

“There's a lot of people that don't know what they're doing I guess. They hire students all the time, and fire students all the time too. So you just kind of never know what you're gonna get. And so for some people, Jose [a full time employee] for example, always knows what he's doing, you can rely on him if you need help. Just like scream his name, “Jose!” He knows what to do and he'll come help. Versus a lot of times other people you ask for help and they don't know what they're doing. Or like they're only used to doing one thing kind of so... yeah.”

Mordecai demonstrates reliance on full time employees when he perceives his fellow workers to not be up to standard on their job. This way he can get assistance from someone with experience where the less experienced do not seem helpful. Where “other people” he feels they cannot support the tasks at hand. This demonstrates his perception of co-workers and how he talks about them backstage, during the interview.

Another example of this student and full time employee tension occurred during Rosie's interview where she expressed stigmas she has felt before:

"I will say that a lot of the times the student workers are expected to not be as good of workers as the full time workers, which is what I got a lot when I started working there. They're like 'wow you're like a student really? You're a good worker.' And so I think a lot of the students get a bad rap for when they work there a lot them think that you know they're not really good employees or whatever... So its just I think like there's a lot more going on then it seems, it would be I guess. If you take the time to notice it and really get to now the work place itself and see it from both angles and different angles, and different perspectives."

She expresses the tension that student workers are not expected to work as hard as the full time employees. This made Rosie aware of not only her perception of herself as a hard worker, but also the perception that is placed on her fellow employees to not be as good at their work as the full time employees. In her interview she also demonstrated what that backstage talk looks like between the full time employee and the student worker.

In all, student employees gain their self-understanding through experienced employee tensions, their talk about customers and perceptions, as well as through the tension and expression of differences between student and full time employees.

Discussion

The findings indicate that student employees utilize front and backstage performances to alleviate stress, with a multitude of talk types, as well using backstage talk to better understand their self-perception and how they communicate that in the backstage.

The findings point to the use of backstage performances in several ways as a way to minimize stress. The ways indicated in the study were the employees use of determining preferred less stressful task and work type, as well as their perception of customers and how they used that to dismiss rude or out of place customers, and lastly the study demonstrated the employees use of understanding peak times as a way to mentally prepare for peak and hence reduce their stress on the frontstage. Looking back at the literature this concept is supported in how Jacobs and Slembrouck (2010) express, "what is front and what is back partly depends on the researcher's perspective," (pp.236). This allows the researcher to determine how, in this case, the way students talk and whether that talk was truly occurring on the front or back stage. Determining this boundary between the back and front became important when looking at the types of talk.

Awareness of the existence of multiple talk types became evident in reading Ellingson's (2003) research in clinics where she had, "inductively derived categories describe the communication involved in daily backstage communication among team members," (pp. 99). Applied to this project, the

types of categories that were made evident by the student workers included their talk about customers and about school. In future research more types may be discovered through more observations over a longer period of time. Looking for the type talk however, led to the observation that students were maintaining a certain level of self-perception through their backstage talk.

Lastly the self-perception that became evident during research and eventually developed into a research question was maintained in; the student's use of observing and analyzing employee tension; their way of talking about customers and how customers must perceive them; as well as their way of looking at the divide between student and full time employees and their reliance on the full time employees. Their self-proclaimed understanding is depicting in the literature of Wilson (2013) when he talks about "stances taken in interactions," like those the employees take when interacting with other employees, customers, or full time workers, "and the participation framework involved," (pp.180). The students chose to take certain stances that began to frame the participation that was happening, both front and backstage, which helped them to form self-understood perceptions of themselves.

To conclude the research that was done could be expanded on in a multitude of ways, including looking at the scene from a customer's perspective, observing the employees for a longer period of time, talking with the full time employees to see how they perceive the student/full time employee tension, and lastly this scene could have been observed from a power perspective of how student employees and their managers interact. The study has made several

implications however into the impact of student workers in an organization since this work and research are missing from the literature. Its an area that is important and needs further looking at how students use this as more of a coping mechanism than a way to procrastinate in their organizations environment.

References

- Atkinson, J. (2011). Performance journalism: A three-template model of television news. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(1), 102-129.
doi:10.1177/1940161210381646
- Coates, J. (1999). Women behaving badly: Female speakers backstage. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 3(1), 65-80.
- Ellingson, L. L. (2003). Interdisciplinary health care teamwork in the clinic backstage. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 31(2), 93.
- Harter, L. M. (2007). Ellingson, L. (2005). communicating in the clinic: Negotiating frontstage backstage teamwork. *Journal of Health Communication*, 12(7), 699-701. doi:10.1080/10810730701620024
- Jacobs, G., & Slembrouck, S. (2010). Notes on linguistic ethnography as a liminal activity. *Text & Talk*, 30(2), 235-244. doi:10.1515/TEXT.2010.012
- Lindlof, T. F. & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sodowsky, K. (2005). BOOK REVIEW: Communicating in the clinic: Negotiating frontstage and backstage teamwork. *Health Communication*, 18(3), 305-308.
doi:10.1207/s15327027hc1803_7

Thornborrow, J., & Haarman, L. (2012). Backstage activities as frontstage news.

European Journal of Communication, 27(4), 376-394.

doi:10.1177/0267323112459529

Vaughan, E. (2007). 'I think we should just accept... our horrible lowly status':

Analysing teacher--teacher talk within the context of community of practice.

Language Awareness, 16(3), 173-189. doi:10.2167/la456.0

Wilson, N. (2013). Interaction without walls: Analysing leadership discourse

through dramaturgy and participation interaction without walls: Analysing

leadership discourse through dramaturgy and participation. *Journal of*

Sociolinguistics, 17(2), 180-199. doi:10.1111/josl.12024