SERVICE WITH A SMILE:
UNCOVERING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE THROUGH THE EXAMINATION OF
DIALECTICAL TENSIONS

A Thesis

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Cassandra Costantini

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Cassandra Costantini

Approved by:

________________________, Committee Chair
Gerri Smith, Ph.D.

________________________, Second Reader
Edith LeFebvre, Ph.D.

________________________, Third Reader
Kimo Ah Yun, Ph.D.

________________________
Date
Student: Cassandra Costantini

I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the Library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

__________________________, Graduate Coordinator _________________
Michele Foss-Snowden, Ph.D. Date

Department of Communication Studies
Abstract

of

SERVICE WITH A SMILE:
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by
Cassandra Costantini

This thesis employs dialectical theory in the organizational context to understand organizational culture. The specific organization studied was Café Opulence, a vegan restaurant with a unique organizational culture maintained by both employees and customers. The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to understand and analyze Café Opulence’s organizational culture through the lens of dialectical theory; 2) to offer a new insight to existing organizational scholarship through showing how organizational cultures in general can be examined through identifying dialectical tensions. The analysis showed the existence of the three prevailing dialectical tensions: connectedness-seperateness, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty, at Café Opulence. Two additional dialectical tensions were also added, including the authentic-inauthentic and implicit-explicit control tensions. The study demonstrates the viability of extending dialectical theory into organizations. Although results were not generalizable, it will provide a source for more in-depth inquiry into the ways in which organizational culture is studied.

_______________________, Committee Chair
Gerri Smith, Ph.D.

_______________________
Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

Organizational culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another” and is extremely important to study based on its relevance in everyday organizational interaction (Hofstede, 1980, p.262). Within every organizational setting, there is a unique culture created by its members, which pervades all aspects of organizational life. For this very reason, organizational culture is an area of research that has been studied extensively by communication scholars (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cooren, 2004; Dougherty & Smythe, 2004; Keyton, 2005; Martin, 2002; Morgan, 2004; Pepper & Larson, 2006; Schein, 1992; Schrodt, 2002; Shapiro, 2006). Organizational culture affects how organizational members think, feel, or act and is guided by “ideas, meanings, and beliefs of a cultural (socially shared) nature” (Alvesson, 2002, p.1). While there is much research that has been done, many researchers have studied organizational culture with varying results, which is expected given the variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives taken.

This lack of consistency in organizational culture research comes from the challenge of identifying what organizational cultures are. Schein (1990) corroborates the elusive nature of organizational culture by recognizing the ambiguity of assigning a definition to what an organizational culture is. Thus, recognizing and analyzing an organization’s culture has, for many, seemed to be conceptually messy and an insurmountable task. In order to make organizational culture research more tangible, additional theories and methods need to be identified in order to assist researchers in, first, identifying and then, gaining insight and meaning from the cultural aspects of organizations.
In more fully understanding how to research the deeply rooted concept of organizational culture, atypical communication theories can aid in allowing greater meaning to emerge. Organizational cultures can provide extremely rich information about not only its corresponding organization, but also about organizational cultures’ roles in organizations in general. Thus, it seems that more knowledge can be learned if an alternative to quantitative methodology is used to examine organizational culture.

Being that organizational culture is created and reproduced by the organizational members’ interactions with one another, a theory that allows for closer scrutiny of these communication acts will serve as a way to dissect the ambiguous concept of organizational culture. Although dialectical theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) is most typically used to study personal, dyadic relationships, its applicability to relationships in different contexts can also be used effectively. Dialectical theory brings to the foreground the opposing tensions that are simultaneously present between communicators and is used to understand the relationship as a whole. Similarly, understanding how groups in organizations negotiate these tensions will shed light on how the organization’s culture is manifested. Thus, organizations may provide a new context for dialectical theory and, in turn, new insights into organizational culture.

Beyond the theoretical difficulty of studying organizational culture, this thesis seeks to examine an organization that embodies a new organizational norm occurring within an increasing number of workplaces. Gradually, organizations are blurring the lines between members’ personal and work lives and encouraging employees to merge the two seamlessly. Traditionally, a sharp contrast and separation between work and non-work matters have existed; these two spheres of life would seldom cross and interact with one another. However, more modern organizations are encouraging workers to integrate their work into their personal lives. For
example, many employees are essentially ‘on-call’ answering emails, having meetings, and making calls while outside of work time. This merging of work and personal lives is done more so for the benefit of the organization and maximization of the employees. It is rare for organizations to also emphasize the importance of their personal lives. Thus, work invades one’s personal life, but their personal life is not also invited to enter the workplace.

Café Opulence was chosen as the organization to study because it is an organization that also embraces this new organizational norm. Yet, unlike most organizations, Café Opulence emphasizes that employees bring their personal lives and challenges into the workplace and bring their work into their personal lives in order to improve and grow personally as well. Therefore, Café Opulence is a very unique organization that embraces aspects of the new organizational structure, while also deviating through its complete integration of work and personal lives of employees.

There are other organizations that currently exist that take similar form to Café Opulence and the organizational merging of personal and profession realms. eRepublic, a publishing company based in Folsom, CA that is a trusted information resource for government’s adoption of technology, takes a similar organizational form. In addition to their work, eRepublic employees are also encouraged (and some say required) to read Scientology books written by L. Ron Hubbard and subsequently take courses based on the contents of the books. Critics of eRepublic say that the use of Hubbard-based training and education techniques are “simply Scientology’s attempt to get its ethics and beliefs established in business and governmental settings, where they may gain influence over policy matters” (Evans, 2001, para. 7). Yet, eRepublic seeks to teach and use Scientology-based principles in the workplace, but also to shape their employees’ beliefs and values in their personal lives.
Another organization that takes this new organizational form is the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-Op, which is a natural foods market that seeks to be a reliable resource for consumer information. The Sacramento Co-Op encourages both its employees and customers to embrace healthy, natural, and sustainable lifestyles. Thus, this organization also goes beyond the bounds of typical organizations and espouses a philosophy that is also carried into employees’ personal lives. Customers are also encouraged to become a part of the organization by owning a part of the company, allowing for decision-making opportunities. Both employee and customer involvement in the Sacramento Co-Op show that there is a move to integrate the organization’s place in the members’ lives.

Evidently, this new organizational form is emerging and is becoming more common. At different rates, organizations are integrating employees’ personal and professional lives and in some cases, including the customers in their organization as well. Thus, there is a need to begin to study and analyze the organizational cultures that are the result of this new organizational norm. Café Opulence is fitting to represent this emerging organizational form and will serve as a useful object of inquiry.

**Purpose of Study**

Through this thesis, an alternative means to understanding the complex concept of organizational culture was employed. This study examined how Café Opulence, a vegan and raw food restaurant in Northern California, manifested its organizational culture through the dialectical tensions communicated among its members. Dialectical theory can also be used in order to understand the complex nature of relationships within organizations. As Baxter (2004a) explained, dialectical contradictions “have multiple strands of meaning that are constituted differently depending on the particular kind of relating understudy” (p.186). In other words, due
to their dynamic nature, dialectical contradictions can be applied to many contexts beyond interpersonal relationships. While there are very few studies that have applied dialectics to organizations, its use will add depth and meaning to both the studies of dialectics and organizational culture. Being that it is the individual relationships that create the organization and, in turn, its culture, dialectical theory serves to examine culture at a more micro level. Through examining the dialectical tensions between groups in an organization, a more holistic, overarching organizational culture can be more clearly identified and analyzed.

There are two goals that I hoped to accomplish through this research. The first and most immediate goal of this thesis was to use dialectical theory as a way to understand and analyze Café Opulence’s organizational culture. While one specific organization will be the focus of this thesis, my hope is that through the use of dialectical theory, as a means to analyze organizational culture, scholars can apply it to other organizations. Therefore, the next larger, overarching goal of this thesis was to offer a new insight to existing organizational scholarship through showing how organizations in general can be examined through identifying dialectical tensions.

Organization of the Study

In the following chapters of this thesis, more detail is provided concerning the relevant topics already introduced. Chapter two provides a review of literature relevant to this study. First, the concept of organizational culture is fully discussed through defining, examining its effects, and the prior research done specifically within the context of restaurants. Second, dialectical theory is detailed through its theoretical and conceptual framework, the contradictions defined, and the use of dialectics within organizational settings will be explained.

Chapter three provides the methodology for this study. A discussion of the approaches and procedures used for data collection within the organization are presented, including focused
participant-observation and in-depth interviews. Additionally, I provide details for how the data will be analyzed once collected.

Chapter four presents the results and interpretation of this study, including the existence of implicit and explicit organizational rules and artifacts that create and maintain the organizational culture, examples and observations of the negotiation of the three established dialectical tensions within Café Opulence, and the additional dialectical tensions observed specific to Café Opulence. The researcher’s interpretations will accompany the examples used to demonstrate each tension.

Finally, chapter five provides the discussion of this study including implications, limitations, and suggestions for future study.

Restaurants, as with other organizations, have a variety of cultures that are communicated through the actions of organizational members, ranging from laid back, social, and relaxing to impersonal, quick, and brief. Employees, customers, and other elements of the organization further reproduce and reinforce the environment communicated. Each restaurant differs in respect to the level of intimacy, comfort, and formality that is conveyed on the part of the whole organization.

This thesis examined the way in which Café Opulence’s organizational culture manifests itself through how the dialectical tensions were managed by its members. Drawing from both organizational and interpersonal communication research, the way in which employees at Café Opulence negotiated and managed the dialectical tensions between one another will help in understanding Café Opulence’s unique organizational culture.
Café Opulence Background

Café Opulence\textsuperscript{1} is an ideal organization to study based on its unique organizational culture, maintained through its philosophy. Café Opulence has been described as “an ambience steeped in progressive, spiritually minded, yoga-infused, animal free, hippy-dippy culture” (Harmanci, 2011, A37A). Essentially, Café Opulence is a vegan food restaurant that serves dishes all named as affirmations, such as I Am Live, I Am Transparent, and I Am Magical. The Café Gratitude dishes include raw and cooked specialties, like raw deep-dish pizza made on an onion sunflower pizza crust with nut parmesan and cashew ricotta cheese, and black bean burger with macadamia nut cheddar (Café Gratitude Menu, 2012). Its founders, Terces and Matthew Engelhart, a married couple, are dedicated to serving ‘live’, fresh food with the foundations of the menu being grown on their own farm, Be Love Farm, where the couple resides.

The first, flagship Café Opulence restaurant was opened in Berkeley, CA in 2004. Currently, Café Opulence has five locations in Northern and Southern California, including Berkeley, Santa Cruz, Venice, Los Angeles, and their all-raw Mexican restaurant in San Francisco. The restaurants’ dining experiences are unique with its philosophy and food embracing a lifestyle rather than just a place where patrons come to eat. Café Opulence promotes their philosophy by pushing beyond the bounds of a typical restaurant, embracing a distinct business model, creating a series of products, holding workshops, and having rituals, to educate and involve both customers and employees in their philosophy.

The founders originally met at an Erhard Seminar Training (EST) event and saw the products and restaurants as ways to show appreciation to Landmark’s philosophies. Landmark Education, later renamed The Landmark Forum, is a program that consists of intensive

\textsuperscript{1} All names used in this thesis are fictitious and are assigned for the sake of anonymity of the organization and its members.
transformational self-help workshops, and was created in 1991 (“Company History: Landmark Education,” 2011, Beginnings section, para. 2). Landmark is the “buttoned-down reincarnation of the ultimate ‘70’s self-actualization philosophy, EST” after Landmark purchased EST founder’s, Werner Erhard, intellectual property in 1971 (McClure, 2009, para. 5). Much of Café Opulence’s philosophy stems from principles and strategies taught through Landmark. Thus, it is important to understand what Landmark is and the philosophy it promotes in order to more fully grasp Café Opulence’s philosophy. Landmark Forum has developed over forty personal development programs that are delivered by extensively trained Landmark Forum leaders in countries all around the world. The sessions are held in casual, workshop settings over three consecutive thirteen-hour days with an additional evening session involving usually 75-250 people. In order to take part in these sessions, participants pay tuition to attend, which ranges from $400 to $2,000, depending on the workshop’s location. Landmark graduates describe the Landmark Education as “one of life’s most rewarding experiences” (“How The Landmark Forum Works,” 2012).

All of the workshop activities seek to support the underlying goal of making the attendees recognize their ability to achieve greater potential than they think possible. Landmark Education promises to “deliver the secret of what it means to be human and guarantees them futures greater than they could imagine” (Hill, 2003, para. 6). In other words, Landmark curriculum aims to help participants look beyond the limitations constructed in their own minds. The goal of the workshops is to identify and examine participants’ blind spots, or areas in their lives (such as work or relationships) that are limiting themselves. Through the sessions, Landmark seeks to transform attendees’ thinking by shifting their awareness to their own and others’ endless capabilities.
Landmark self-identifies benefits that graduates of the program have reported including, increased ability to relate effectively to others, increased personal productivity and effectiveness, confidence, increased ability to make the right choices and pursue what is important, and overall, living life more fully with no regrets, having passion for commitments, and expressing oneself fully (“An Introduction to The Landmark Forum,” 2006). In addition, Landmark corroborates the stated workshop benefits with independently collected graduate results. For example, Landmark found that from the graduates surveyed, that 93% felt the workshops were well worth the cost and 94% said there was a profound, lasting difference in the way they live their lives from taking the Landmark Forum workshops (“An Introduction to The Landmark Forum,” 2006). Landmark even goes so far as to claim that 1/3 of the participants surveyed experienced a significant increase in their income with 90% of this group saying that Landmark directly contributed to this.

Similar to Café Opulence, Landmark Education has come under great scrutiny and criticism since its creation. For example, Landmark has been described by critics as a cult, saying it is “an exercise of brainwashing and a marketing trick cooked up by a conman to sap the vulnerable of their savings” (Hill, 2003, para. 5). Critics’ allegations of Landmark being a cult are further perpetuated by the highly controlling rules set up at the beginning of the workshops. The rules for the sessions include that bathroom breaks are discouraged except for during short breaks and the one meal break given; homework is assigned both during the day’s breaks and also at the end of each day; notetaking, unprescribed medicines, and alcohol are forbidden; and everyone must commit to open their minds to all suggestions. The Landmark Forum justifies these guidelines by saying the attendees must be fully, wholly embraced in order to reap the potential benefits and results. Café Opulence’s philosophy and business model was borrowed and inspired by Landmark’s curriculum.
Cafe Opulence embraces an experimental business model, Sacred Commerce, which is characterized by a work environment of transformational growth and self-help, meaning employees are committed to more than a typical job. All Cafe Opulence employees “are signing themselves up for a curriculum of practicing ‘Being’-that their life is great now” (“Cafe Opulence as a School of Transformation and an Experiment in Sacred Commerce,” 2011). This business model is supported by employees’ participation in the other aspects of the philosophy, including playing the Abounding River board game, attending workshops and clearing, which will be discussed in more detail.

Through the sharing that occurs in these activities, employees are given the opportunities to express their deepest, darkest past regrets or secrets in their life and are comforted by the fact that, no matter what, they will still be appreciated and accepted by others within the Café Opulence community. This model is described as “a safe container of unconditional love, where transparency is encouraged, and held as a courageous act” (“Cafe Opulence as a School of Transformation and an Experiment in Sacred Commerce,” 2011, para. 2). Sacred Commerce’s focus is the transformational power of what happens when the community is focused and built around qualities of Love, Spirit, and the Divine. This business model is spread to other groups and organizations through trainings that are offered to private groups and businesses.

The commitment to Café Opulence’s overall philosophy led to the creation of other methods in order to espouse and make more people understand and practice their philosophy as a lifestyle. Before Café Opulence was established, its owners developed a board game, Abounding River, an interactive way of practicing ‘being’ abundant in your life, even if one’s life seems lacking. The idea of Cafe Opulence then evolved from Tatum and Michael Engelhart’s vision of a place where customers could gather, eat, and play the game.
Five books were then written by the Engelharts’ in order to allow for Café Opulence’s business model and philosophy to transcend the walls of the restaurant into the everyday lives of their members. Their first book was the *Abounding River Logbook* (2005), a 42-day practice done with a partner that supplements the board game. It guides individuals through exercises to recognize qualities we all aspire to embody (i.e., love, acceptance, generosity, worth, gratitude, creation, and responsibility). This is done through daily affirmations that are mirrored by the partner and practices, such as to give something away today. Next, the owners wrote two additional philosophy-driven books, including *Sacred Commerce* (2008) and *Kindred Spirit* (2011), which both focus on espousing their philosophy in different areas of one’s life.

*Kindred Spirit* looks at extending their ‘Be Love’ philosophy into all personal relationships. It provides the tools to communicate love to all people, whether it is a cashier, father, or romantic partner. *Sacred Commerce* emphasizes the need for using Café Opulence’s business model and philosophy to be used in other businesses. Also, other types of publications were written to embrace the Café Opulence philosophy including, *Plenty of Time: A 366 Day Creative Planner*, an alternative kind of day planner created to shift the way in which one composes their life, and *I Am Grateful: Recipes and Lifestyle of Café Opulence* (2007), a cookbook that familiarizes readers with the Engelharts’ story and instructions on how to prepare delicious raw food at home.

This overall philosophy is also infused throughout the everyday rituals of the restaurants, including the daily clearing each employee performs beginning each shift to become present, engaged, and free of distractions from their lives. The daily clearing is a set of questions done with another employee (clearer) and goes as follows:

Clearer: Are you committed to being cleared?
Employee: Yes.

Clearer: What has been distracting you from being present?

Employee: *I have been distracted with all of the deadlines that are coming up with work. I am always looking forward to the next thing.*

Clearer: (Mirrors what is said by employee to validate)

Clearer: What feelings do you feel when you are distracted?

Employee: *I feel anxious and nervous about being able to finish everything.*

Clearer: Close your eyes and locate the emotions and when you are ready, exhale the feelings out to let out the negative energy.

Clearer: What are you grateful for?

Employee: *Wow, I am grateful for a lot of things. I have a great support system: my boyfriend, my family, and friends. Also, I love my job and enjoy my life a lot.*

Clearer: Beautiful. (Clearer gives a compliment to the soul) I want to acknowledge how devoted and grateful you are for those who surround you. I see that your love for them shines through in your actions.

The clearing is designed as a time for employees to directly address anything that is distracting them from their lives and to move it out of their mind to begin their shift with a non-distracted outlook.

Each customer who dines at Café Opulence is asked the ‘Question of the Day’ (i.e., “When do you feel most alive?,” “What is your superpower?,” or “What do you love about your life?”) by their server. Similar to the employee clearing, the Question of the Day allows customers to reflect and acknowledge what they are grateful for rather than focusing just on what is distracting them. Furthermore, the philosophy is also infused in the names of their menu items
with dishes in the form of affirmations (i.e. I am Thriving, I am Extraordinary, I am Grateful, etc.). Thus, customers are encouraged to order their meals by inadvertently saying a positive statement about themselves.

The Northern California location will be the particular site of observation and analysis in this study. In this location, there is a fairly normal dining experience where customers can sit at their own tables enjoying their food. A long community table is also available for use in the restaurant where strangers can dine together if they choose or if no other tables are available. From an outsider’s perspective, those who are members of the Café Opulence community, whether an employee or patron, are very easily identified, greeting others in the restaurant with long embraces and friendly kisses. The physical environment of the restaurant also has a very warm, welcoming feeling with a dark wood interior, very low lighting, comfortable couches and chairs, and shelves full of books.

Despite the apparent positivity being espoused by Café Opulence’s philosophy, the restaurant’s practices have been highly criticized for exhibiting cult-like qualities. Organizations labeled as cults are perceived in a negative, pejorative light in both the academic and public spheres. Even the terminology has been revised and has more contemporarily been referred to as ‘new religious movements’ in order to alleviate the negative connotations associated with the term ‘cult’ (Barker 1986, 1989; Richardson, 1993; Miller, 1996; Wessinger, 2000).

However, little consensus among scholars has been reached as to the characteristics of new religious movements. This lack of clear definition is due to the variation within new religious movements concerning leadership, authority, organizational structure, and concepts of the family, individual, and gender. Dawson (2006) describes new religious movements as possessing the following features:
1) they are more concerned than churches or sects with meeting the needs of their individual members

2) they lay claim to some esoteric knowledge that has been lost, repressed, or newly discovered

3) they offer their believers some kind of ecstatic or transfiguring experience that is more direct than provided by traditional modes of religious life

4) Unlike established faiths, they often display no systematic orientation to the broader society and usually are loosely organized

5) they are almost always centered on a charismatic leader and face disintegration when leader dies or is discredited (p. 374)

By this definition, Café Opulence does not qualify as a new religious movement for two reasons. First, the needs of their individual members are not their main concern. In fact, their members are expected to put their needs behind Café Opulence, giving money and their time to maintain inclusion within the organization. Another reason Café Opulence does not meet the new religious movement designation is that Café Opulence is a functioning restaurant open to the public and maintains daily contact with the broader society. Also, because Café Opulence is a successful business, there is some element of organization that allows the restaurant to keep functioning smoothly. While I would be remissed to not address whether Café Opulence is considered a new religious movement, this is not the main focus or purpose of this thesis.

This cult designation has been in the forefront due to the “series of aggressive lawsuits” that Cafe Opulence has faced from previous employees (“To our Café Opulence Community,” 2011). The lawsuits, brought on by former and current employees, were intended to shut down all eight of their California locations. The allegations made against Cafe Opulence include their illegal company policies including, their tip pooling procedures and the requirement of managers to attend compulsory Landmark Forum workshops with the threat of job termination if managers
refused to attend the workshops. Ash Ritter, a former employee of one of Cafe Opulence’s locations, emphasized how employees were encouraged to embrace and recognize the importance of the Landmark curriculum, saying, “It was the theme. Landmark saved my life” (Levin, 2009). While there is contention regarding the intentions of Café Opulence, it is clear that this organization, with its philosophy, is a unique organizational culture that offers valuable knowledge about the study of organizations.
Organizational Culture

Definition

There are a number of different definitions of organizational culture with very little consensus on its meaning (Ott, 1989). Just as in anthropology (Borowsky, 1994; Ortner, 1984), ‘culture’ has no fixed or singular meaning in the organizational culture literature. This is due, in part, to the fact that organizational culture represents the subjective side of organizational life where appropriate behavior depends heavily on interpretation and context (Meyerson, 1991). Kotter & Heskett (1992) offered a rudimentary definition of organizational culture as an “interdependent set of shared values and ways of behaving that are common to the organization and tend to perpetuate themselves” (in Øogaard, Larsen, & Marnburg, 2005, p. 24). In simpler terms, organizational culture encompasses ‘how things are done around here’ within an organization (Triandis, 1994).

Organizational culture is also seen as a set of mental assumptions that guide the actions and perspectives of organizational members to define appropriate behavior within various contexts (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin (1985) offered a definition of organizational culture that was closely followed in this analysis, recognizing the importance of symbolism (i.e., rituals, myths, stories, and legends) and the interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences. Values and assumptions were taken into consideration in this analysis, but the central attention was on the meanings and symbols used within the organization. This priority was embraced due to the idea that culture is not “primarily ‘inside’ people’s heads, but somewhere ‘between’ the heads of a group of people where symbols and meanings are
publicly expressed” (Alvesson, 2002, p.3). It is through the interaction and communication of individuals within an organization that the organizational culture is created, maintained, and negotiated.

As for the specifics of organizational culture, it is difficult to pin down and assess the key attributes of an organizational culture in any given organization. Yet, as Schein (1992) explained, identifying these characteristics is imperative to understanding and improving the organization. Scholars from a number of different fields, such as public administration, political science, psychology, and business have made efforts to delineate key attributes of a culture of any given organization (Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi, & Mohammed, 2007; Balthazard, Cooke, & Potter, 2006; Barley, Meyer, & Gash, 1988; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Jung, Scott, Davies, Bower, Whalley, McNally, & Mannion, Kane-Urrabazo, 2006; Ott, 1989; Schein, 1992; Smircich & Calas, 1987; Schneider, 1990; Trice & Beyer, 1984, 1985). Some of the attributes of culture outlined by the above scholars include factors such as the nature of leadership throughout the organization, engagement among individuals in the organization, the degree of employee input, pay and benefits, opportunities for individual development (i.e., training), and the breadth and types of job tasks given to employees.

Structural aspects of organizations also shape the organization’s culture, such as the size or hierarchy of the organization. As an organization gets larger, it becomes more likely that many subcultures shape organizational values and actions (Schein, 1992). Moreover, in organizations like police and correctional agencies where there is strict bureaucratic and legislative structure, there is little flexibility to adjust to change in internal and external environments (Masood, Dani, Burns, & Backhouse, 2006). Both the overt culture and the underlying or covert culture, can influence the organizational and individual outcomes (Franklin & Pagan, 2006). Thus, in
examining an organization’s culture, the subtle, unrecognized, and embedded aspects of an organization must also be considered as important and revealing.

In an effort to examine and apply the concept of organizational culture in organizational research, Schein (1981) offered a conceptual framework for analyzing and intervening in cultural aspects of the organization. This model has gained wide acceptance among organizational culture scholars. He deconstructed organizational culture into three different levels: 1) basic underlying assumptions, 2) values, and 3) artifacts and behaviors. Each subsequent level detailed more overt and conscious manifestations that generate an organizational culture. The basic underlying assumptions are unconscious or preconscious and thus are difficult to assess, especially for those outside the organization. While values, artifacts, and behaviors are easily observable, they are, at the same time, difficult to interpret. As much research seeks to define and classify terminology, defining a concept like ‘organizational culture’ is extremely difficult because culture itself is an abstraction. Thus, tangibly measuring and assessing such an ambiguous term is not a simple task.

**Effects of Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture is an aspect of an organization that can be impalpable and considered difficult to pinpoint. Thus, in order to uncover the invaluable benefits organizational culture can provide, organizational culture must be studied in different ways. Service industries benefit even more so than other fields because success typically depends on organizational members’ coordination with one another (Chan et. al., 2004). Organizational culture has important implications for an individual’s affective reaction to organizational life, innovation, and even their organizational performance as well (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Harris & Mossholder, 1996; Dwyer et. al., 2000; Kemp & Dwyer, 2001; Dolan & Garcia, 2002; Tepeci & Bartlett, 2002). Schein (1992) detailed the need to focus on organizational culture, arguing that leaders
who are oblivious to, or dismissive of, their organization’s culture are likely to be less successful at innovation, communication, and achieving change. Similarly, organizational members who do not recognize the organization’s culture may be vulnerable to its more negative influences.

Many contemporary organizations have placed increasing attention on organizational culture and see it as crucial to organizational success. Even in the cases where organizational culture is recognized, top organizational members often lacked a deep understanding of how people and organizations function in terms of culture. Just as significant as organizational culture is, it is just as complex and difficult to understand and apply in a thoughtful way. Yet, when organizational culture is fully comprehended, there is mutual support from both successful managers and scholars of its relationship to performance. As the CEO of CompUSA, the largest retailer of personal computers, explained, “companies win or lose based on the cultures they create” (Academy of Management Executive, 1999, p.34). Pfeffer (1994) corroborated this by arguing that the traditional measures of success, such as product and process technology, access to regulated markets, economies of scale, etc., matter less today than in the past than the more intangible aspects of organizations, like organizational culture.

Organizational Culture Analyses Pertaining to Restaurants

While all organizations have an overarching culture composed of the organizational values, beliefs, behaviors, norms, language, practices, and traditions of organizational members, little research has been devoted to looking solely at restaurants’ organizational cultures. More broadly, research has been done on the hospitality industry, including fields within the service industry, such as hotels, restaurants, transportation, leisure, and travel (e.g., Kemp & Dwyer, 2001; Kusluvan & Karamustafa, 2003; Iverson & Deery, 1997; Reynolds, 1986; Sheridan, 1992). Much of the organizational culture research on restaurants has been done in areas of study outside
of the communication discipline, including management, sociology, and psychology (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003; Tepeci & Bartlett, 2002; Stuart, 1998). Very little current research has been done on organizational cultures existing within restaurants from a dialectical tension model. One exception was Whyte’s (1949) analysis, which took a communication standpoint by focusing on the social structure of a restaurant and presenting the organization as a negotiated set of interactional patterns among different status, gender, and occupational groupings.

Analyses within non-communication disciplines are much more applied in nature, seeking practical solutions to improve organizational problems (e.g., employee turnover, decreased performance, job satisfaction, etc.). Thus, organizational culture served more as the means, or dependent variable, to gain insight on the effects it has on other variables, rather than it being the main object of inquiry. From the more dominant quantitative approach to organizational culture, many models and measures have resulted gauging the individual and group outcomes of organizational culture, further perpetuating the use of quantitative methods of studying organizational culture and its effects (e.g., Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Homburg & Pflesser, 2000; Tepeci & Bartlett, 2002). However, this study took an in-depth, qualitative perspective to analyze Café Opulence’s unique organizational culture.

The analyses of restaurants’ organizational cultures that do exist focus more on descriptive analyses of an existing culture rather than examining the ways organizational culture are formed, negotiated, and reproduced. Primarily, studies to date have predominantly consisted of in-depth case studies (e.g., Dwyer et. al., 2000; Kemp & Dwyer, 2001). In general, these case studies of organizational cultures, especially within restaurants, viewed organizational culture as a static and constant entity. This method of analysis was evident in Salvá-Ramiréz’s (1995) case study on McDonald’s corporate culture where McDonald’s restaurants’ cultures were viewed as
being manipulated and created by the founder, Ray Kroc. Despite the many franchises worldwide, Salvá-Ramiréz described McDonald’s organizational culture as a ‘one size fits all’ kind of description. Also, the McDonald’s organizational culture was viewed as being forced on each specific restaurant, yet no mention was given to the other organizational members’ integral roles in creating and maintaining the organizational culture of the McDonalds’ franchise.

There are also a number of quantitative studies that have been conducted on organizational culture within the restaurant industry. More specifically, Øogaard et. al. (2005) used the data gathered in order to explain the effect of organizational culture and the performance, job efficacy, and organizational commitment of managers in the fast food industry. The results suggested that managers’ commitment and efficacy are related to performance. While studies, such as Øogaard et. al.’s, are valuable to understanding the effects of organizational culture, there were two weaknesses that the current analysis of the Café Opulence restaurant addressed. First, quantitative studies offered the generalizability of results to restaurants as a whole, but did not give any in-depth, firsthand analyses of organizational cultures. Also, the quantitative research neglected a more holistic approach to studying organizational culture from the perspectives of all organizational members, rather than only privileging the hierarchically superior organizational members.

While it seems as if the literature is limited, there are a few select organizational culture analyses focusing on restaurants that serve as models in which to follow in the current study (Albrecht, 2007; Ventura, 2007). Two of these analyses used organizational culture as a theoretical lens in which to view an organization rather than as a specific variable that produces results. The organizational cultures were examined in depth and helped infuse greater meaning and understanding of the organization as a whole.
For example, Albrecht (2007) detailed the tensions and anxieties present within the Olive Garden restaurant’s claims of offering the authentic Italian experience. The analysis of Olive Garden’s discourse of authenticity was conducted through examination of two different cultural objects of inquiry: Olive Garden’s television commercials and its web page. It is recognized that the Olive Garden positions itself as simultaneously ‘authentically’ Italian, while also a main fixture within mainstream American. Through its slogan, ‘When you’re here, you’re family,’ the tensions present became evident because the goal was to encourage everyone, even non-Italians, to participate in the ritualized consumption of Italian food.

In addition, the advertisements and website have specific mechanisms that reinforced and looked to reproduce the ‘authentic’ Italian organizational culture for its customers, such as the actors used in their commercials, the large Italian family their slogan embraced, the training given to their chefs in Italy, and the Tuscan-style design of their restaurants. Albrecht’s analysis examined, in depth, one specific tension, authentic-inauthentic, or Italian-ness, that is central to the Olive Garden dining experience. This offered a much clearer picture of the way in which the authentic-inauthentic tension was involved within the organization as a whole; the level of interpretation over mere description was present. Instead, the organizational culture was not just explained, but was analyzed and critiqued in more detail.

While Ventura’s (2007) case study examined organizational culture in a different fashion, the depth of analysis was not lost or ignored. Instead, this research interpreted Chick-Fil-A’s organizational culture through the effect its founder’s values has had. Chick-Fil-A’s founder and CEO, Truett Cathy, used Judeo-Christian values as a guide to shaping the Chick-Fil-A organization. Through interviews, organizational artifacts, and participant-observation, it was found that the communication of Christian values such as holiness, love, and justice, in the
organization were used as the primary means to understand Chick-Fil-A’s organizational culture. Thus, the organizational values espoused embodied Chick-Fil-A’s culture.

**Dialectical theory**

**Theoretical framework**

The dialectical approach proposed by Baxter and Montogomery (1996), provided a useful framework for analyzing groups’ relational dilemmas, incongruities, and tensions. There were a number of communication perspectives on dialectics (e.g., Bochner et. al., 1997; Conville, 1998; Rawlins, 1992), and a variety of dialogical communication perspectives (see Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004). However, the theoretical underpinning of relational dialectics came from Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981; 1984) dialogism theory.

Bakhtin’s theory recognized the “unfinalizable, open, and varied nature of social life,” identifying relationship development between individuals as the never-ending negotiation between different voices (Baxter, 2004a, p.181). Social life was then seen by Bakhtin (1981) as a product of “a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies,” the *centripetal* (i.e., forces of unity) and the *centrifugal* (i.e., forces of difference) (p.272). Bakhtin generalized the centripetal and centrifugal tension to all facets of social life where it is always possible to identify a dominant, unifying tendency or voice with an opposing counterpoint or voice. These oppositions are not static or binary, the centripetal and centrifugal forces are “multiple, varied, and everchanging” in the immediate context (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.26).

**Definition & Description**

Fittingly, the discussion of the dialogical perspective perfectly sets the foundation to understanding relational dialectics, which was formally articulated by Leslie Baxter and Barbara
Montgomery in 1996. Relational dialectics is a further elaboration of Bakhtin’s (1981; 1984) dialogism with the detailed outlining of the specific tensions, or contradictions, that are negotiated within relationships. Baxter & Montgomery (1996) began formulating the theory based on their observation of anomalies that were expressed to them through interviews conducted on communication in personal relationships. A notable similarity began to emerge and revealed the complex quality of personal relationships where there are competing demands (i.e., independence-interdependence, certainty-novelty, openness-closedness) that are both simultaneously desired and necessary for a relationship to remain a dynamic social entity.

Dialectical theory views contradictions as the catalysts to change and satisfaction in relationships. A healthy relationship is considered one in which the parties manage these oppositions rather than resolve or ignore them; these contradictions serve as “the very fabric of relating” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 6). It then follows that the well-being of relationships depend on the parties’ abilities to achieve this ‘both/and’ status. While traditional theories are not equipped to explain why contradictions have positive effects on relationships, dialectical theory makes it possible to more deeply grasp how the interaction between opposing forces epitomize healthy relationships.

**Dialectical Contradictions**

Baxter (1988) identified common dialectical tensions that individuals experience and negotiate within relationships. The different tensions detailed include separateness-connectedness, openness-closedness, and novelty-predictability. These three tensions will be described in more detail and were used in the analysis to understand Café Opulence’s unique organizational culture. While these contradictions were discussed in isolation of one another, relationships involve the management of all of these contradictions simultaneously.
Relationships also focus on different contradictions during different periods in their relationships with one another; thus, not all tensions are always in the forefront.

The dialectical tension of connectedness and separateness are the most central and discussed among scholars (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1988; Rawlins, 1983a). While it seems that individuals enter relationships in order to be closer and more connected to another person, dialectical theory recognized that there is a need for individuals to differentiate from others in order to develop healthy self-identities. Paradoxically, Baxter & Montgomery (1996) also claimed that communication is the process in which one constructs and understands their own self; the conception of self is closely intertwined with the relationship and is concurrently in flux and affect one another. At the same time, “each person requires periods of privacy (which may be construed by her [or him] as periods of independence) so that she [or he] may distance herself [or himself] from the relationship in order to reflect on the interaction” (Askham, 1976, p. 538).

Another argument that must be understood within this tension is the need for dependence, congruence, and positivity. In other words, variability is present within relationships because the self-identity and conception of private and separate being come about through social relationships. These definitions, then, can only be understood in the contexts of each specific relationship. Separateness can only be understood in the context of connectedness; there are no absolutes that exist across all relationships.

The next dialectical tension, openness-closedness, is typically understood monologically as a gatekeeping activity where individuals either disclose or not. However, the reasons the self-boundary opens or closes are essential to fully encompass the depth of the dialectical tension. In deciding to disclose or not, individuals assess their own perceptions of various costs and benefits associated with candor and discretion. On one hand, the self-boundary must be protected from
the vulnerability and risk inherent in disclosure. There is also pressure for a person to grant others access to her or his private territory because of the potential benefits that both the individual and the relationship gain. The openness-closedness dialectic is prominent in all types of relationships, including friendships at all stages of life (Rawlins, 1983b; 1992), romantic relationships, and marital couples (Baxter, 1990; Baxter & Simon, 1993; Conville, 1991; Cupach & Metts, 1988; Hause & Pearson, 1994).

Novelty-predictability refers to the need for predictability, certainty, and routine, while the need for novelty, stimulation, and spontaneity within relationships is also desired (Werner & Baxter, 1994). For example, in long-term romantic relationships, stability and consistency are valued, but the desire to mix up and vary the normal is also present and important. As with the other tensions, the dialectical tension of novelty-predictability was also examined from a dialogical standpoint. In other words, individuals are actively constructing the degree of consistency and predictability, rather than simply observing it. Those communicating are jointly responsible for the predictability and novelty that exist within an interaction. As Baxter & Montgomery (1996) explained “relationships are never given but instead are always posited in the living dynamics of interaction” (p.107). It is through interaction that novelty and predictability are negotiated and maintained.

*Dialectical Studies Within Organizations*

The dialectical perspective has served as the underlying foundation of many subsequent perspectives on personal relationships, such as Bochner & Eisenberg’s (1987) notions about family systems, Altman’s (1990; 1993) transactional view of relationships, Rawlin’s (1989; 1992) study of friendships, and Conville’s (1991) structural approach to dialectical tensions. Many scholars have recognized and focused on articulating contradictions and tensions within
organizational settings (Howard & Geist, 1995; Jian, 2007; Pepper & Larson, 2006; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunck, 2004; Tracy, 2004; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004).

While dialectical theory has informed much work within the realm of personal relationships, there have also been a few studies where dialectics were examined in the context of organizations and small groups.

Day (2008) used dialectical theory in order to understand the personal level relational tensions that children within family businesses experience. It was found that the connection/separation contradiction was most prominent in the interactions of daughters within family businesses. More specifically, this tension appeared as the daughters in family businesses grappled with their overlapping roles of “good worker” and “good daughter.” As shown, the study of dialectics can be used in order to understand what is occurring between individuals within an organization.

Further, dialectical tensions can also illuminate issues between individuals in an organization and allows for reflection on improvements that can be made. Jenkins & Dillon (2012) examined how the management of dialectical tensions within an intercultural congregation served to discipline its own members thus (re)constructing a racially oppressive organizational structure. Three dialectical tensions emerged from this study, including individual-community, valuation-devaluation, and inclusion-exclusion. Through the examination of the dialectics present within the organization, practical implications are gained that allow the organization to reflect on their potential to make positive social change within their own congregation.

Similarly, Hartwig (2008) showed the constitution and management of dialectical tensions within a leadership team at a changing suburban megachurch. Through the identification of the simultaneously present contradictions, the applied communication study assisted the
megachurch in fulfilling its goals and purposes by offering reflection on how the group could properly balance the tensions in the future to make positive, progressive change. Other dialectical analyses have been conducted within a number of other organizations, such as virtual teams, small groups, and interorganizational partnerships (Gibbs, 2009; Gibbs, Scott, Kim, & Lee, 2010; Driskill, Meyer, & Mirivel, 2012; Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010). Clearly, much information can be gathered about specific organizations when examined under the dialectical lens. This is the direction that the current analysis took in order to understand more fully what was happening within Café Opulence’s organizational culture.

To date, there are no dialectical analyses that have specifically focused on the context of a restaurant or café. Thus, due to the lack of scholarship done using dialectical theory to understand organizational culture, there is an obvious need for an analysis within an organization like Café Opulence.

**Research Questions**

Based on the groundwork set forth in the literature review, the following research questions were posed. In any organization, there are rules that are followed either consciously or unconsciously by its members. In order to first establish an understanding of the organizational culture that exists within Café Opulence, these rules need to be understood. This is the preliminary step of identifying how these rules create the organizational environment in which tensions then occur.

*RQ1*: What are the organizational rules, implicit and explicit, that guide members and maintain the organizational culture of Café Opulence?

Furthermore, organizational cultures are also comprised of artifacts that add another component to the many ways in which organizational cultures are constructed. These artifacts
provide visible manifestations of organizational culture. Thus, establishing these more overt artifacts will allow for the more concealed and disguised dialectical tensions, which are the ultimate objectives of this thesis.

RQ2: What are the organizational artifacts that maintain manifestations of the Café Opulence culture?

Once identifying how the current organizational culture exists through Café Opulence’s rules and artifacts, the ways in which the organizational culture is maintained through dialectical tensions will be observed and analyzed. By identifying how the tensions are managed and negotiated by organizational members, it allows a view of how individual organizational members’ interactions also construct and negotiate the organizational culture. These tensions will be identified and analyzed in greater depth.

RQ3: How is the tension between separateness and connectedness manifested and managed within Café Opulence?

RQ4: How is the tension between closedness and openness manifested and managed within Café Opulence?

RQ5: How is the tension between predictability and novelty manifested and managed within Café Opulence?

Through the analysis and identification of the dialectical tensions present within Café Opulence, there may also be other dialectical tensions that arise through the interviews conducted. As a starting point, two dialectical tensions are identified; however, the possibility for additional dialectical tensions may arise. The chance of the other dialectical tensions grows more likely due to the fact that dialectical theory is being applied in an unusual organizational setting.
RQ6: What additional dialectical tensions can be identified within the Café Opulence organizational culture?

In conclusion, this chapter presented the previous literature and research that has been conducted in the concepts relevant to this thesis, including organizational culture and dialectical theory. In addition, the six research questions and their corresponding rationales were outlined. Chapter Three will describe the methodology used for this study. The approaches and procedures used for data collection, such as focused participant-observation and in-depth interviews. The way in which the data was analyzed will also be explained in more detail.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this research is to understand Café Opulence’s organizational culture as fully as possible through the negotiation and communication of dialectical tensions between organizational members. Thus, in order to analyze the organizational culture of Café Opulence, increased familiarity with the organization was necessary. All organizational members, including employees and customers of the restaurant, as well as Café Opulence’s owners’ experiences and perspectives were considered. In addition, the organization’s everyday practices and procedures were observed in order to view the natural manifestations of Café Opulence’s organizational culture. In order to gather the data necessary to reach the understanding desired, a methodological triangulation was applied. Methodological triangulation employs multiple methods of data collection (see Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

For this study, two different forms of data were collected to understand in situ at Café Opulence and its workshops, including: (1) focused participant-observation of Café Opulence patrons and employees within the restaurant and also at the associated workshops, and (2) interviews with Café Opulence patrons and employees. All of the data was collected in Northern California starting in January 2013, and ending in April 2013.

Focused Participant Observation

Observational Procedures

Focused participant-observation was used throughout the study of Café Opulence. Participant-observation was utilized for two purposes, including 1) to familiarize myself on a surface level with the organization’s atmosphere, norms, and everyday practices, and 2) to participate and become informed through firsthand organizational experiences, such as workshop
attendance and restaurant observations. As the researcher, I had very little background knowledge of Café Opulence, aside from the background research done prior for the research prospectus, and stories heard and read from others and in the news. Thus, I used observation in the initial stages of this research as an introduction to Café Opulence.

The observational procedure entailed much of what a customer at the restaurant experiences: entering the restaurant, being seated, ordering a menu item, and observing the many simultaneous interactions that take place. The interactions of central importance were the communication between the customers, the customer-server interactions, the interactions among the employees, and also manager-employee communication. Observations were made as unobtrusively as possible in the observation stage by sitting with another person, appearing to be just another patron enjoying food at Café Opulence. These interactions cumulatively contributed to my personal knowledge of the overarching, unfiltered impression of the organizational atmosphere. The observations had more of a socializing function for myself, as the researcher, and will not be the central focus of the data collected and analyzed.

A total of 36 hours of participant-observation was done, with 10 hours of observation done in the restaurant and 26 hours of workshops (3 total workshops) completed. Two workshops were attended in-person and one was a teleseminar held by phone. Less time was spent observing in the restaurant than in workshops because the restaurant gave a very surface-level view of the organizational culture and Café Opulence’s philosophy to myself as an organizational outsider. Observation in the restaurant was a mechanism to familiarize myself as an organizational outsider and was not mainly used as data for the final analysis.

More emphasis and time was spent attending workshops because this is where new members could be explicitly taught and practice the philosophy. Three workshops served as an
adequate amount because while there are more workshops beyond the ones attended, all workshops had the same philosophical undertones taught. The workshops all taught Café Opulence’s philosophy, but just applied in different contexts. Therefore, repetition and similarities became clear after attending the third workshop, signaling that my understandings of the workshops was satisfactory to begin analysis. In total, 36 hours of observation was sufficient because it became clear to me, as the researcher, that repetition and patterns began to emerge from my observation, signaling the data was consistently present in a number of instances.

While watching the interactions that were occurring within the restaurant, detailed notes were taken of what was seen and heard, the physical environment, and anything notably unique, was recorded in a small spiral-bound notebook or on the researcher’s cell phone. The researcher’s decisions of what interactions were considered notable and the focused elements of observation were guided by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw’s (1995) advice. They suggest that the researcher should, first, take note of and fully describe one’s initial impressions of the scene, and then should proceed by describing “key events or incidents” (p.27). The server-customer, customer-customer, employee-employee, and manager-employee interactions were treated as key events/incidents and were recorded in as much detail as possible, including the physical and emotional closeness of the interactants, body language, adherence to typical restaurant norms, phrases and jargon used, etc. As Emerson, et. al. (1995) explained,

In writing fieldnotes, the field researcher should give special attention to the indigenous meanings and concerns of the people studied. …fieldnotes should detail the social and interactional processes that make up people’s everyday lives and activities…

Ethnographers should attempt to write fieldnotes in ways that capture and preserve indigenous meanings (p.12).
The focused observational phase was used as a means to immerse myself within the restaurant and to begin to understand the daily practices and the possible meanings attached that occurred within this setting. In order to retain the most detail, the fieldnotes were subsequently typed up a few hours after observational periods and simultaneously developed into more intricate, extensive fieldnotes.

The focused participant phase of this study was chosen based on the necessity for full understanding the Café Opulence organization from the perspective of an involved participant. Amongst much media coverage of the restaurant’s lawsuits and its negative public perception, it was important to analyze the organization from actual firsthand experiences with Café Opulence, rather than just taking an outsider’s perspective, wrought with biases and preconceived notions. As Atkinson & Hammersley (1994) put it more succinctly “we cannot study the social world without being a part of it” (p.249). Therefore, in order to get the most genuine and accurate depiction of how this organization culture is shaped by organizational members’ communication, I looked to comprehend the organization as fully as possible as an active member rather than just a passive observer making assumptions from an outside perspective.

Interviews

Participants

Due to the fact that, unlike typical organizational structures, both employees and customers co-construct Café Opulence’s organizational culture, it was necessary to interview both for analysis. Customers and employees are both equally organizational members and to ignore one would leave out extremely valuable information on Café Opulence’s organizational culture. The organizational access for an outsider was feasible because of the support for this research from the customers, employees, and owners, which made gaining interested participants
extremely viable. The sample of interviewees was selected in a fairly random manner through a snowball method where participants would refer and connect me with other organizational members. The snowball method to gain participants was appropriate and fitting based on the communal, connected nature of Café Opulence. Interviewees were selected based on: 1) their presence at workshops or during times of observations, 2) their availability and willingness to be interviewed, and/or 3) their position within the organization (i.e., Café Opulence managers, employees, ex-employees, customers, etc). While many interviewees were chosen based on mere presence and involvement with Café Opulence, consideration was made to ensure diversity among the participants, in terms of the organizational position, the length of their involvement with the organization, and their place within the different subgroups within the broader organization. Most of the interviews, excluding those with prominent figures within the organization, were conducted either impromptu or information was exchanged in order to interview at a later date.

The process to interview the random organizational members generally involved: (a) introducing myself and giving a broad description of the research that I was doing; (b) asking for their permission to use our impromptu conversation(s) within the research; (c) interviewing them, either on-the-spot or at a later time; and (d) transcribing the interview for purposes of analysis. As for the more influential organizational members’ interviews, there was more prior contact and planning that needed to be done, including the creation of more specific and appropriate questions and arrangement of more formal interview dates and times (see Appendix B & C).

Seven employees (5 female, 2 male) as well as twelve customers (9 female, 3 male) were interviewed, making a total of 19 interviews. Interviews were both planned and impromptu. The formal interviews were transcribed word-for-word, but some impromptu employee interviews
done in the restaurant were not transcribed due to the environmental distractions or the lack of time employees had to talk. Instead, the interview notes were used as evidence to corroborate other employees’ statements. All the participants’ names used throughout this thesis were changed to protect the anonymity of interviewees.

The employees interviewed included hostesses, servers, managers, and upper management. Formal interviews conducted included, Yvette, a former employee who worked at Café Opulence for 3 ½ years. She started as a bartender and then became a manager at the restaurant. Yvette attended many workshops and even though she no longer works at Café Opulence, she still coordinates and leads their workshops. Another employee interviewed was Tanya who is a current server of over six years at the Café Opulence restaurant. During her employment, she has worked at three different Café Opulence locations and was first hired as a hostess and did training to become a manager. Tanya has completed all four Café Opulence workshops offered multiple times and had also completed the Leadership Training Program, a series of weekends that trains you to be a leader. Also, Trinidad, who was a current server of eight years, was interviewed at length. Aside from the time spent working at Café Opulence, Trinidad also went to the restaurant as a customer once a month. Like Tanya, Trinidad had also attended all of the workshops and had repeated some more than once. Lastly, Maria, the Vision Coordinator and Assistant to the owners, Michael and Tatum, were formally interviewed. Maria had worked for Café Opulence outside of the restaurant for three years managing the division for workshops and books, but had known the owners for over 25 years.

Impromptu employee interviews were also helpful in understanding Café Opulence’s organizational culture. These interviews were informally conducted while observing in the restaurant and at workshops. When observing, Belinda was my server and had worked at Café
Opulence for three years. At the workshops, valuable information was also gathered from Stephen, a former server at Café Opulence in Northern California for three years and a current server in the Los Angeles restaurant. Claire also was the volunteer at the December 2012 workshop and was a current server who had been at Café Opulence for a year.

Customers were also interviewed, but all were completed in more formal settings. The average length of time that the twelve customers interviewed had been customers at Café Opulence was about 3 ½ years, with the longest time as a customer of Café Opulence being eight years and shortest being one year. Six of the twelve customers had attended the Café Opulence workshops held outside of the restaurant. The frequency that the customers ate at Café Opulence varied. On average, the customers came to the restaurant 16 times per year, or little over one visit per month, with the most frequent being Jaime with one visit per week, and the least frequently being Ashleigh who had only visited one time in her year as a customer. However, many customers indicated that they had become less frequent customers with the closing of a few of Café Opulence’s other restaurant locations. For example, Robert went once a week to a different Café Opulence location before it closed, but now only went about three times per month. Similarly, Shannon used to eat at another Café Opulence location three times per week, but once it closed, she dramatically decreased to two times per year.

Interview Design

The customers’ and direct organizational members’ (i.e., employees, owners, etc.) interviews specifically explored the existence of dialectical tensions within Café Opulence. Therefore, the identification of where these tensions were present, as well as the ways in which these, in turn, informed the organizational culture, are the notable aspects to be addressed within this organizational analysis. To this end, the interview questions were carefully designed to
isolate the interviewees’ description of the general culture of Café Opulence, their connectedness to the organization and others, and the degree to which one felt they could be open (see Appendices B and C for list of interview questions). Essentially, many of the questions were crafted around gaining greater insight into the dialectical tensions and how they operated within this particular context. Interview questions were adapted depending on the role that the interviewee played within Café Opulence. Prior to interviewing participants, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of all potential interview questions was received. Interviews were semi-structured, being that they implemented,

- a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed the freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers in their prepared and standardized questions (Berg, 2004, p.70).

The prepared questions consisted of a mix of different questions that were organized to elicit an interview that yielded responses most directly related to the proposed research questions. The questions included the following: basic, warm up questions meant to establish a comfortable interview environment, questions more specifically addressing Café Opulence’s organizational culture and group interaction, and closing questions. Per the suggestion of Berg (2004), the questions were generally sequenced from simple, easy-to-answer questions in the beginning and followed by more complex, involved questions. As the interviews were conducted, additional aspects of the organization were spontaneously included and discussed, as necessary.
Interview Procedure

Interviews were both impromptu and pre-arranged, depending on the context in which interviewees were found. Generally, the more prominent organizational members’ interviews were scheduled beforehand due to the time constraints and the interviewees’ schedules. All interviewees were able to speak as long as needed or able, yet the scheduled interviews lasted thirty minutes to one hour in length. The impromptu interviews with patrons, workshop attendees, employees, etc., were much shorter in duration based on the informal, conversational form. A few impromptu interviews took place with organizational members, both individually and in a group, while observing in the restaurant and at the workshops. If interviewees seemed to have more information to impart about the organization, arrangements were made to interview in more depth at a later time.

Before beginning each interview, each interviewee was provided consent to participate in this research in one of two forms: verbal or written. In more spontaneous interviews, interviewees provided verbal consent to participate in social scientific research with intent to publish preceding the interview. In more formal interview settings, interviewees were asked to sign a written consent form before starting the interview for the same purpose (see Appendix A). In addition, they were told that the interviews were completely voluntary, research-centered, and company-approved, but not company-driven. They were also assured that all information that they shared will be treated as confidential and anonymous information, privy only to the researcher.

When interviewees agreed to participate, the interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, only if interviewee granted permission. Handwritten notes were also taken during the interviews as a form of data backup. At the end of the interview, I gave each respondent the
opportunity to provide an email address or phone number for follow-up interviews, data validation, and clarification, if necessary. Shortly after the conclusion of the interview, I listened and transcribed the audio data, word for word, for the purpose of more effective and thorough analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and notes taken during the interviews were all considered source materials. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and served as the text-based data for analysis. Examination began by reading through all the transcriptions in their entirety at least once with a procedure consistent with the constant comparison approach of grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Initially, interviews were repeatedly listened to and transcripts were reread until reoccurring themes, issues, and domains of meaning emerge representing relational tensions the organizational members of Café Opulence experience in constructing the organizational culture. Themes and categories were identified in different ways, including through the use of similar words or phrases used by interviewees or interviewees addressing similar situations, behaviors, or feelings.

Similar to Braithwaite and Baxter’s (1995) research on the renewal of wedding vows, the next stage of data analysis involved the identification of “patterns” or “meaning clusters” that “uncover implicit dialectical themes that could organize seemingly opposed categories” (p.183). Once these clusters were identified, I identified if they fit into a supra-dialectical category. Supra-dialectics are the major dialectical classes previously identified in the dialectical theory literature as being pertinent to this context, including connectedness-separateness, openness-closedness, and novelty-predictability (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). As found in Day’s (2008) research on family business daughters, there is a possibility of sub themes that may exist within
the supra-dialectical category and must be noted as well. Dialectical tensions specific to a
particular relationship often are a localized representation of a supra-dialectic; although this is not
always the case. Relational tensions are localized and often do not fit under the cookie cutter
mold of a supra-dialectic (Baxter, 2004b). Finally, similar to Braithwaite and Baxter’s (1995)
research, once the dialectical tensions were organized, I reread the transcripts once more to
identify information that could disconfirm my findings (see Miles & Huberman, 1994) and to
identify similar themes in the interviews that I may have overlooked.

Memo-writing will be an essential part of my analysis as well, linking “coding to the
writing of the first draft of the analysis” (Charmaz, 2002, p.687). Memos are for researchers to
note and later elaborate on ideas for coding that arise in the process of data collection, making it
easier to “fracture the data” once collected (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 357). Its purpose is to
contextualize a code’s content by identifying “its fundamental properties,” looking “for its
underlying assumptions,” and showing “how, when, and why it develops and changes” (Charmaz
& Mitchell, 2001, p.167). After each interview, I wrote a descriptive memo summarizing
observations, initial thoughts, and reactions. Part of memo-writing involves the researcher
explaining the importance of the relevant theme, and also comparing it to other instances where
the theme has appeared in the research. This reinforces an aspect of the constant comparison

In summary, this chapter has presented the method for investigating Café Opulence’s
organizational culture through participant observation and interviews. The method for analyzing
the data collected through both forms was explained. Chapter four details the results and
researcher interpretations of the study obtained using the methodology discussed.
Chapter 4

RESULTS & INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the results and researcher’s interpretations of the results obtained through the analysis of the themes concerning the dialectical tensions present in Café Opulence’s organizational culture. Each research question will be addressed separately and interpretations will be given immediately following the results to explain the relevance to understanding organizational culture.

**Research Question 1:** What are the organizational rules, implicit and explicit, that guide members and maintain the organizational culture of Café Opulence?

**Implicit Rules**

*Hierarchical structure*

In beginning to describe and analyze the Café Opulence organizational culture, the organizational rules were first identified. Café Opulence’s restaurant experience can be both a typical and atypical restaurant experience, depending on what aspect of the restaurant the customers focused on. Shannon, a Café Opulence customer of two years and workshop leader, explained the two different customer experiences when asked about customer participation in the everyday practices, saying, “Well, you know, people are different. You are going to find people who love that experience and other people that are just there for the food.” A customer eating at the café does not necessarily need to also embrace or even completely agree with the overarching organizational philosophy, including recognizing the importance of community and focusing on community-oriented issues rather than their own individual needs. In a sense, either the customers of Café Opulence are into the organizational philosophy or not; there is no middle ground in regards to customer involvement. However, the choice over the kind of restaurant
experience was not mainly a decision of the customers themselves, but was instead left up to the employees.

Employees were the main transmitters of the organizational rules to the customers, being that they were the first in contact with those who ate at the restaurant. Yvette, a former Café Opulence manager of three and a half years, also delineated two types of realms in which customers fell, stating “They were either interested in the conscious kind of food realm or the self-actualization realm, the self-help demographic.” Unless customers were made aware of Café Opulence’s organizational culture beforehand, the employees were the organizational members that ushered customers into becoming a part of the construction and maintenance of the organizational culture, or not.

Shannon showed this process by stating, “So it is up to the servers to sense ‘Okay, these people just want to be left alone.’ They are here for the restaurant experience, they are not here to connect.” The judgment of whether a customer wanted to abide by the organizational rules or the perception of interest in the organizational philosophy rested solely in the hands of the server with whom the customer interacted. In other words, the customers who were included and excluded were determined through the employees in this hierarchical structure created by these implicit behaviors.

In-group & out-group subcultures

Organizations, like other groups, naturally divide into smaller subcultures, which also affect and shape the organizational culture overall. There are no limitations to the number of subcultures that can exist in an organization, but Café Opulence clearly delineated between two distinct groups: the in-group and the out-group. Café Opulence touted itself as an inclusive community where all were welcome. As Shannon, a customer and workshop leader said, “If you
want to be included, you are always welcome.” She implied that if an individual has the motivation or desire to participate in the community, they will be accepted. However, the customers interviewed who had not felt accepted or valued within the restaurant created widely used nicknames, such as Café Attitude and Café Purgatude. Those organizational members who were part of the in-group seemed to assume an attitude that had the opposite effect than intended by Café Opulence’s philosophy: exclusion and distance with the less involved organizational members.

Most Café Opulence employees were widely included in the organizational in-group because of their inevitable connection to the restaurant. Even from a sporadic customer, unifying features of the employees were clear and perceptible. As Holly recounted, “They [employees] all seem to have a similar style too, from the type of earring they wear to feathers in their hair. I’m not sure if it is part of the dress code or they all came together and decided it looked cool to dress alike. It certainly makes them look unified.” The style of clothing and accessories chosen by employees indicated their cohesiveness and similarities as an in-group.

Further, the language that the employees, as well as regular customers, used built an even clearer barrier between those who were in and those who were out. In order to be able to understand and properly use the ‘insider’ language, one would have to attend the workshops or be very observant in order to adapt to the environment; organizational language was only explicitly taught at the workshops. Some examples included, phrases such as “I make up that…,” which referred to one’s perceptions of a situation and the recognition that it was not absolute truth. For example, one might say, “I make up that there is conflict between you and I,” instead of “There is conflict between you and I.” Also, Café Opulence did not have expectations of their employees,
but instead ‘invited’ or ‘requested’ them to do something. As in any subculture, language also acts as a unifying and exclusionary mechanism that insulates and solidifies the group from others.

The distance between the two groups within the restaurant was visibly observed through the interactions that took place between employees and customers in the restaurant. Holly, an occasional customer, explained, “You can feel that there’s an in-crowd and then the rest of the people…the servers will hug people who are regulars, and I assume also attend the workshops, and be very friendly to them. Whereas the rest of us aren’t treated the same way. They are polite, but there is no special closeness.” The in-group appeared to discriminate between who was included and who was excluded, based on how much time and effort was put into embracing the philosophy and organization. In addition, not only was the in-group covertly close with one another, but also more overtly through physical closeness. When observing in the restaurant, the employees would give unusually long and intense hugs to regular customers and other employees. Whereas, other customers were treated in a typical way or completely ignored.

The in-group and out-group were also made distinct through the customer service that was given. Brett, an intermittent customer, told of how bad the customer service at Café Opulence was whenever he ate there. When asked why he thought this was he speculated that maybe “if you go in at the wrong moment or I don’t know wearing the wrong thing, um, I’ve waited to be seated when there were tables open.” By no means did Brett feel like part of the Café Opulence community and he felt that this may have lead to the inequality of service that he received when he went there. Through observing the interactions at Café Opulence, I also noticed that there were many customers who were completely ignored. They would stand at the front of the hostess desk waiting to be seated with employees walking past, not acknowledging their existence. This poor customer service continued so long that some people would just leave
out of frustration. In contrast, those who were regular customers were served immediately and treated with excellent customer service.

Implicitly, employees also referred to the ‘type’ of customers who came into Café Opulence. Yvette, a former server, said “…the kind of customers we tended to attract were people who were on their path to some sort of [self] awakening already.” Tanya, a current server, continued to say that a lot of the clientele were “just naturally more happy and we certainly have grumpy people too.” In other words, those customers who were not interested in gaining self-transformation or awakening at Café Opulence did not fit the prototypical view of a Café Opulence customer, or as Tanya described the “certain kind of people” Café Opulence looked to attract.

Holly, a customer, even likened Café Opulence to “…a high school cafeteria and we’re not the cool kids.” Holly elaborated that every customer was not treated the same and one’s acceptance was based on their workshop attendance and participation. Beyond one’s involvement, one’s lifestyle choices, such as diet, needed to align closely to Café Opulence’s perspective. The food one ate was not explicitly enforced or discussed, but was implied because all who were in the community were eating in a similar way to one another: organic, natural, and healthy. For example, at the March 2012 workshop, everyone was eating raw nuts, fruit, and drinking freshly squeezed juice out of dirty mason jars. As an outsider at my first workshop, I felt quietly judged because I was drinking a chemically processed Diet Coke and Skittles for my afternoon snack. When I brought these out, no one explicitly said anything to me, but the eyes looking at me with disgust and skepticism implied that I was clearly part of the out-group. Once I realized this, I felt guilty and began eating and drinking when others were not looking. Even
though there were no overt rules that told me what I could eat, the power of the in-group’s implied rules carried just as much influence as if the rules were overtly stated.

It seemed that other unifying qualities were present as well, such as political affiliation, dress, and values. For example, Café Opulence’s philosophy in regards to all-organic, natural food and taking care of the earth as well as your body implied underlying values that the group embraced such as being against pesticides and chemically processed foods. The employees’ and regular customers’ physical appearances were the most striking distinction because many organizational members wore similar attire like long peasant skirts, fedora hats, and other stereotypical hippy and hipster attire. Yet, these similarities, such as food choice, were not discussed, but were still very powerful.

**Explicit Rules**

Within the restaurant, there were very few explicit rules expressed because of the free-spirited, open nature of the organizational culture. When employees and regular customers were asked what rules were necessary to know as a new customer, there were none outlined and the question was frequently met with confusion and question. Yet Erika, a customer and workshop leader, when asked the question, answered in a telling way, saying “Well they [new customers] are probably going to learn it [the Café Opulence philosophy], regardless.” While the rules were not made explicit to customers, Erika felt the explicit rules were underlying yet unmistakable once customers were in the restaurant. However, Erika’s perspective viewed from the in-group seemed to differ from the observations of transmission of explicit rules within the restaurant. The explicit rules appeared to be fully expressed and followed by the employees who acted as the gatekeepers, allowing only certain customers into the in-group. For example, when I went into the restaurant to observe, the servers asked the Question of the Day or proclaimed the menu name
about half of the time. It is unclear the reasoning behind this, whether it was because I did not fit the prototypical hippy, all-natural look of many of the customers or if I was not perceived as showing an interest. It was not just me though; many customers around me were also not given the opportunities to participate in the foundational organizational practices.

More clearly explicit rules, either in verbal or written form, were laid out at the beginning of workshops that took place outside of Café Opulence rather than in the everyday interactions of the restaurant. There were much more obvious behavioral norms, due in part, to the great deal of personal information attendees shared through the workshops’ activities. Thus, the workshop leaders would establish specific rules at the beginning of the workshop in order to create a safe place where all felt welcome to share freely. Self-disclosure is highly encouraged by workshop leaders because it leads to Café Opulence’s ultimate goal of self-transformation as well as connectedness amongst the group. The agreements written clearly on a Powerpoint slide were covered at the December 2012 workshop I attended and included:

* Confidentiality/non-gossip policy

* Conscious sharing (using “I” statements)

* Full participation
  
  • Stay for the whole workshop & check-in before leaving
  
  • Take care of yourself (ex. water, stretching, washroom, etc.)
  
  • Sharing (volume, question your motivation as you normally wouldn’t, raise hands high with authority)
  
  • Listening (not “active” listening, everything shared is for you)
  
  • Breaks (timing for breaks and lunch)
• “I love you” sign language signal (means leaders love you and want you to be quiet)

• Integrity of work (try it on like a coat)-“The degree to which you play is the degree to which you receive”

• “Lean into discomfort”: pain is inevitable, suffering is optional

• Donations: what it takes, evaluate and pay the value of your exchange (not tied to self-worth, but we want you to be thrilled with your donation amount)

• Coaching: Be coachable, we will interpret commerc-isms: (ex. making up that,” “that’s great,” “I invite you to…,” “I’m giving myself the experience that…”).

Thus, allow the leader to work through a situation with you without getting defensive. Be open to what insight the leader can give and consider the advice rather than fighting against it.

Overall, most of the rules were intended to allow an environment conducive to extreme closeness, connection, and disclosure at the workshops by removing any worries of outside judgment. Whereas, the restaurant environment is more of a meeting place for already established relationships and only allows for minimal disclosure amongst strangers, like with the Question of the Day. The Café Opulence community is mostly built outside the restaurant through the workshops and highly involved members only, the in-group.

Erika, a long-time customer and workshop leader, exemplified the norms of relationships within the restaurant, saying:

I usually come there [Café Opulence] with people I know, but I also do know a lot of customers. Inevitably, whenever I go to Café Opulence, I will see someone I know, and it’s a big hug fest. I know a lot of people who patronize Café Opulence, so I don’t often meet other customers who are eating at Café Opulence on my own. Sometimes I will strike up a conversation, but that’s not a very typical experience for me, personally.
Erika only connected to those that she knew from prior workshops and did not usually bring other random customers into the in-group present amongst the employees and regular customers. Thus, Café Opulence’s organizational philosophy appears to be welcoming to all, but instead it is welcoming to those who are committed and devoted to the philosophy, beyond just eating their food.

Research question one identified the implicit and explicit rules that exist within the Café Opulence organizational culture. The implicit rules established the hierarchical structure of the employees and the customers and those who were included and excluded. While there were few explicit rules laid out in the restaurant, much more clear and obvious rules, such as the language used and no gossip policy, were detailed at the workshops outside the restaurant and intended to create an environment where involved organizational members felt comfortable and part of the Café Opulence community.

**Research Question 2**: What are the organizational artifacts that maintain manifestations of the Café Opulence culture?

The organizational artifacts directly support and reinforce Café Opulence’s organizational culture for all of its members. Even more powerfully, organizational artifacts can communicate to those outside the organization information about the organizational culture. The organizational artifacts are physical or verbal embodiments of the organizational culture that can be widely perceived. At Café Opulence, many artifacts represent the larger, overarching organizational culture.

While it may seem superficial, Café Opulence’s physical environment provides a space that makes both employees and customers comfortable to disclose. More importantly, the physical restaurant setting usually served as the customers’ first impressions of the organizational
culture within the restaurant. Common terms used to describe Café Opulence’s physical environment include cozy, warm, homey, welcoming, comfortable, and nurturing. Julie, a customer, explained the specific aspects that fostered these positive feelings, such as the couches and dark wood. Another customer, Stephanie, mentions the family style tables as an additional aspect that contributes to Café Opulence’s open and inviting setting.

In turn, the physical aspects of the restaurant familiarize customers with the philosophy and reinforce the need to be open, honest, and transparent. Better put, Jaime, a customer, says that “the atmosphere is a reflection of the Café Opulence philosophy.” Café Opulence’s philosophy is focused on positivity and affirmation, which supports and creates a conducive environment for openness without judgment. Even in the restaurant, there is artwork accompanied by positive affirmations and encouraging words, such as ‘You Are Bountiful’ and ‘Can You Just Let Go and Accept What Is?’ The many positive and comforting elements within the restaurant contribute to a restaurant where people feel less guarded and open to disclosing private information with others. Through my observations at the restaurant, I was seated directly behind two women who were confessing their love toward one another. Even though I was only a few inches away, these customers seemed comfortable enough to openly have a deep conversation that resulted in tears of happiness and kissing. Even though restaurants’ environments are usually used to set the tone for the customers’ experience, Café Opulence’s physical environment supports the common goal of transformation of the employees as well.

The positive environment was also supported by the unique format of the menu. All of the dishes were written in the form of an affirmation, such as ‘I Am Healthy’ or ‘I Am Brilliant.’ Customers were encouraged to order their dish by proudly stating an affirmation about themselves rather than the actual contents of the food. Even further, when the dishes were
delivered to the table, the servers were expected to proclaim the dish by directing the affirmation to the customer. For example, if a customer ordered the ‘I Am Worthy,’ their server would deliver their juice to the table and say, “You are worthy!” The servers were supposed to declare the affirmation to all customers, no matter how familiar they were with the customers they were serving.

In practice, the purpose of the menu names was, at times, lost and ignored by both employees and customers. As Tanya, a server, explained:

There’s few people who avoid saying it [menu name]. By and large, I would say that most people order it [meal] by saying ‘I would like to have the I Am Healthy’ instead of saying ‘I Am Healthy.’ I mean we [employees] have that too where we will say, ‘I’ll take a large Healthy rather than ‘I Am Healthy.’ That’s fine, at least we are getting the word out there.

In other words, even if the menu items were not used just in the affirming way intended, they also looked to get a message out within the restaurant of self-love and acceptance. Café Opulence looked to portray itself as an inclusive, loving, and accepting organization and the menu intended to further this claim by making people feel appreciated and praised. In turn, the customers who felt valued would be more likely to feel comfortable sharing and may be encouraged to make subsequent trips back to Café Opulence.

Café Opulence’s customers and employees both embraced a specific sense of style that separated them from less involved organizational members. When I walked into the restaurant to observe, it was easy to identify the regular customers based on the way they dressed. Aside from the restaurant, workshop attendees, including both employees and customers, assumed a specific style of clothing that hinted at one’s membership into the in-group of Café Opulence. Most of the involved members dressed very Bohemian hippy, grungy, and natural because they embodied a minimalistic lifestyle where material possessions were not high priorities. This overarching style
and appearance were shown in a number of ways, including dreadlocks, no makeup, flowy peasant skirts, fedora hats, unshaved legs, stacks of bracelets, multiple rings, dirty fingernails, and a careless, unmaintained, and all-natural look. The physical appearance served as a strong indicator of the members who were part of the in-group.

Research question two detailed the organizational artifacts that are representative of and reinforce Café Opulence’s organizational culture. Café Opulence’s warm physical environment and positive menu affirmations created a restaurant where employees and customers could feel more comfortable and open to disclose, as opposed to typical restaurant environments. Also, the clothing and overall physical appearance distinguished the more involved customers and employees from the more infrequent customers who came for the typical restaurant experience.

Research Question 3: How is the tension between separateness and connectedness manifested and managed within Café Opulence?

The most apparent dialectical tension that is constantly negotiated within Café Opulence’s organizational culture is the tension between separateness and connectedness. At the center of Café Opulence’s organizational culture is the idea of community on many different levels. There are multiple layers of community that Café Opulence looks to promote, including: community between the managers and the employees; community among the employees as co-workers; community between employees and customers; and the community among customers. Community is a discussed in great depth, especially within the workshops held outside of the restaurant.

Community between upper management and employees

Communication between upper management and employees within organizations in general tend to conform to usual communication rules and scripts. The ways in which an
individual communicates with other employees depends on others’ positions within the organizational hierarchy, relative to their own status. In other words, an employee, in general, will communicate with their superior (supervisor) differently than their equal (coworker). At Café Opulence, a hierarchy informally exists between their employees: owners, managers, and employees (servers, bartenders, and hosts).

Through interviews, this hierarchy within the organization emerged, yet Café Opulence insists that it practices a more egalitarian organization. Yvette, a former employee of three and a half years, explained that “how the structure went was like they [owners] were the coaches of the managers and then the managers were the coaches of the staff. So, I saw them [owners] on a weekly basis for awhile after I became a manager.” On the other hand, Yvette described her relationship with the owners when she was a server as “mostly professional.” The higher position one was within Café Opulence, the more access they had to the owners who were viewed as extremely wise and revered by the community. Therefore, the connectedness to the heartbeat of the organization, the owners, was dependent on the level of participation, time, and effort exerted to advance within the organization.

Yet, the appearance of an equal organization was maintained by the language used within the workplace. As is usual in organizations, many everyday practices within the restaurant were kept consistent and enforced by the management. Employees’ adherence to these practices, such as clearing and the Question of the Day, was covertly required. Specifically, Café Opulence did not ever claim to have ‘expectations’ or ‘make’ their employees adhere to the practices and philosophy. Alternatively, as Yvette, a former employee, said Café Opulence would put:

everything in the form of an invitation, so even though we had agreed that we would step into this culture and take it on, it always, everything that we did, was asked of us in an invitation rather than a demand. And that, in and of itself, was part of establishing the
Employees were not forced into embracing the Café Opulence philosophy by management, but were given the appearance of independence through the language used. The ‘invitation’ form of language denoted the autonomy of employees to make their own decisions within the workplace. Paradoxically, through the independence employees seemed to receive from the ‘invitation’ language, employees were more intimately connected with their upper management because it conveyed a deeper level of trust in the employees’ abilities.

Community among employees as co-workers

There are different levels of connectedness that co-workers feel with one another, depending on the organizational culture that exists. In organizations overall, coworkers can act more as acquaintances who simply pass each other in the hall and wave or may have very close friendships with one another. The kind of relationship is highly dependent on the organizational culture that is fostered and practiced on an everyday basis. Café Opulence’s employees described the interactions with their co-workers as more like a family. The common terms used to characterize the overall interaction among the employees were love and care. As Yvette said, “It [Café Opulence] is a very loving and supporting environment. Everyone was always asking each other how they could support them.” Similarly, Tanya, a current server, explains that “…there is a lot of love, there is a lot of love at Café Opulence.” Employees believed that this greater level of connectedness was due, in part, to the transformational, transparent setting of Café Opulence; this was the motivation of why employees chose to work in the restaurant.

While the staff of Café Opulence considered themselves more like family, the connectedness existed on a deeper level as well. Yvette noticed that it went beyond just loving, nurturing, and friendly interactions among the employees. Their connectedness as coworkers
came instead from employees’ interests in “...supporting each other’s transformations. And that was not just at the top level, it was throughout the organization.” As many employees described, the opportunity for personal transformation and growth that working at Café Opulence offered was their main motivation. Thus, employees’ commitment to their own and other’s transformations creates the network of close-knit, intimate relationships within the organization.

Each employee’s transformation was not only their own responsibility, but employees and managers also assumed what Yvette described as “a whole other level of responsibility” in their relationships with each other. In a sense, the mutual desires for transformation was the glue that held the employees together. The employees were concurrently striving toward being their best, most loving self. This commitment to personal growth was also maintained within the restaurant. Yvette also explained, “servers would constantly be checking in with other servers. In my experience, it was never in a pushy way, but it was in like a ‘hey, I’m going to help you to be accountable to what you said you wanted to create in your life’.” While Café Opulence’s owners admittedly described transformation as an internal process that each individual had to undergo, the organizational community played a huge role in making sure that each person was advancing their personal goals. While self-improvement is work normally accomplished outside the workplace, Café Opulence makes the process a community goal rather than just a personal one.

The connectedness that employees experience while working is further strengthened through the non-work time that employees spend with one another. There is much variation that occurs pertaining to socialization within the workplace. Some workplaces encourage the closeness of their employees as a community-building tool, while others see the personal relationships as distracting and potentially destructive. Through the intertwined nature of
employees’ personal lives, Café Opulence employees were bound to fraternize with their coworkers outside of the workplace, with both friendly and romantic intentions.

Employees were extremely close friends, even considered by Yvette as “best friends,” with each other. Many employees described their coworkers as constituting their main social circle with whom they would attend parties or spend time outside their work life. Yvette attributed the socialization outside work time to the organizational culture Café Opulence embraces, explaining “…that because of the language that we were practicing, because of the dedication we all had to transformation, it didn’t mean that things didn’t look messy, you know? ”

Based on the underlying goal of transformation that employees were expected to embrace, employee interactions could become a lot more intimate than in most workplaces.

While Café Opulence was not immune to the potential consequences the connectedness could create, the tools learned within the workshops, such as clearing and re-creation of other’s feelings, made having such an excessively intimate organizational community workable and possible. With the knowledge taught in the workshops, Yvette explained that Café Opulence management could trust that their employees would “have the consciousness to deal with that kind of stuff [close personal relationships with other employees or customers] and make sure they were leaving their relationships in great shape.” While obviously not every employee had strong connections to every one of their coworkers within the workplace, every employee interviewed seemed to support that their interactions with the coworkers were closer than in the average organization.

In addition, the high level of connectedness Café Opulence’s organizational culture encouraged lent itself to the formation of many romantic relationships between the employees. Fraternization policies in the workplace are typical, but Café Opulence sees this view as what
Yvette describes as what “…the old paradigm of business would look like. You don’t party with your employees after work, you don’t date them.” Yvette gave an example of how this new type of organizational culture allowed for these closer romantic relationships to form with little trouble or repercussions. One of the managers at the café was known as being a playboy. He dated both customers and a lot of employees. In most cases, this would result in problems within the workplace. Yet, in each one of the manager’s relationships, the women left the relationship feeling respected and cared for, what Café Opulence refers to as ‘complete.’ While it may seem like a troubling dynamic to have within an organization, Café Opulence holds that the tools taught in workshops and this dedication to personal growth by all employees makes the deep connectedness a viable possibility.

While it is important to understand the ways in which the employees themselves describe their connection and separation with their co-workers, it is also valuable to present the outside perceptions of the employee interactions from the customers and the researcher’s point of view. From a customer perspective, the degree of connectedness among the employees varied. Yet, there were some customers who mirrored the employees’ perspectives.

As Erika, a Café Opulence customer of eight years observed, “I think that they [Café Opulence employees] are some of the most collaborative and they care about each other in profound ways. It is like a family.” The intimate connection between the coworkers was not only experienced by the employees, but was also noticed by some of the customers who entered Café Opulence. Erika continues to explain how this connectedness manifests by saying, “For me, it is really—there is a sense of commitment to more than just doing their job by the people who serve and work there. There’s a real commitment to the community as a whole in lots of different ways and a commitment to the planet.” Trinidad, a Café Opulence customer of eight
years, furthered this view of employee interactions by recognizing there was a deeper level of trust based on the employees’ vulnerability with one another. Similarly, Shannon attributed the commitment of employees, in part, to the workshops provided as the setting to build such a connected community amongst one another.

The extreme connectedness among Café Opulence’s employees is considered central to its organizational culture. However, it seemed that while the desire for a cohesive and unified community was there, its application was unlikely. Café Opulence employees are not superhumans who can espouse love and caring for every person they work with. Similar to other workplaces, Café Opulence’s employees expressed unusually deep connections with certain coworkers, while the relationships with others were distant and cordial. Tanya suggested that while she approached all of her coworkers with love, her interactions “really depend on my relationship with the person: there are some people that I work with that I don’t know very well, there are people I enjoy working with more than others, and so my interactions will depend on who they are.” While this would run counter to the philosophy of Café Opulence, in practice, it is more difficult for employees to completely embrace and follow complete love and connection to all in the organization.

Customers, such as Chloe, a customer of six years, and Ashleigh, a one-time customer, both did not see the coworker relationships within Café Opulence as any different from other organizations. Ashleigh details, “It seemed like a typical coworker relationship to me; they were working in tandem to take orders and get people’s food to them.” In addition, Chloe described Café Opulence employee interactions as cordial, but that it was nothing special and she felt that there are “other businesses in Northern California and other places where people are the same way.” In other words, although the goal was to foster a close community among Café Opulence
employees, the most connection that some customers viewed was the interaction necessary for completing their job successfully.

Community among employees and customers

Within the restaurant setting, the connectedness between employees and customers usually is not studied in much depth based on the limited, surface-level interaction that the two typically have. Interactions are usually restricted to taking the customers’ food orders, responding to customers’ requests during their meal, and completing their bill at the end of the meal. However within Café Opulence, the community created between employees and customers is one that the organization believes sets it apart from other restaurants, as well as other organizations. Café Opulence’s owners’ definition of their ‘community’ is multi-layered and encompasses more than just their employees’ community. The customers and employees’ community is among one of the sub-cultures that composes Café Opulence’s overarching organizational culture.

As opposed to other restaurants, Shannon expressed that Café Opulence looked to have a “much more loving, interactive environment between the servers and the customers.” Customers are treated in this inclusive, loving way even when they walk through the doors of the restaurant. Yvette, a former manager, said that employees were asked to welcome customers “like we would welcome someone into our home.” Based on the importance Café Opulence placed on this initial warm introduction to the customers, it was included in the employee orientation as well. In the practice exercise, the employees lined up and practiced appropriate and acceptable welcomes.

The employees’ greetings were just the starting point of the affiliative interaction between the customers and employees. The warmth of employees set the tone of the interactions that at times followed. However, there were varying levels of connectedness that occurred based
on the amount of time the customers spent both in the restaurant and outside Café Opulence attending the workshops. From the interviews with employees, a few categories of customers that came to Café Opulence emerged: regulars (customers both interested in the food and the philosophy); foodies (those who frequented the restaurant, but only because they loved the food); and what I refer to as the ‘walk by’ customers (those who just happen to stumble upon the restaurant while walking down the street or in the area).

The regular customers were considered by employees as best friends. Jaime, a customer of two years who had attended many workshops, felt that the Café Opulence managers and employees were “genuinely interested in their customers’ physical and emotional well-being.” More specifically, Tanya, a long-time server, recalls when a regular customer got pregnant and the employees watched her become bigger and bigger over the months. Once she had her baby, the employees asked how the baby was and also how she was doing. Thus, employees were interested and cared about the regulars’ lives beyond just serving them food.

In addition, Tanya even had a few regular customers that she had socialized with outside of work because “they come in and are part of the family.” Similar to the close employee community, regular customers shared greater bonds with the employees than normal restaurant patrons do. However, as with the employee community, not all regular customers were as close with employees, but closer personal relationships were more typical with regulars than with infrequent customers. Yvette explains the closer customer-employee relationship was present, explaining “they [customers] came because they felt seen, which is really the basis of any relationship.” Eating at Café Opulence allowed for regular customers to be recognized and feel supported by the staff.
Yet, from the interviews, it did not seem like the employees also benefited personally from their interactions with regular customers. The employees were, in a sense, providing a service to some customers by listening and giving emotional support. In turn, this support kept these customers coming back to the restaurant for more. Samantha, a customer of five years, even suggested that Café Opulence should encourage more interaction between servers and customers by “eliminating any distinction between server and the served.” It is evident that servers were more valued by regulars for the support they offered than their capabilities as a server.

The connectedness among regulars and employees was also visible through the physical intimacy that accompanied certain customers’ greetings. Jaime, a regular who had friendships with employees, is “always greeted with smiles and hugs when I’m there.” This level of physical intimacy far surpasses the typical employee-customer relationship not only within restaurants, but also in organizations overall. Holly, a very infrequent customer of Café Opulence, even observed that “the servers hug people who are regulars, and I [Holly] assume also attend the workshops, and be very friendly to them.” In a sense, nonverbal communication, such as hugs and smiles, act as a physical indicator of the difference between regular customers enmeshed within Café Opulence’s organizational culture and less frequent customers.

Infrequent customers seemed to feel separation from the employees, either by choice or by their lack of involvement. There is a distinct group of customers who are simply there to have the normal restaurant experience and created the separation from the staff based on their lack of interest or need. Damon, a customer who occasionally eats at Café Opulence, was not interested in being a part of the community with employees because he already had “a really good support system with my friends and family; not needing to look for additional community support from
Café Opulence.” It was clear that Damon had no motivation to seek support from the employees by his own choice. Even when a server tried to impress the sense of community by taking food off of his friend’s plate with bare hands, Damon was still not receptive to becoming more connected. Conversely, customers were also separated from the community built with employees by their lack of involvement and immersion within the restaurant. On multiple occasions while observing at Café Opulence, I noticed there were customers who would stand at the front with no recognition whatsoever from the employees, while others would be served immediately. Most definitely, the lack of acknowledgment dampened and furthered the level of separation the ignored, less frequent customers felt.

Community among customers

Within a restaurant, the connectedness between customers is typically relationships that are not fully examined. Within restaurants, customers’ interactions are usually not the focus because of the infrequency of their occurrence. More generally, customer-customer interactions are not as central to being analyzed within organizations. Customers interact more so with the organization as a whole and the employees that are a part of the organization, rather than other customers. In this analysis, it is important to evaluate customers’ connections to one another because Café Opulence prides itself as unique due to its close-networked community among all organizational members.

Many customers expressed that they are a customer and continue to return to Café Opulence because of the community. When asked about the interactions among customers, Trinidad, a customer of many years, described it as “total community.” Also, Erika, another long-time customer, stated that “besides the amazing food, I go there [Café Opulence] because I
love the community.” Yet, besides liking the idea of community, there were no specific examples of strong connections among the customers within the restaurant.

When observing the restaurant environment from the outside researcher perspective, the community created among customers was difficult to identify. Customers would walk in and would be seated at their own tables and only interacted with those with whom they came to the restaurant. Stephanie, a customer of five years, and Holly, a sporadic customer of two years, supported this observation by stating that they had never met anyone while eating at Café Opulence. Interaction between customers was not exceptionally close and the closest Ashleigh ,who visited Café Opulence once, got to other customers was speaking with “…other denizens who were also playing the game. One was playing a violin, I believe, and we complimented her on her performance.” Ashleigh did interact with other customers in her visit, but it was very minimal, surface-level interaction, at best.

However, it would be one-dimensional to assume that all customers were more separate from one another within the restaurant because there were also customers who felt deeply connected with other Café Opulence customers. Jaime, customer of a few years, felt as “that’s [Café Opulence’s] where I feel most at home,” while Samantha longed for more interaction between herself and other customers. Samantha thought, “I’d love to know other patrons and feel like I’m walking into a second home when I walk into one of their restaurants.” Even though Café Opulence intended a communal, supportive environment and customers also had a desire for connection with other customers, the community feeling between customers was reaching some and not others. What determines whether a customer will be friends with other customers or will be insulated within their own previously established social connections?
It became clear that there were more than just one underlying factor that contributed to the discrepancy between the levels of connectedness made by different customers. First, there were some customers who really did not want to be connected and as previously discussed, were more interested in the restaurant experience Café Opulence had to offer rather than being a part of a greater philosophy or community. A suggestion made to Café Opulence leadership by Anna, a customer of two years, was to have more tables of two, “…so that we could have an intimate dinner when it is just the two of us.” Even though the efforts Café Opulence make with the community table and larger sized tables, some customers would rather remain separate from other customers and instead share dinner with people with whom they are familiar.

Another factor is that the workshops are used as the main sites where customers are introduced and become connected to other customers who appreciate Café Opulence’s community. These customers may not feel comfortable meeting one another in the restaurant or be interested in doing so, but the workshops push those who attend to become closer with one another through the amount of time and depth that is reached through the subject matter discussed. Thus, customers are only really connected and form a community with each other if they make the conscious effort to do so, either by sitting at the community table or attending workshops outside the restaurant.

Erika, a deeply rooted customer of Café Opulence, explained “I usually come there [Café Opulence] with people I know, but I also do know a lot of customers. Inevitably, whenever I go to Cafe Opulence, I will see someone I will know, and it’s a big hug fest.” Even though Erika knows a lot of customers in the restaurant, she attributes this to the fact she has gone to and led so many workshops outside the restaurant. Shannon, who has attended many workshops and also
leads some workshops as well, paralleled Erika and said she shared much more with other customers at the workshops than she did within the restaurant.

As opposed to other restaurants, Café Opulence does seem to have a much more community-centered environment. However, it seems that rather than the existence of large, overarching close community, there is an appearance of community within the restaurant. In a sense, Café Opulence is a conglomeration of previously established mini communities that come to the restaurant. There are exceptions with some regular customers who infuse themselves deep within the organizational culture of the in-group. Mostly, Café Opulence serves more as a comfortable, warm environment for people to eat with friends, not connect deeply with strangers.

Connection with organizational philosophy

When speaking of connectedness-separateness dialectic, it typically refers to the negotiation between two or more individuals within interaction. Yet, when applied to the organizational setting, the dialectic is also negotiated with individuals and the organization as a whole. In any organization, organizational members assess and re-assess their level of connectedness to their organization. It has become clear that the basis of the organizational culture stems from the underlying philosophy, meaning that organizational members’ interaction with the organizational mission is important to discuss. Particularly at Café Opulence, both employees and customers balance their connection and separation from Café Opulence’s organizational philosophy.

Café Opulence leadership seeks to have the employees and customers see their participation and connection to the restaurant apart from purely for practical reasons. In other words, employees should not just see Café Opulence as their employer and a job and customers should not just see it as another restaurant to get some food. Instead, the goal is for customers
and employees to eat and work at the restaurant because they believe and are linked to the organizational philosophy. Tanya, a server, voices her reason for working at Café Opulence, saying:

I’m not just there because it is a restaurant. I am not just there because I work in food. I am not there for money or tips, or whatever. I’m there because I support the mission of the restaurant and I know a lot about it because I have been to all the workshops, so I’m well-rounded. I can represent the company really well. I can explain to customers who wonder how we got there and what we’re all about. I can explain it to them.

Tanya, obviously, was deeply connected to the organizational philosophy of Café Opulence and worked to subsequently support and advance the philosophy through her work. Moreover, Tanya first came to Café Opulence as a customer and noticed how happy and joyful the servers were. At the time, she had a stable job, which made her unhappy and had never worked in the food service industry. Yet, she decided to apply for a job at Café Opulence because the organizational values made sense to her. Other employees and their reason to work at Café Opulence also supported this motivation based on the organizational philosophy.

The connection to the organizational philosophy was also experienced by some of the customers who ate at Café Opulence. Anna, a customer of two years, described “…my love for the restaurant makes me feel a part of it.” Ashleigh, a one-time customer, first came to the restaurant with her friend who chose to eat at Café Opulence because he “had heard about their philosophy and found it aligned with his own.” In some cases, Café Opulence’s food becomes secondary to the philosophy espoused. However, other customers felt little or no connection to the organizational mission and as Damon, an infrequent customer, said “I see Café Opulence as just a restaurant.” It seems that customers’ relationships to the organizational mission fall from the extreme of connection to the opposite extreme of separation with little moderation whatsoever.
Research question three summarized the most central dialectical tension within Café Opulence: separateness and connectedness. There were many different communities present within Café Opulence, including community between upper management and employees, community among employees as co-workers, community between employees and customers, and community among customers. While community was the underlying principle of Café Opulence’s philosophy, it became clear from the analysis of each level of community that connectedness was not experienced on all levels and was negotiated among organizational members.

Research Question 4: How is the tension between closedness and openness manifested and managed within Café Opulence?

Employees

At Café Opulence, organizational members are encouraged to bring their whole selves, including their personal, private lives, into the restaurant. The connection made through the communities on all different levels previously discussed: employee-upper management, employee-employee, employee-customer, customer-customer, and the connection to the organizational mission, tend to breed openness on the part of all those intertwined in the organizational culture. Openness is also encouraged because Café Opulence’s purpose goes beyond that of typical restaurants and is widely referred to by employees and customers, like Yvette and Erika, as a “transformational school under the guise of a restaurant.” Thus, Café Opulence’s main goal is to help its employees and customers grow personally.

This goal necessitates that employees and customers are completely open and transparent with their emotions and life circumstances to open themselves to the transformational experience that Café Opulence offers. Erika, an involved customer, described that Café Opulence is “…not
business as usual, it’s not the old paradigm. It is a business that is really committed to people and planet and people’s awakening as well as making profit, so they can continue to thrive.” Jaime corroborates this new way Café Opulence runs the restaurant as more of a “…holistic approach to operating a restaurant rather than being centered on the monetary aspect.” More emphasis is placed on larger causes rather than just their own business survival; their mission is much more global in nature. Drawn from the sacred commerce business model, Café Opulence is run off of a quadruple bottom line, including profit, awakening, sustainability, and social responsibility. The restaurant goal of awakening lends itself to the need for greater openness and self-disclosure both by employees and customers.

The restaurant recognizes no distinction between the employees’ work selves and personal selves. When working within the restaurant, employees are expected to reveal and address the personal struggles or feelings even before they begin working in the restaurant. As Yvette, a former employee, explains the application process, stating,

When you first inquire for a job, they [Café Opulence] have you fill out this application and its actually not a normal application. It has questions like, you know, what inspires you about the notion of, or the possibility of sacred commerce? Things like that and, you know, you interview with a few managers, um, just talking about, just talking to them kind of about my philosophy on life and, you know, what I was committed to.

In order to even be considered to work at Café Opulence, extremely personal information is revealed, as opposed the strictly factual application businesses usually use. Tanya, another employee, continues:

the application process was very personal and they liked what I wrote because I was very upfront with them. I was like ‘I am here because of the type of place this is, it has nothing to do with the fact that it is a restaurant.’ In the interview process, they asked ‘are you up for being in this school of transformation?’ And I said yes, that’s why I’m here. Sign me up, so that’s how I got hired.
Notably, Tanya had no previous restaurant experience and was selected more based on her willingness to be open and surrender to the self-improvement process that Café Opulence promotes for all of their employees. Employees continue to participate in their ongoing process of personal growth through everyday practices done while working.

Clearing was the most consistent way in which employees were allowed to bring their personal lives into the organizational environment. Through clearing, it allowed employees to become present and in the moment without outside distractions interfering with their job performance. It was a time before the shift began where employees would share what was keeping them from being grateful and to shift their thinking to see their life in a more positive way. Tanya identified the clearing as the best part of her job as a server and thought it was really foundational to being a good server to her customers. Tanya expressed that through the clearings:

sometimes you heard some really personal stuff, so you know even if that’s the only interaction you are having with them, you know you don’t hang out with them outside of work, you sometimes learn some really personal things about people. That vulnerability breeds intimacy, so there’s a sense of intimacy with people that I have not had with coworkers before.

Self-disclosure was highly encouraged among employees and was a required element of every work day. Even with coworkers that were unfamiliar with one another, very personal and private information was disclosed, which inevitably fed a different, more connected community that was previously discussed within the last tension.

Similar to the connectedness-separateness dialectic, a hyper-intimate, different kind of organizational culture was created and maintained among Café Opulence employees. Yvette illustrated the high level of self-disclosure among employees where:

it wasn’t just like, ‘Hey, how are you doing? It was so great to see you!’ It was like ‘How did that conversation go with your mother?’ You know or like ‘In the past I know you had mentioned that you were having a hard time explaining to your mother the choices in
your life and feeling like you weren’t connected to her.’ You knew this either from a workshop or in a coaching session [clearing] with one of the managers. It was not just always a just like a really nurturing, loving, and friendly environment, but we were always interested in supporting each other’s transformations.

The organizational environment went beyond just employees being kind, positive, and respectful of one another and instead entered a whole other level where employees knew of each other’s deep, dark secrets and challenges.

It must also be recognized that employees constantly were in the process of balancing the openness-closedness dialectic in the workplace. Café Opulence strictly enforces a no-gossip policy among its employees, stating that anything personal or sensitive that is revealed has the expectation of not being discussed outside with others. Like many of the rules in the restaurant, the no-gossip policy among employees was not written down, but was an explicit rule taken from the workshops and implicitly applied to the restaurant. Though Café Opulence encourages an extremely open organizational culture, there is a need for a mechanism that serves two different, opposing functions to maintaining the uniquely transparent workplace. First, the no gossip policy seeks to temper the amount of openness that employees have with voicing private information about others, with the unspoken consequence of job termination. In a disguised way, Café Opulence balances the extreme openness through the threat of consequence. Yet, this no gossip policy did not hinder employees from disclosing, but instead established an unspoken trust among employees through boundaries and loyalty to others.

However, the no gossip policy creates a safe place, much like the physical environment, where employees are free to share without the worry of their secrets being revealed to others. Trinidad, an employee, when asked about his comfort level sharing sensitive information about his life with others in the Café Opulence community, voiced this struggle. He explained that he was “very comfortable…sometimes very uncomfortable, but I am happy to lean into the
discomfort. I feel safe.” Employees at Café Opulence shared not just because they were completely comfortable, but the safe, non-threatening environment allowed many to look past the hesitation they may have experienced on an individual level.

While this may seem evasive, employees enjoyed having the forum to express things that were happening in their lives, rather than ignoring what was happening in their lives during work. Tanya went through a time with many personal difficulties and said “there were days that I wouldn’t want to get out of bed, much less go to work. I actually knew that going to work would make me feel better because its such a positive environment, so even in the deepest, darkest days of my grief, I felt better at work because of my interactions with my coworkers and customers.” In a sense, the employees’ openness with each other created a safe place that was healing and therapeutic. This was the ultimate purpose of the transformational school Café Opulence wanted to construct for their employees, but was transmitted via the servers to the customers as well.

Customers

Like employees, Café Opulence customers were also invited to share more personal information while dining. In place of the clearing, the Question of the Day acted as the customers’ mini-version of clearing at the beginning of their meal. It allowed customers to shift their attention to what they had rather than did not have in their lives. However, much more effort and motivation was needed on the part of the customers to participate in the transformational school within Café Opulence.

Being a customer did not assure that one would be comfortable disclosing information while in the restaurant. If customers desired to be open and disclose at Café Opulence, they had to intentionally inject themselves into the community through attending the workshops and going to the restaurant on a regular basis. These involved customers loved to share their experiences
even if the openness was not reciprocated by the employees. Samantha, a customer of five years, said the amount of disclosure done within the restaurant was “more than I’ve shared about myself anywhere else, including therapy. In my experience though, servers serve and there is not a deeper development of any relationship.” Another customer, Jaime, described a similar comfort sharing information about herself and said she had been “…deeply transparent with others within the Café Gratitude community.” She felt that the Question of the Day encouraged the transparent communication she had within the restaurant. It is clear that there was a space made available for customers to also share at Café Opulence.

Even though a space was made available for customers to disclose, not all customers participated and instead desired more privacy in their dining experience. Holly, a sporadic customer was annoyed by the Question of the Day and said, “Sometimes you just want to talk about real-world things (your life, your friend’s life) in a restaurant and not venture into anything too New Agey.” Holly’s interest was to talk with people she was close to about her private life rather than sharing information about herself to strangers, such as other customers or servers.

Ashleigh also described having a low comfort level sharing personal information about herself to strangers and found the group she came with and herself “spent most of the time there [Café Opulence] playing the game and musing on the questions…in that way, we disclosed more about ourselves with each other than we would have otherwise.” Café Opulence may have contributed to Ashleigh and her group disclosing more to one another, but the group did not want to extend this self-disclosure beyond their immediate social circle. Other customers, such as Chloe, believed that she was an open person who was okay with sharing sensitive information about herself, but not just exclusively within the Café Opulence community. Thus, customers
seem to respond in a number of different ways to the space created for self-disclosure at Café Opulence.

The common theme, in regards to openness-closedness, for both customers and employees who tend to share a lot of sensitive, private information is that sharing is not done to know each other on a deeper level within the community. Instead, openness is mainly used as a tool for the individual’s personal growth and does not contribute to creating community. High levels of self-disclosure support the transformation of the individual rather than the connectedness of the organization. To illustrate, Trinidad, an employee, describes himself as completely transparent within the organization and was “…encouraged to be open. And if I wanted to disclose personal information, there is someone who is actually listening. That’s pretty cool.” Employees and customers who tend to be very open do so because Café Opulence’s community offers another person or group of people are simply listening to what one says; their experiences and emotions are validated through their acknowledgement from others.

In addition, openness and sharing served this same purpose within the workshops that were held outside of the restaurant. For example, Michael, one of Café Opulence’s owners, coached a customer who was having conflict with her daughter in a teleseminar of one of their workshops. Michael advised her to “be in communication about what is going on. What is it like for you that your thirteen-year old does whatever she does? Share what that’s like and remind them [her husband and daughter], ‘I don’t need you to fix me, I would just like you to hear me out.’ ” Thus, openness allows for expression of feelings to others rather than resulting in any kind of resolution to the problem.

The re-creation group activity done at this same teleseminar also exemplified that the primary need fulfilled through openness was being heard. Attendees were asked to do a clearing
with another participant and “…recreate what the person says exactly. You are not going to add anything. You are not going to subtract anything. You are just going to be a perfect mirror and reflect what the person says back to them…Recreate as verbatim as you can…” The debrief of the activity showed that participants reinforced why sharing with a complete stranger was beneficial. Steve explained after completing the activity that “for each of us to feel heard, whether it solves a problem or not, at least it opens the door and doesn’t shut it right in our face.” Put more succinctly by Tatum, one of the owners, “listening is the highest form of loving.” The purpose of recreation reflected the motivation as to why organizational members choose to disclose: to be heard and validated.

Research question four examined how the tension between closedness and openness were managed by both Café Opulence’s employees and customers. With the underlying goal of Café Opulence’s owners being to help customers and employees grow personally, complete transparency and disclosure was highly encouraged. Employees were asked by Café Opulence leadership not to distinguish between their work and personal selves and everyday practices such as the clearing before every shift where personal information would sometimes be disclosed. Yet, the closedness-openness tension was subsequently balanced with the no-gossip policy, which created a sense of loyalty and trust among employees. Like employees, customers were also sometimes asked to share more information while dining through the Question of the Day. Customers needed to more purposefully desire to share more information; being a frequent customer at the restaurant was not synonymous with comfort to self-disclosure. In fact, many of the customers viewed Café Opulence as a restaurant in the traditional sense, rather than a place to share and reflect on their lives.
Research Question 5: How is the tension between predictability and novelty manifested and managed within Café Opulence?

Due to its unique organizational culture, Café Opulence includes considerable novelty within its day-to-day restaurant practices. The restaurant experience at Café Opulence brings customers into eat, just because of the sheer novelty and difference it has compared to other restaurants. As Brett, an occasional customer, explained, “I have had the really consistent experience with waiters being so flamboyantly in character. That’s kind of the fun part...they act like a, someone on acid at a festival.” Brett implied that the novelty is what keeps him coming back to the restaurant. However, Brett did express that he was a bit disoriented when he first ate at Café Opulence because of the unusual restaurant experience.

Ashleigh, who had only been to Café Opulence once, said, “the group I was with enjoyed the novelty of it [the restaurant experience] for the most part- my brother was a bit skeptical of the touchy-feelyness of it.” Paradoxically, the novelty present in Café Opulence’s organizational culture, over time, becomes predictable, routine, and expected. Thus, there is much novelty within the experience for those unfamiliar with the restaurant, but as one becomes involved and exposed to Café Opulence, the novelty wears off.

When regular customers were asked what new customers needed to know about Café Opulence before coming to eat there, the distinction between new and frequent, involved customers became more apparent. Both employees and regular customers tended to talk about the Café Opulence restaurant experience as if it were very similar to other restaurants and no learning curve was present. Simply put, Robert who frequented the restaurant suggested that all new customers needed to know was how to “eat.” While Robert later in the interview notes the
uniqueness of the restaurant, it seems he has become so accustomed to the restaurant practices that he does not think new customers need to become acquainted with its distinct culture.

When asked the same question, Shannon, a workshop leader and deeply involved customer, acted as if there was nothing of great importance that customers should understand about the restaurant before coming there. She replied, “I think you just come in, you look around, you go there because maybe the menu appeals to you. There’s raw food, there’s cooked food, vegetarian. The food is very tasty. And when you come in, you may not know anything about the restaurant, but you have an experience.”

Shannon’s explanation shed light on the fact that there was not a necessity for newcomers to know about Café Opulence’s philosophy and practices before coming to the restaurant, but that new customers learn the routine, or predictability, of the organization by being immersed and exposed to the environment. Prior knowledge of the Café Opulence philosophy is not a prerequisite and as Erika said, new customers do not “need to learn something, but they would learn that Café Opulence is different.” Just by eating and experiencing the restaurant, new customers can infer that Café Opulence is not the norm and offers an unconventional dining experience.

Among more involved members of Café Opulence, including regular customers and employees, the restaurant experience is far from unusual and rarely deviates in practice. When asked about employees’ conformity to the everyday practices like the Question of the Day and the proclaiming of the menu items, Yvette, a former employee, said “I think people [employees] can, depending on the café and the management style, I think people do give it their own little personal spin, but the request or the invitation of the owners is that the clearing stays exactly the way we were taught it, that it was taught to us, and that every customer gets asked the Question of
the Day.” Predictability of the practices is valued and employees are expected to keep a consistent experience that regular customers return for and maintain the novelty new customers love to encounter. Thus, the organizational members’ expectations depend much on their involvement and experience with Café Opulence.

The people in the organization who were included in the everyday rituals remained fairly consistent and predictable. Employees were tasked with deciding what customers were included or excluded from the organizational practices that constructed Café Opulence’s organizational culture. While it seemed like a fairly random or spontaneous choice made in the moment, there was definitely a consistency to who was invited to participate in the everyday rituals, such as the Question of the Day. The more involved customers, who attended workshops and made regular appearances in the restaurant, were always included in the organizational practices intended to bring them into the culture of Café Opulence.

Also, customers who appeared to be the prototypical customer, interested in self-awakening and transformation through their physical appearance, were included. When observing Café Opulence, I was never asked the Question of the Day before my meal arrived. I am not sure whether it was that I did not fit the type of individual usually in the in-group at Café Opulence, but it was clear that a select few in my surrounding area were being asked. It may have appeared that Café Opulence would invite customers into their organizational culture at random, but there was a deliberate and consistent method regarding who was included or excluded. If a customer did not fit the server’s image of a Café Opulence customer, they were left out of the organizational practices.

Research question five analyzed the negotiation of the dialectical tension of novelty-predictability among Café Opulence’s organizational members. Based solely on Café
Opulence’s unique restaurant experience, novelty existed on the surface level compared to other restaurants. Some sporadic customers would return to Café Opulence because the novelty its experience provided. However, those immersed in Café Opulence’s organizational culture, such as employees and more involved customers, did not view new customers as requiring any additional knowledge to understand the unique organizational culture. Also, there appeared to be a spontaneous rather than strategic nature to who was included and who was excluded from the everyday organizational practices. Upon further examination, it became clear that there was a predictability to who was invited to join the community, as will be seen in the analysis of research question six.

**Research Question 6**: What additional dialectical tensions can be identified within the Café Opulence organizational culture?

In its current form, dialectical theory does not account for all of the dialectical tensions present in the creation of organizational culture because the theory was not developed with this context in mind. Through the interviews and observation, additional tensions that were also very important in understanding Café Opulence’s organizational culture were recognized. The additional tensions that existed between organizational members at Café Opulence included the authentic-inauthentic and the covert-overt control dialectical tension. These tensions were significant and contributed to part of the creation and maintenance of Café Opulence’s organizational culture.

*Authentic-Inauthentic*

When describing to authenticity, the term refers to the *genuine* devotion or commitment to upholding the organizational philosophy and goals without any ulterior motivation. Café Opulence’s employees and dedicated customers preached, promoted, and claimed to embody the
philosophy created by the restaurants’ owners, Michael and Tatum. However, people, typically those outside the organization, would question whether or not their overly positive and all-loving hippy perspective was just an act or if the philosophy was actually embraced by the organizational members. Interestingly, this tension was one that was not directly addressed by the employees or deeply involved customers interviewed. Instead, new customers were the evaluators of Café Opulence and its members’ genuineness. At Café Opulence, the authentic-inauthentic tension was frequently addressed in a number of different ways.

The employees struggle with authenticity because of the expectation to espouse absolute love and positivity to everyone who comes to the restaurant (authentic to the restaurant philosophy). Yet, embracing this mentality is not realistic on an everyday basis and can result in the robotic transmission of the organizational mission to customers (inauthentic to the restaurant philosophy). Damon, an infrequent customer, noticed that the employees’ delivery of the organizational practices (i.e., Question of the Day, Abounding River board game, and menu item affirmations), were a bit forced and said “people [employees] seem unusually (making the effort of being) happy, loving, eat healthy, and have a positive attitude.” He also recommended that the owners not “…try to make their employees try too hard, it may come out as fake.” In other words, it seemed as if employees were putting extra effort into embodying not only the Café Opulence philosophy, but also the euphoric attitude. The desire to maintain the proverbial ‘happy face’ was based on the fact that this was the norm for those in the previously mentioned in-group at Café Opulence. Employees who chose to deviate were disconnected and apart from not only other employees, but also the organization and its philosophy.

Besides employees’ tendency to become inauthentic through the day-to-day mechanization of their job, employees would struggle with authenticity to the organizational
mission based on the fact that it was still a business. Although Café Opulence was distinguished from other restaurants, it still faced the same pressures, such as paying attention to customer service, being understaffed, and most importantly, making a profit. In a sense, upholding the positive, extremely grateful image to customers was job security for employees. Thus, the motivation behind portraying this image could be inauthentic and contrived.

These pressures seemed incompatible with the level of depth and authenticity that employees were supposed to have in their interactions. Tanya, a long-time server, explained that:

*the* most important things we [employees] are asked to do when relating to customers, which I totally enjoy and love asking the Question of the Day and usually I don’t stick around to hear the answer because I have a ton of things to do and can’t really listen to everybody.

The reason for the server asking the Question of the Day is to listen and make deeper connections with the customers. Yet, the question is superficially asked by the server, while customers are not able to answer.

Even further, customers said that the employees would sometimes even negate asking the Question of the Day because of the many customers they were waiting on. Employees experienced an interesting contradiction of being a ‘good’ server in the conventional sense (spreading time with customers, getting orders out quickly, etc.), while embodying the owners’ ideas of a ‘good’ server (more intimate relationship with customers, being in the moment, embodying the philosophy, etc.). In practice, both conceptions of a ‘good’ server were unable to always co-exist with one another, resulting in inevitable lack of authenticity to the organizational philosophy from the employees.

*Covert-overt control*

Café Opulence’s leadership exerted control over its employees and customers in different ways. It is typical for organizations to exert control over employees through traditional means,
such as an employee handbook with company policies and rules. On the other hand, employees within organizations also want to feel trusted, rather than micromanaged or watched by their upper management. Thus, there is a fine line between upper management providing necessary structure through rules and policies and being overbearing and untrustworthy toward their employees. The covert-overt control tension may resonate more so with employees in general, but can also apply to customers as well.

As explained in research question one, Café Opulence has very few explicit rules made clear for their employees. Instead, the organizational rules are implied and understood as the actions for those who are in the in-group to which they conform. For example, the employees and managers interviewed repeatedly said that employees were not required to attend workshops, but that it was highly encouraged. All employees that were interviewed had attended at least one workshop. Thus, it would stand to reason that if an employee did not attend a workshop, the employee may not be as connected and accepted by their coworkers and managers.

Notably, Café Opulence does not have any employee manual or written rules for employee conduct in the restaurant because this would contradict the language of making requests rather than demands. Through the framing of ‘invitation’ language established by Café Opulence’s owners (i.e, “I invite you to ask customers the Question of the Day” as opposed to “You must ask all customers the Question of the Day”), it seems that a trust or confidence is put in the hands of the employees given the requests. Employees feel as if they are making a conscious choice, but is this really independence or just the appearance of such? Even though Café Opulence employees felt autonomous through the use of requests and invitations, the language seemed to more intimately connect employees to the upper management. A deeper
level of trust was implicitly communicated and in turn, in response, Café Opulence employees would conform and follow the wishes of management.

The implied control of employees could be achieved even through the establishment of an explicit rule. The ‘no gossip policy’ was one of the only employee policies made explicit and overt in the workplace. The ‘no gossip policy’ essentially said that any sensitive, deeply personal information that was shared during the daily clearings could not be talked about with others. Café Opulence management made it clear that breaking this policy would result in punishment, but did not specify what the punishment would be. Some employees interviewed said that job termination was the implied punishment, based on the rumors that they had previously heard. With such a heavy punishment, it may seem that employees would be very careful about what they said to their coworkers. Instead, with the boundaries and desire to be loyal the no-gossip policy created, trust and community were further established among employees.

Indirectly, Café Opulence’s owners and management exerted great control through the appearance of autonomy and trust in their employees to make the right decisions. However, the right decisions happened to be aligned with the good of the Café Opulence community and advanced the intended organizational philosophy. Essentially, implicit control had greater effectiveness on achieving the organizations’ goals because it avoided creating animosity from employees toward upper management, while still maintaining the organizational culture the owners expected.

At Café Opulence, customers were also subject to implicit control with the ultimate punishment being exclusion. Implicitly, the frequent Café Opulence customer had expectations beyond just frequenting the restaurant. While the community would appear to accept all customers, those who did not fit into the prototype of their ‘typical’ regular customer were not
given full acceptance to the Café Opulence in-group and were kept at a distance. While observing in the restaurant, I was never asked the Question of the Day by the servers. I feel it was due to, mainly, my physical appearance, which greatly deviated from the Bohemian, all natural image that distinguished members of the in-group from the out-group. I was dressed in preppy style clothes, had my makeup and hair done, and was sitting alone with my laptop. Thus, physical appearance was one of the implicit barriers that maintained who was part of the in-group.

Also, the amount a customer was willing to be involved within the organization, such as donating money to Café Opulence, volunteering at events or workshops, or attending workshops, had an effect on one’s standing in the Café Opulence community. One example is that the workshops held are funded through donations only. The rationale was that a participant at a previous workshop paid to be able to attend this workshop, so it was up to the subsequent participants to do the same. Though it seemed to be completely voluntary, the leader would use the donation as another opportunity to push the participants to practice Café Opulence’s philosophy by giving to the community without fear of not having enough money for oneself. Those who did not give much money were considered to not fully embrace what was taught. Though Café Opulence’s owners would not directly state that customers’ commitment to Café Opulence had to be proven through contributing their money or time, this was the implied prerequisite to be seen as a full-fledged member of Café Opulence.

Research question six identified two additional dialectical tensions that were significant in analyzing Café Opulence’s organizational culture: authentic-inauthentic and overt-covert control. The authentic-inauthentic tension was characterized by the tendency of employees and involved customers to express their unrelenting devotion to the principles of the Café Opulence
philosophy. At the same time, conveying positivity and gratefulness on a daily basis was difficult, especially for employees. However, appearing authentic and present, in the moment, and positive was a job requirement and determined one’s job security. The implicit-explicit control dialectical tension showed that Café Opulence’s leadership used indirect influence to establish rules, so that would alienate their employees. In addition, no restrictions were made on what customers were included in the community, but a certain ‘type’ of customer based on their values, physical appearance, and willingness to be involved in Café Opulence.

Summary

The organizational rules and artifacts of Café Opulence were outlined to establish how Café Opulence’s organizational culture was maintained. Through the examination of dialectical tensions, this study then identified the occurrences of each tension in Café Opulence and interpreted how each tension manifested and managed Café Opulence’s organizational culture. Observations of additional dialectical tensions more fitting to the organizational context were also discussed. Chapter five provides a discussion of the study. In particular, chapter five includes the implications from the results of this study, the limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Implications

The current study sought to use dialectical theory in understanding the maintenance and negotiation of Café Opulence’s organizational culture. This was achieved by examining each individual dialectical tension: connectedness-separateness, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty, in great depth. This was done by identifying specific instances and practices obtained from both researcher observations and interviews with organizational members. The results from this study found that all three tensions, typically used to understand personal relationships, were also central to the existence and sustenance of Café Opulence’s organizational culture. Through the examination of these tensions, it became apparent that the tensions were closely connected in many cases. This intersection and overlapping of the dialectical tensions remain consistent with past dialectical theory research, which typically views dialectical tensions “more as an interconnected web of contradictions than as isolated categories” (Erbert & Alemán, 2008, p. 678). Also, in the process of applying dialectical theory in the context of the organization, other dialectical tensions organically presented themselves as key factors in shaping the organizational culture.

In considering the implications for studying organizational culture and the role of dialectical tensions in the organization, the results of this study promote the use of dialectical theory as a valid theoretical framework to analyze organizational cultures. It also shows the viability for dialectical theory to be extended into another context beyond personal relationships.
While one specific organizational culture was studied to show the presence of dialectical tensions within the workplace, these tensions can also be identified in other organizations as well. In addition, Café Opulence represents the direction that organizations have been progressing toward over time. Like Café Opulence, many organizations are embracing the new organizational norm of total integration of employees’ personal and work lives, indistinguishable from one another (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Kahn, 1992; Mirvis & Hall, 1994; Mirvis, 1997). The modern employee performs their organizational role even when not working, with their identity and their profession closely connected. While Café Opulence is an organization who has an even more seamless integration of employees’ work and personal realms than most organizations, it serves as the ideal model of what organizations may advance to and represents the potential future of organizations’ pervasiveness in employees’ lives.

Despite dialectical tensions occurring in a context different from interpersonal relationships, communication is still occurring on individual, interpersonal and group levels to negotiate the ever-evolving, dynamic organizational culture. As Harris (1994) observes, the group level of organizational culture production is often the most commonly studied in organizational culture research. Instead, individual, interpersonal, and group level processes are involved in the negotiation and maintenance of organizational culture (Alderfer, 1987; Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; Golden, 1992; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). This view stems from the idea that the construction of organizational, or group, identity and self identity are inexplicably intertwined and mutually affect one another (Sauvayre, 1995). The analysis looked to understand organizational culture in an alternative way that allowed for more focus on the smaller-scale interactions occurring between organizational members. In turn, the overwhelming task of studying organizational culture can be made more straightforward and tangible for future
researchers. Scholars are not the only beneficiaries of this study, but also leaders of organizations can critically examine their own organizational culture to improve their workplace (Chan, Shaffer, & Snape, 2004; Schein, 1992). The need to effectively study organizational culture is indispensible and necessary in both theoretical and practical realms.

Within Café Opulence, the connectedness-separateness tension was in the forefront of their organizational culture because of their strong emphasis on the collective power of community. There were different interconnected levels of community that existed amongst employees, customers, upper management, and the organizational mission. Based on the highly connected, egalitarian community that Café Opulence promoted, there were additional relationships examined that are not typical in restaurants or organizations, such as connection between customers and employee-customer relationship.

Through this analysis, the dialectical tension of connectedness-separation was not solely negotiated between two individuals. Connection and separation was also experienced between the individual and the entity of the organization, including its mission and founders. Community was highly valued at Café Opulence, but it resulted in more of an appearance of community through a minority of closely connected regular customers and employees who were heavily entrenched with one another and their lives. Due to their routine involvement, employees constituted more of the in-group, which resulted in the blurring and intertwined nature of their personal and work lives.

The openness-closedness tension was intimately connected to and contributed partially to the connectedness-separateness tension previously discussed. At Café Opulence, the founders implied that the more one shared about themselves, the more connected they subsequently felt with other organizational members and the organization as a whole. Customers and employees
were encouraged to be open and transparent with their emotions and life circumstances in order to achieve transformation and personal growth.

Employees are encouraged to bring their whole selves to work by expressing the distractions and issues in their lives through clearing rather than suppressing the emotions until after the workday is complete. Customers also have the opportunity to share, but in order to disclose on a deeper level, some customers must make additional effort to participate in the personal growth aspect of the restaurant. Thus, being a customer of Café Opulence usually does not mean one shares extremely personal information; customers who do share constitute the minority at Café Opulence. For all organizational members, sharing of personal information was not intended to build community, but was mainly a tool for the personal growth of the individual, not the group.

Novelty-predictability was much less explicitly and frequently balanced and re-evaluated by its organizational members. Of the three dialectical tensions discussed, novelty-predictability seemed to be the most stable and consistent among organizational members. Café Opulence prides itself on being different than the typical restaurant experience. Therefore, there is much novelty in the day-to-day restaurant practices, including the Question of the Day, the menu names, and the game. For customers, the level of involvement in the organization determined whether the organizational culture was one that embraced novelty or predictability. For customers disconnected to the restaurant’s mission, the novelty of their dining experience was what kept them coming back. Even if the unique experience was expected, the novelty of Café Opulence remained the same over time. Conversely, for regular customers and employees, who usually attended the outside workshops, novelty would paradoxically become predictable, habitual, and normal.
In addition to extending dialectical theory into the organizational context, additional dialectical tensions were identified. These dialectical tensions were created based on Café Opulence’s organizational culture. The authentic-inauthentic tension was an ever-present tension that Café Opulence employees experienced while working. Employees voiced the difficulty of being authentic in embracing, appreciating, and validating their customers and coworkers on a day-to-day basis. Authenticity was constantly balanced based on the need to make profit as a business and the ability to truly connect with the customers they serve while working. While this tension may not be applicable to all other organizations, its importance may be recognized within the service industry and the emotional labor these types of jobs experience.

In summary, this study sought to examine the way in which organizational culture was studied through the application of an alternative theoretical framework: dialectical theory. Through examining dialectical tensions, two objectives were completed in this thesis. Dialectical theory was first used to recognize and analyze Café Opulence’s unique organizational culture. Inadvertently through studying Café Opulence, the dialectical theory was developed further in its use in the organizational context and also new dialectical tensions identified by the organizational members of Café Opulence. Despite the limited scope of this study, it also offers organizational scholars and organizational leaders with an approach to understand and become more aware of organizational culture and its effects.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the sample size of those interviewed. A total of 18 interviews were conducted with a wide variety of organizational members including bartenders, servers, managers, and both new and regular customers. However, the results from this study are not generalizable because Café Opulence has such a unique organizational culture
and also that no restaurants or organizations can possess identical organizational cultures to one another. Marshall (1996) simply stated that in qualitative research, the appropriate sample size “is one that adequately answers the research question” (p.523). This study’s sample size was sufficient, but in order to be able to generalize the use and validity of dialectical theory to analyze organizational cultures in restaurants, a much larger study that includes a much more random sampling of restaurants would be needed.

This study was also limited by the possible researcher bias and underlying assumptions. Especially due to the prior background research done by the researcher on Cafè Opulence as an organization, the researcher’s observations could have been affected by the negative publicity the organization had received from its lawsuits. The thesis began at the height of the lawsuits when Cafè Opulence was under intense scrutiny in the media. Being that the researcher was not a customer of Cafè Opulence, the outsider perspective was assumed, which can lead to misunderstandings or distortions in observations.

Another limitation of this study was that the researcher’s physical proximity to the restaurant was a few hours away. Therefore, all of the interviews were conducted online or over the telephone, making the interviews less dynamic than face-to-face interview might be. There are many weaknesses to conducting phone and telephone interviews over conducting them face-to-face. First, the researcher was not able note any of the nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions, which add nuance to interviews. Next, interviewing over the phone could have inhibit participants from sharing completely or elaborating due to the lack of familiarity with the researcher. The online interview format presents the obstacle of the extra time and effort that participants had to take in order to complete each question. As a result,
the complexity of answers and immediate follow-up questions from the researcher were hindered by the online format.

Phone and email interviews appear as less appealing research methods because of the absence of visual cues that result in loss of context and nonverbal data. However, prior research has found that this may not be as much of a limitation as it may initially seem. Different interview modalities: face-to-face, phone, and email, have been compared, finding that there were no significant differences in regards to the resulting qualitative data (Pettit, 2002; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Novick (2008) described that there was a bias against different interview modalities when phone and email could actually make the interviewees disclose more information and feel more relaxed. While there seemed to be some observed shortcomings in this particular research, it may not have affected the research as greatly as I had thought.

**Future Research**

Ideally, this study will stimulate more discussion among scholars about alternative means used to uncover organizational culture. This study provided an example of the possibility to extend other communication theories into unexpected contexts. If communication is viewed on a broader scale, other communication theories may also apply to more than just the specific communication context intended. On the most rudimentary level, even in more complicated interactions like organizations, communication is occurring between individuals and must be dissected to make the context easier to study.

Based on accessibility and the scope of the study, only the employees, lower level managers, and customers’ perspectives on Café Opulence’s culture were observed. However, it may yield interesting results for future research to compare the organizational culture as described by employees, as opposed to the CEO or owner. In what ways do the conceptions of
organizational culture differ from or parallel one another? This question would be important because top organizational members may lack an accurate understanding of their actual organizational culture versus their idealized organizational culture. This knowledge is also imperative because there is consensus among managers and scholars that organizational culture does have many practical implications, such as increased performance and profit.

Just as significant as organizational culture is, it is just as complex and difficult to understand and apply in a thoughtful way. Yet, when organizational culture is fully comprehended, there is mutual support from both successful managers and scholars of its relationship to performance. As the CEO of CompUSA, the largest retailer of personal computers, explained, “companies win or lose based on the cultures they create” (Academy of Management Executive, 1999, p.34). Pfeffer (1994) corroborated this by arguing that the traditional measures of success, such as product and process technology, access to regulated markets, economies of scale, etc., matter less today than in the past than the more intangible aspects of organizations, like organizational culture.
APPENDICES

Appendix A. Consent Form

Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in research being conducted by Cassandra Costantini, a graduate student in the Communication Studies Department at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to investigate the unique organizational structure of Café Opulence.

You have been asked to be a voluntary interviewee on this subject. If you agree, you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences with this subject. This interview will last for approximately 60-120 minutes.

Your name will not be used for any purpose and will not appear in the research paper. No names will appear on the interview notes. The interview will be recorded ONLY if you feel comfortable with it and give your permission to the interviewer to do so. If you agree to have the interview recorded, you may subsequently have the recorder turned off at any time you wish. Recorded materials will be kept in a secure location. They will be handled only by Cassandra Costantini and are considered “privileged documents”; that is, private communication between you and this researcher alone. Once the research is completed, the recordings and any notes will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Cassandra Costantini at cassie.costantini@gmail.com, (916) 475-3644.

If you have any additional questions about the thesis or CSUS Communication Studies theses in general, please contact Dr. Gerri Smith, the Chairperson for this study, at smithg@saclink.csus.edu, (916) 278-6711.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to be interviewed.

__________________________________________                  ____________________
Signature                                                           Date
Appendix B. Proposed Interview Questions: Employees

Basic Information

- How long have you worked at Café Opulence?
- What is your job title?
- Describe your job.
- What specifically made you want to work here at Café Opulence?

Warm-Up

- How did you first “discover” Café Opulence? How did you get interested in working for them?
- Describe the last job you held before coming to Café Gratitude.
  a. How would you describe your past job’s workplace environment?
- In what ways does your job at Café Gratitude differ from the other workplaces you have worked at?

Key Content

- Tell me about the employee training that you receive. What training did you complete in preparation to work at Café Opulence?
- What are you expected to do in your interactions with customers? How do you feel about it?
- Outside of when you work, how much time do you spend at Café Opulence?
  a. If so, why do you enjoy spending non-work time at Café Opulence?
- In what ways is Café Opulence different from another workplace?
  a. In what ways is Café Opulence different from other restaurants?
• Talk me through the typical interaction that you have with other employees while
socializing outside of work. What is it like?

• Talk me through the typical interaction that you have with other employees while
working. What is it like?

• In what ways would you consider the relationships you have with other employees
similar to the typical co-worker relationship? Why or why not?

• In what ways would you consider the relationships you have with your managers similar
to many manager-employee relationships? Why or why not?

• What, if any, interactions have you had with the owners, Matthew and Terces, since you
have worked here? What are your perceptions of them as owners?

• To what extent do you go “by the book,” what the owners would hope, when working
and serving customers (i.e., clearing at beginning of shift, Question of the Day, etc.), or
do you change what you do at all?
  a. If you have changed what you do, how have you changed it? Why?

• What do you like about your job?
  a. If you could, what would you change about your job?

• How would you describe the level of closeness among the Café Opulence employees as a
group?

• How comfortable do you feel sharing personal information about your life with other
employees?
  a. If comfortable, what do you feel creates this environment conducive to sharing
  with your employees?
• How would you describe your level of closeness to Café Opulence customers who come into the restaurant?
  a. If close, what do you feel creates this environment conducive to sharing with the customers who come into the restaurant?

Summary

• How would you describe your work environment in general?
• If you could give Matthew & Terces any advice about improving the workplace or Café Opulence as a whole, what would it be?
• Is there anything else that I have not asked that you think would be important to add?
Appendix C. Proposed Interview Questions: Customers

**Basic Information**

- How long have you been a customer at Café Opulence?
- How often do you come to Café Opulence?

**Warm-up**

- How did you first “discover” Café Opulence? Why do you enjoy coming here so much?

**Key Content**

- In what ways is the Café Opulence experience different from other restaurants that you are customers of?
- Why do you continue to be a customer here at Café Opulence?
- How would you describe your relationship to other customers who dine at Café Opulence?
- From your observation, how would you describe the relationships among the Café Opulence employees?
- Have you ever attended any of the workshops held outside of Café Opulence? If so, why did you choose to go?
  a. What did you learn from the workshop you attended?
  b. Did attending the workshop make you feel more part of the Café Opulence community?
- What specifically would you attribute Café Opulence’s atmosphere to?
- If someone were new to Café Opulence, what would they need to learn in order to become familiar with the restaurant?
• Would you consider yourself a member of the Café Opulence community? Why or why not?

• How much information about yourself have you shared with others within the Café Opulence community?

• What is your comfort level sharing sensitive information about your life and being open with those in Café Opulence?

Summary

• From your observation and involvement with Café Opulence, how would you describe the overall atmosphere of the restaurant?

• If you could give Matthew & Terces any advice about improving the atmosphere of Café Opulence as a customer, what would it be?

• Is there anything else I have not asked that you think would be important to add?
Appendix D. Proposed Interview Questions for Owners

Basic Information

• How did you two meet each other?
• How long did you work on the concept of Café Opulence before you opened your doors?

Warm-Up

• When specifically did the idea of Café Opulence come into being? What spurred its creation?
• If you had to describe what the concept of Café Opulence is in one sentence, how would you describe it and why?
• Describe what your past job before starting Café Opulence was.
  a. How did the work environment in your past job differ from the work environment you have created at Cafe Opulence?

Key Content

• Describe the physical environment within Café Opulence restaurants.
  a. Does this physical environment connect to Café Opulence’s mission and philosophy? Why or why not.
• When hiring your employees, what specifically are you looking for?
• Is there any training that new or continuing employees must complete while working for Café Opulence? If so, detail what this includes.
• Describe how employees feel working at Café Opulence on a daily basis. What work environment do you intend to have amongst your employees? Detail what this looks like.
  a. Do you believe that you have been successful at maintaining this work environment for your employees? And if so, how is this achieved?
- Describe how customers are supposed to feel dining at Café Opulence.
  
a. How is this different from other restaurants that customers go to? What specifically sets Café Opulence apart?
- Would you say that Café Opulence is an exclusive or inclusive kind of community? Are new customers openly accepted into the restaurant? Explain.
  
a. Do you believe that customers are treated or viewed differently based on their involvement within the Café Opulence community (i.e. attending workshops, eating at restaurant frequently, etc)?
- How would you respond to critics who characterize Café Opulence as ‘Café Attitude’? Where do you believe these criticisms come from and why?
- What role (if any) does emotional expression have in your organizational philosophy pertaining to employees?
- What role (if any) does emotional expression have in your organizational philosophy pertaining to customers who come to your restaurant?
- What role (if any) does self-disclosure and openness have in your organizational philosophy pertaining to your employees? Is this encouraged or not within the workplace?
- What role (if any) does self-disclosure and openness have in your organizational philosophy pertaining to customers of Café Opulence? Is this encouraged or not within the dining experience?
- How close are you, as an owner, to your employees and managers? Customers? Give some examples.
REFERENCES


*Human Communication Research, 9,* 255-266.


