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**Fun and friends: The impact of workplace fun and constituent attachment on turnover in a hospitality context**

*Michael J Tews, John W Michel and David G Allen*

**Abstract**

Extending the growing body of research on fun in the workplace, the present study examined the relationship between fun and employee turnover. Specifically, this research focused on the influence of three forms of fun on turnover—fun activities, coworker socializing, and manager support for fun. With a sample of 296 servers from 20 units of a national restaurant chain in the U.S., coworker socializing and manager support for fun were demonstrated to be significantly related to turnover. In addition, constituent attachment was found to mediate the relationship between each of the three forms of fun and turnover. This research highlights that not all types of fun are equal and demonstrates that one of the key means through which fun influences retention is by facilitating the development of high quality work relationships.

**Keywords**

workplace fun, constituent attachment, turnover, retention

Employee turnover is arguably one of the most significant human resource management challenges confronting managers, particularly in the hospitality industry. For example, turnover rates for entry-level employees in hotels and restaurants can easily exceed 50% annually (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000; Tracey and Hinkin, 2008). Such excessive turnover is both costly and disruptive to hospitality enterprises. Managers are confronted with a continuous cycle of recruitment, selection, and training that strains their organizations as costs escalate and productivity losses ensue (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000). Given high turnover and the need to quickly fill vacancies, managers often fall victim to hiring warm bodies, which only compromises the service experience. Not surprisingly, managing employee turnover in the hospitality industry is one of the key concerns that “keeps managers up at night” (Enz, 2001). Given the negative impact of excessive turnover, determining how to promote retention among entry-level hospitality employees is warranted.

The vast body of turnover research has illustrated that classic turnover models account for only a modest percentage of variance in turnover behavior, and researchers have emphasized the need for more theoretical contributions tailored to specific contexts (Felps et al., 2009; Holtom et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2001). In their extensive review of turnover research, Holtom et al. (2008) identified job level and job type as key theoretical variables that have often been overlooked in research on the turnover process. The present study takes these characteristics into account by focusing on entry-level hospitality employees, who are typically younger workers who perform relatively low-skill, low-pay work in a highly social employment context.

The existing body of turnover research has reached consensus on a number of variables that reduce turnover. Griffeth et al.’s (2000) meta-analysis, for example, demonstrated that job satisfaction, leader-member exchange relationships, and role clarity were among the strongest

predictors of turnover. Other key predictors were those related to employee compensation, work group issues, and employee stress. Notwithstanding the importance of these variables, the modest level of variance explained suggests that other variables may also be important in explaining the turnover process. In the context of entry-level hospitality employees, we contend that fun in the workplace may have a significant impact on leaving behavior and help promote retention in a context where turnover rates are among the highest.

The purported benefits of fun have long been extolled in the popular management press. The roots of the modern workplace fun movement can be found in the writings of Deal and Kennedy (1982) and Peters and Waterman (1982) that encouraged the development of corporate cultures that promote fun, humor, and play. More recently, fun has been promoted in publications like *Fish!* as a key ingredient to create energized and productive work environments (Lundin et al., 2000). Fun has been deemed to have a favorable impact on nearly every aspect of organizational life. It has been argued that fun leads to higher job satisfaction, morale, pride in work, creativity, retention, and service quality, as well as lower absenteeism, anxiety, and burnout (Abner, 1997; Abramis, 1989; Frieberg and Frieberg, 1996; Hemsath et al., 1997; Lundin et al., 2000; Yerkes, 2007). While some academic research has demonstrated that fun does in fact have positive consequences for individuals and organizations (e.g., Peluchette and Karl, 2005; Stromberg and Karlsson, 2009; Tews et al., 2012), other studies have been more critical, highlighting that workplace fun may be met with resistance (e.g., Baptiste, 2009; Fleming, 2005; Taylor and Bain, 2003; Warren and Fineman, 2007).

The present study aims to substantiate the generalizability of fun to employee turnover among entry-level employees in the hospitality industry. In particular, this research will examine the effects of three forms of fun on turnover—fun activities, coworker socializing, and manager

support for fun. Drawing from a relational perspective of turnover (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2001; Mossholder et al., 2005), we argue that fun may enrich the social experience of work and facilitate the development of high quality work relationships to embed individuals within an organization. Accordingly, we will also assess constituent attachment as a mediator in the fun-turnover relationship. Furthermore, this study will examine whether some dimensions of fun have a stronger influence on turnover than others. We contend that coworker socializing and manager support for fun will matter more than fun activities because they are more regular features of the work environment and may be more authentic and genuine.

### **Prior research on workplace fun**

Fun in the workplace is a broad construct, and several similar, yet slightly distinct, conceptualizations have been advanced. Fluegge (2008) provides a broad conceptualization by defining workplace fun as “any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure” (p. 15). While Fluegge (2008) includes task activities in her conceptualization, McDowell (2004) argues that fun involves activities that are “not specifically related to the job that are enjoyable, amusing, or playful” (p. 9). Furthermore, Ford et al. (2003) define fun as a “work environment that intentionally encourages, initiates, and supports a variety of enjoyable and pleasurable activities” (p. 22). Of note in Ford et al.’s (2003) definition is that fun is intentionally promoted by the organization. However, Bolton and Houlihan (2009) articulate that not all fun is organizationally sponsored and it is important to distinguish between “packaged fun” and “organic fun,” the latter reflecting an “intrinsic and inherent part of organizational life” (p. 557). Based on these various conceptualizations, fun can potentially be derived from multiple sources

and may or may not be formally encouraged and initiated by the organization. It is important to highlight that these conceptualizations focus on features of the work environment that may facilitate enjoyment or pleasure, rather than employee attitudes or states, such as job satisfaction, engagement, and positive affect, that could result from the existence of fun.

Three areas of inquiry have been the primary focus of previous research on fun. One area has focused on the prevalence and perceptions of fun. For example, Ford et al. (2003) examined the extent to which various fun activities were prevalent in organizations. Furthermore, Karl et al. (2005) assessed whether individuals perceive different activities as fun or not, and Plester (2009) demonstrated that informal and formal organizations have different boundaries as to what is considered fun. A second area has focused on individual differences and fun. In this context, Lamm and Meeks (2009) illustrated that there are generational differences in attitudes toward fun, and Karl et al. (2007) demonstrated that the Big Five dimensions of extraversion and agreeableness are related to more favorable attitudes toward fun. A third area of inquiry, most germane to the present research and discussed more fully below, has addressed the potential impact of fun.

One set of studies has examined the impact of *experienced fun*, which reflects whether individuals generally perceive the existence of fun in the workplace. Scale items corresponding to this conceptualization include: *This is a fun place to work* and *At my workplace, we try to have fun whenever we can*, among others (Karl and Peluchette, 2006b; Karl, Peluchette, and Harland 2007). In one of the first studies in this area, Peluchette and Karl (2005) established that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction with a sample of healthcare employees. Also in healthcare contexts, Karl and Peluchette (2006a) demonstrated that experienced fun tempered the influence of emotional exhaustion on job dissatisfaction, and Karl et al. (2007)

found that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to emotional exhaustion. In addition, Karl and Peluchette (2006b) found that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction and employee perceptions of customer service quality with a sample of students in service settings. Finally, with a sample of volunteers, Karl et al. (2008) demonstrated that experienced fun was positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to turnover intentions.

Other studies have examined the impact of fun as a multidimensional, higher-order construct (Fluegge, 2008; McDowell, 2004). With a sample of oil company employees, McDowell demonstrated that fun was significantly related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. McDowell's framework of fun included *socializing*, *celebrating*, *personal freedoms*, and *global fun*. Socializing refers to friendly social interactions among coworkers; celebrating refers to marking special events and having social gatherings at work; personal freedoms refers to employees being afforded flexibility and autonomy regarding attire, playing music, and playing around; and global fun refers to an overall evaluation of whether an organization has a fun work climate. Using the same framework of fun as McDowell, Fluegge (2008) found with a sample of working undergraduate students that fun had a positive impact on employee engagement, positive affect, and job performance, including task performance, creative performance, and organizational citizenship behavior. Since McDowell and Fluegge aggregated their dimensions of fun into a single measure, it could not be determined which aspects of fun were more influential.

Subsequent research by Tews et al. (2012) focused on the impact of fun in the context of applicant attraction. This study focused on fun activities, coworker socializing, and fun job responsibilities with a sample of undergraduate job seekers who evaluated recruiting scenarios.

This research demonstrated that fun was a stronger predictor of applicant attraction than compensation and opportunities for advancement. Moreover, coworker socializing and fun job responsibilities were stronger predictors than fun activities. These findings illustrate that fun is important in a recruiting context and that not all forms of fun are valued equally.

Turning to qualitative investigations, a number of studies have illustrated that fun results in potentially desirable outcomes. In detailing the organizational culture at Disney, Van Maanen (1991) illustrated that fun activities and coworker socializing were central features of the employment experience that enhanced camaraderie and bonding among employees, who were primarily of college age. In addition, Stromberg and Karlsson (2009) in a study with female meatpackers demonstrated that work environments characterized by fun, humor, and laughter promote group cohesion and enhance the quality of work life in an environment that might otherwise be perceived as “greasy, monotonous, and repetitive” (p. 638). Furthermore, Bolton (2004) detailed the use of humor among nurses. Even though the use of humor may be a form of organizational resistance in a highly pressurized work environment, she noted a number of benefits. She concluded that the use of humor is not necessarily detrimental as it may foster group cohesion and reduce the emotional exhaustion associated with service work.

Despite its potential benefits, other qualitative studies have cast workplace fun in a more critical light. Taylor and Bain (2003) illustrated that supervisor efforts to sponsor fun may at times be counterproductive. In addition, Baptiste (2009) found that senior managers could be resistant to participating in fun as such endeavors would “encroach on their already busy schedules” when confronted with work overload and other job stressors (p. 609). Furthermore, Redman and Mathews (2002), Fleming (2005), Fleming and Sturdy (2009), and Warren and Fineman (2007) detailed mixed results for different organizationally sponsored fun initiatives



that encompassed elements such as social events, play, and freedom for personal expression. While some employees enjoyed and appreciated these initiatives, other employees were resistant and skeptical. For example, Fleming (2005) found that many employees disliked company-sponsored fun, considering it inauthentic and fake. Furthermore, Fleming and Sturdy (2009) found that some employees were resistant to participation in outside social activities, feigned interest in company fun, and hid their true identities when personal expression was encouraged. While fun could be beneficial, these diverse studies highlight that implementing fun in the workplace is not as straightforward as popular press publications suggest.

### **The present study**

The present study extends research on workplace fun in several ways. This research will examine the impact of fun on turnover, drawing on job embeddedness theory which posits that relationships are a key factor enmeshing individuals in organizations (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mossholder et al. (2005) drew on job embeddedness theory to demonstrate that social networks influence turnover, yet they did not address the formation of such networks. Allen (2006) and Allen and Shanock (2013) described tactics that organizations use to aid newcomers in developing relationships. However, they did not address the possibility that fun could play a role. We extend these relational perspectives by incorporating the fun literature to demonstrate additional ways organizations can help embed its members. Along the same lines, this research will examine constituent attachment as a mediator in the fun-turnover relationship. Our contention is that fun will largely impact turnover through the development of high quality relationships, and thus constituent attachment may be a key process variable through which fun influences employees' decisions to remain with or leave an organization. Finally, this study will

examine different forms of fun as discrete predictors of turnover. McDowell (2004) and Fluegge (2008) conceptualized fun as multi-dimensional, yet they analyzed fun as an overall construct. The qualitative research reviewed above suggests that not all fun is equal, and additional research is warranted that further examines this notion. These issues will be addressed in the context of entry-level employees in the hospitality industry where fun may be highly valued.

The present study will address elements of fun that specifically relate to the social experience of work. Specifically, three interrelated constructs are the focus of this research—*fun activities*, *coworker socializing*, and *manager support for fun*. Fun activities include a variety of social and group activities initiated by the organization intended to promote enjoyment among employees. While a wide variety of activities may be subsumed under this umbrella, the present study will assess the impact of more mainstream activities that are generally perceived favorably, such as social events, team building activities, and public celebrations of achievements and personal milestones (Ford et al., 2003; Karl et al., 2005). Coworker socializing is characterized as coworkers being friendly, outgoing, and social. Coworker socializing is examined because coworkers are central to most employees' experiences on the job (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). Manager support for fun is conceptualized as the extent to which managers allow and encourage employees to have fun on the job. Manager support for fun is similar to McDowell's (2008) personal freedoms construct in that it relates to the opportunity the organization affords employees to have fun. We focus specifically on manager support to provide a sharper focus on the potential source of fun and because managers are actively involved in supervising entry-level employees.

Fun activities, manager support for fun, and coworker socializing are similar, yet distinct, constructs. These elements of fun are all intended to produce enjoyment among employees,

foster cohesive relationships, and embed individuals in the organization. However, these elements may be contrasted by level of formality. Fun activities are likely the most formal and “manufactured,” as by definition they are organized and sponsored by the organization. By contrast, coworker socializing is more informal, often initiated by coworkers themselves, and more volitional. Manager support for fun lies somewhere in the middle. As managers supervise employees, manager support for fun could be considered formal. At the same time, manager support for fun is a means of affording freedom to have fun that may promote informal and serendipitous fun among employees. These elements of fun may occur simultaneously or not. For example, coworkers may socialize while engaged in fun activities supported by a manager, yet coworker socializing may occur independently as well. Furthermore, fun activities could be enthusiastically supported by a manager, while at other times, there may be little or no demonstrated support. Although fun activities, manager support for fun, and coworker socializing are related, these dimensions of fun are not rigidly linked. As such, value is to be gained by focusing on these dimensions as discrete constructs.

Theoretically, these three dimensions can be subsumed within the framework of factors that impact the social experience of work. With respect to traditional job design, Grant (2007) defines the social characteristics of work as the structural features of jobs that influence employees’ interpersonal interactions and relationships. Jobs with enriched social characteristics provide opportunities to work and interact with other people, develop friendships, and exchange support (Grant and Parker, 2009), which in turn have favorable outcomes. A wide body of research supports this argument that the social characteristics of work are important. Humphrey et al.’s (2007) meta-analysis of 259 studies highlights that social characteristics explained unique variance in turnover intentions, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance.

Extending these findings, fun in the workplace may also influence favorable workplace outcomes as well.

Qualitative research findings highlight that workplace fun is important and valued more in some employment contexts than others. The fundamental premise of this research is that fun is especially relevant in the context of the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry is typically thought of as a fun and social industry, and individuals may want to work in hospitality because it is fun and dynamic. Not all hospitality environments are equally fun, however. To the extent that employee needs and expectations are met with respect to fun, employees may be more or less likely to remain with their place of employment. While job responsibilities and compensation levels may be highly similar across hospitality establishments (Andersson et al., 2005; Steel, 2004), fun may be less so, thereby potentially promoting retention.

In one respect, fun may be important in the context of the hospitality industry because fun may compensate for other less desirable aspects of work. Entry-level employees in the hospitality industry often perform routine tasks, are paid relatively low wages with few benefits, are afforded few opportunities for advancement, and work shifts that are frequently erratic and irregular (Brown et al., 2006; DiPietro and Milman, 2004; Hinkin and Tracey, 2000; Leidner, 1993; Maxwell, 2008). To the extent it can be promoted, fun may serve as a counterweight to these conditions and enhance the quality and meaningfulness of the work experience, in effect increasing perceived inducements according to March and Simon's (1958) widely used model of organizational participation. Drawing on Bolton's (2004) arguments, fun could also reduce the emotional labor associated with service work. It is well documented that employees often experience emotional exhaustion and burnout from the emotional labor inherent in serving customers (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Glomb and Tews, 2004; Hochschild, 1983; Morris

and Feldman, 1996). Fun in the workplace, however, may alleviate emotional exhaustion and burnout whereby employees can take time off task and recharge (Sonnentag, 2003).

Fun is also thought to be relevant in a hospitality context because employees are disproportionately younger than in other industries (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Younger individuals in general may value fun. Bolton and Houlihan (2009) noted that fun companies are typically more youthful companies with employees who are typically under the age of 35 years old (Bolton, 2006; Gordon, 1993; Woudhuyesen, 2001). Fun may also be particularly important for younger workers today, the Millennials, the cohort of individuals born in 1980 onwards (Lamm and Meeks, 2009; Parker and Chusmir, 1990; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Such individuals grew up in a period of relative prosperity and have experienced relatively comfortable lifestyles (Raines, 2003). In an employment context, Millennials desire to balance play with work, freedom, and social involvement (Carless and Wintle, 2007; Cennamo and Gardner, 2008; Dries et al., 2008; Loughlin and Barling, 2001; Smola and Sutton, 2002). In fact, Lamm and Meeks (2009) found that fun exhibited a stronger relationship with job satisfaction and performance with Millennials than with Generation Xers, the preceding generational cohort.

Similarly, fun is argued to be important among these employees because it may lead to the development of friendships. With respect to turnover, Mossholder et al. (2005) argued that solid interpersonal relationships “enmesh individuals within a relational web, making them less susceptible to forces that could dislodge them” (p. 608) and demonstrated that having a broader social network on the job is central to reducing turnover. Friendships are especially important among younger individuals who value developing new relationships beyond the traditional family context (Erikson, 1968; Tokuno, 1986). Friendships at work may provide a source of social contact, intimacy, and support with establishing an adult identity. In addition to being

valued by younger individuals, friendships are thought to be important in a hospitality context given the social intensity of the work environment, where quantity and frequency of social interactions are high. When the work is high in social intensity, coworkers have been demonstrated to have a greater influence on employees (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). The work for entry-level hospitality employees is socially intense because employees typically work alongside one another with duties that require regular interaction. Workspaces are often undefined, making it difficult to avoid interpersonal contact. To quote Schneider (1987), “people make the place,” and particularly so in entry-level hospitality work because of the numerous constituents with whom one works.

Fun activities, coworker socializing, and manager support for fun put employees in contact with each other, and such contact is a necessary precursor to the development of friendships. More importantly, individuals can interact with another more informally through these avenues and get to know each other beyond the traditional confines of their job roles. Coworker socializing, by its very definition, relates to enhanced friendly communication and camaraderie among peers. With respect to fun activities, they may provide an architecture for individuals to connect with each other on a more meaningful basis, often in a non-task context. Barsoux (1993) argues that such activities are an essential part of humanizing organizations. Finally, manager support for fun could facilitate a more relaxed business attitude in general where individuals may be more apt to interact in a friendly manner without fear of negative repercussions. When there is fun on the job, work is not merely about task and goal accomplishment, but also about relationships that may enhance organizational embeddedness.

Fun in the workplace may meet entry-level hospitality employees’ needs and values in several respects, and therefore, fun may have a significant impact on turnover. Certainly one of

the primary reasons why individuals work is for the compensation that a paycheck provides. That said, individuals work for more than just a paycheck and seek intrinsic satisfaction, enjoyment in their work, and quality relationships with others (Grant and Parker, 2009). Given the vast amount of time spent on the job, clearly individuals would prefer the experience to be enjoyable and to have fun. Based on these arguments, fun is hypothesized to have a negative relationship with employee turnover.

*Hypothesis 1a* Fun activities will be negatively related to turnover.

*Hypothesis 1b*: Coworker socializing will be negatively related to turnover.

*Hypothesis 1c*: Manager support for fun will be negatively related to turnover.

Drawing on the previous discussion, we believe that fun will largely impact employee turnover through the development of relationships, which we examine in terms of constituent attachment. Specifically, constituent attachment reflects an employee's attachment to key constituents in the workplace such as coworkers (Maertz and Griffeth, 2004). Such attachment has been argued to be a key factor that embeds employees in the organization and reduces turnover (Maertz and Griffeth, 2004). As argued above, fun may lead to the development of friendships on the job and thereby enhance one's level of constituent attachment. Therefore, constituent attachment is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between fun and turnover. Assessing constituent attachment as a mediator in the fun-turnover relationship will not only serve to help explain how fun impacts turnover, but also to assess the extent to which friends and attachment to others in the workplace influence individual decisions to remain with or leave an organization. We recognized that fun may also influence turnover in other ways such as through

greater levels of affective organizational commitment and lower levels of job stress. Nonetheless, we propose that constituent attachment is a key mediator in the fun-turnover relationship.

*Hypothesis 2a:* The relationship between fun activities and turnover will be mediated by constituent attachment.

*Hypothesis 2b:* The relationship between coworker socializing and turnover will be mediated by constituent attachment.

*Hypothesis 2c:* The relationship between manager support for fun and turnover will be mediated by constituent attachment.

A final issue to be examined is whether some dimensions of fun have stronger relationships with constituent attachment and turnover. While we argue that each of the three forms of fun is important, coworker socializing and manager support for fun may be more so. In one respect, fun activities may be less important because they are less frequent and do not permeate the day-to-day experiences for employees. Coworkers and managers are constant features in an employee's work life. As such, these individuals have a greater opportunity to impact the quality of one's experiences on the job than fun activities. In another respect, fun activities may be less valued because they are more formal and manufactured. Warren and Fineman (2007) illustrated that to the extent it is manufactured, fun may be met with ambivalence. Because they are larger and more public endeavors, employees may feel less free to be their authentic selves participating in fun activities. In contrast, as they are more informal and organic, coworker socializing and manager support for fun are believed to be more impactful. In fact, Stromberg and Karlsson (2009) suggested that informal, organic fun is



particularly valuable in organizations and argued that in spite of attention directed toward formal fun, organizations should not lose sight of organic fun and humor. Coworker socializing and manager support for fun are therefore argued to have a stronger impact on constituent attachment and turnover than fun activities.

*Hypothesis 3:* Coworker socializing will have a stronger relationship with constituent attachment and turnover than will fun activities.

*Hypothesis 4:* Manager support for fun will have a stronger relationship with constituent attachment and turnover than will fun activities.

## **Method**

### *Sample and procedure*

The sample for this research includes 296 servers from a casual dining restaurant chain in the U.S. The employees were from 20 restaurants, which encompass one of the company's regional districts. The sample was 65% female and 61% Caucasian. The average age was 27 years old. The average organizational tenure at the beginning of the study was 2.58 years. Data were obtained on fun and constituent attachment through employee surveys. Seven hundred twenty-five servers were initially invited to participate in the study. The employees received a packet containing the survey itself, information about the study, and an assurance of confidentiality. Employees completed the surveys during work time. Of the 725 surveys distributed, 305 were returned with useable data, yielding an initial participation rate of 43%. Turnover data were obtained six months following survey administration from organizational records and then matched with the survey responses. Nine participants of the initial 305 were

excluded from the study as they were terminated, resulting in the final sample of 296.

### *Measures*

All measures used a five-point response scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, unless otherwise noted.

*Fun activities.* This scale was comprised of five activities based on the work of Ford et al. (2003). The scale was refined through discussions with the organization's Vice President of Human Resources to ensure that the activities and corresponding item wording were appropriate for the organizational context. The five activities included: 1) social events (e.g., holiday parties and picnics); 2) team building activities (e.g., company-sponsored athletic teams and bowling nights); 3) competitions (e.g., team sales and productivity contests); 4) public celebrations of work achievements (e.g., public recognition for outstanding results); and 5) recognition of personal milestones (e.g., public recognition of birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries of employment). The employees indicated how frequently each activity occurred with a five-point scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *all the time*. ( $\alpha = .76$ )

*Coworker socializing.* The four-item coworker socializing scale was based on McDowell's (2004) measure. Sample items included: *My coworkers and I socialize outside of work* and *My coworkers and I joke around with each other*. ( $\alpha = .83$ )

*Manager support for fun.* Five items were used to measure manager support for fun. These items were based on the perceived supervisor support measure developed by Shanock and Eisenberger

(2006) and adapted to reflect support for having fun in the workplace. Sample items included:

*My managers care about employees having fun on the job* and *My managers allow employees to play around on the job.* ( $\alpha = .92$ )

The three fun constructs were examined at the individual level of analysis as opposed to the group level. Theoretically, examining these constructs at the individual level was appropriate as the employees in our sample did not work the same shifts or the same number of hours from week to week, and they worked with different managers and coworkers on any given shift, which is common in high volume restaurant settings with a large number of employees and shift managers. As such, the level of experienced fun was believed to vary from employee to employee. Inter-class correlations [i.e., ICC(1) and ICC(2)] were to examined to justification variables as individual-level phenomena. The ICC(1) indicates the amount of variance explained by group membership, and the ICC(2) is an assessment of interrater reliability among participants within each unit compared to those participants between units. Although the  $F$  tests for each of the predictors were significant, the ICC values were all below values typically considered acceptable in organizational research (Bliese, 2000). The specific values are as follows: fun activities— $F_{(19, 276)} = 2.67, p < .01, ICC(1) = .10, ICC(2) = .63$ ; coworker socializing— $F_{(19, 276)} = 1.89, p < .05, ICC(1) = .06, ICC(2) = .47$ ; and manager support for fun— $F_{(19, 276)} = 2.24, p < .05, ICC(1) = .08, ICC(2) = .55$ . Given that these findings do not provide support for restaurant-level aggregation, these three variables were examined at the individual level.

*Constituent attachment.* Constituent attachment was measured with five items based on the work of Maertz and Campion (2004). Sample items included: *I enjoy working at [company name]*

*because of the people I work with and I would lose valuable friendships if I quit at [company name].* ( $\alpha = .82$ )

*Voluntary turnover.* Six months was the time frame used to examine turnover. Six months, as opposed to a longer time, was used for two reasons. Six months was employed because annual turnover rates in the hospitality industry are very high. This time frame was also used because employee perceptions of fun may change over time. The longer the time frame, the less predictive a perceptual variable measured at one point in time becomes (Mossholder et al., 2005). Voluntary turnover was coded dichotomously as 1 for leavers and 0 for stayers. As discussed above, of the 305 respondents who completed surveys at the beginning of the study, nine cases were not used because their turnover was involuntary. For the final sample of 296 employees, 87 employees were leavers, and 209 were stayers.

*Control variables.* Employee age, gender, and pre-study tenure were used as control variables as they have been found to relate to turnover in previous research (Griffeth et al., 2000; Mossholder et al., 2005). Ethnicity was also included as a control as some have suggested that minorities are more likely to leave than non-minorities (Hom and Griffeth, 1995). Gender was coded 1 for male and 0 for female. Ethnicity was coded 1 for Caucasian and 0 for “others”.

#### *Discriminant validity*

Results from a confirmatory factor analysis provide support for the discriminant validity of the three fun and constituent attachment survey measures. A four-factor model in which the items loaded on their respective constructs was assessed using *Mplus* 6 with the sample

covariance matrix as input and a maximum likelihood solution (Muthén and Muthén, 2010). Although the model possessed a statistically significant chi-square statistic [ $\chi^2(144, N = 296) = 266.22, p < .01$ ], the individual fit indices provided adequate support for the four-factor model (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Specifically, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .96, the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was .95, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was .05 (90% confidence interval ranging from .04 to .06), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was .06. In addition, the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio was less than 2.0, suggesting good overall model fit (Byrne, 1989). Table 1 presents the factor loadings of the scale items, where all items loaded .40 or higher on their respective constructs. Table 2 presents the correlations among the factors which ranged from .18 to .63. Discriminant validity was further established with pair-wise chi-square difference tests between a two-factor model and a general factor model for all possible combinations of latent variables (Bagozzi and Phillips, 1982). In each pair-wise analysis, the general factor model possessed significantly worse model fit.

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#### *Analytic strategy*

Random coefficient modeling (RCM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. RCM was used because the study participants were nested within restaurants, whereby an assumption of independence may not hold. The ICC(1) estimate for the null model for turnover was .06,  $F_{(19, 276)} = -0.88, p < .01$ , indicating that 6% of the total variance in turnover could be explained by restaurant. Because we hypothesized a mediation model, the ICC(1) for constituent attachment was also estimated. The ICC(1) estimate for the null model for constituent attachment

was .08,  $F_{(19, 276)} = 3.40, p < .01$ , indicating that 8% of the total variance in constituent attachment could be explained by restaurant. As these effects were significant, RCM was appropriate for testing our hypotheses. RCM partitions the total variance into within-group and between-group components, thereby controlling for non-independence (Bliese and Hanges, 2004). The analyses were calculated using the open-source platform R and the nonlinear and linear mixed effects (NLME) package for R and S-Plus (Pinheiro and Bates 2000). The generalized linear mixed model with normal random effects using the penalized quasi-likelihood function was used to assess the impact of fun on turnover, a dichotomous variable. The linear mixed-effects model was used to assess the impact of fun on the constituent attachment mediator, a continuous variable. In each model, the dependent variable was regressed on the control variables, fun activities, coworker socializing, and manager support for fun.

To test the proposed mediating relationships, separate equations with one independent variable, constituent attachment, and turnover were estimated. Support for mediation was examined following Kenny et al.'s (1998) three criteria for testing indirect effects. One, the independent variable is related to the mediator. Two, the mediator is related to the dependent variable, controlling for the independent variable. Three, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable becomes non-significant (complete mediation) or significantly lower (partial mediation), controlling for the mediator. Furthermore, the significance of the indirect effects was assessed using the z-prime version of the Sobel test outlined in MacKinnon et al. (2002).

Differences in effect sizes for the dimensions of fun were examined as follows. If two coefficients were non-significant, the coefficients were deemed to be equivalent because they were not different from zero. In the case where one coefficient was significant and one was not,

the significant coefficient was deemed to be larger because this coefficient was different from zero. Finally, when both coefficients were significant, Paternoster et al.'s (1998) formula for testing the equality of regression coefficients was employed to determine if one coefficient was significantly larger.

## Results

Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics and partial correlations among the study variables. Partial correlations were computed controlling for restaurant location. Table 4 displays the direct effects of the dimensions of fun on turnover. The model explained 24% of the variance. Table 5 presents the results of the mediation analyses.

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 Insert Tables 3, 4, and 5 about here  
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*Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c*, which proposed that fun activities, coworker socializing, and manager support for fun would be negatively related to turnover, were partially supported. Both coworker socializing ( $b = -.33, p < .05$ ) and manager support for fun ( $b = -.30, p < .05$ ) were significant and negatively related to turnover. However, fun activities were not ( $b = .12, p > .10$ ).

*Hypothesis 2a*, which proposed that constituent attachment would mediate the relationship between fun activities and turnover, was supported. Fun activities were significantly related to constituent attachment ( $b = .37, p < .01$ ), supporting step 1, and constituent attachment was significantly related to turnover after controlling for fun activities ( $b = -.58, p < .01$ ), supporting step 2. After controlling for constituent attachment, the fun activities-turnover relationship was non-significant ( $b = -.09, p > .10$ ), and the Sobel test was significant ( $z' = -2.54$ ,

$p < .01$ ), providing support for complete mediation. Although fun activities were not demonstrated to have a direct relationship with turnover (*Hypothesis 1a*), they were found to have an indirect relationship through constituent attachment.

*Hypothesis 2b*, which proposed that constituent attachment would mediate the relationship between coworker socializing and turnover, was supported. In step 1, coworker socializing was significantly related to constituent attachment ( $b = .48, p < .01$ ). In step 2, constituent attachment was significantly related to turnover ( $b = -.42, p < .01$ ). In step 3, coworker socializing was not significantly related to turnover ( $b = -.23, p > .10$ ), and the Sobel test was significant ( $z' = -1.87, p < .05$ ), providing support for complete mediation.

*Hypothesis 2c*, which proposed that constituent attachment would mediate the relationship between manager support for fun and turnover, was also supported. In step 1, manager support for fun was significantly related to constituent attachment ( $b = .33, p < .01$ ). In step 2, constituent attachment was significantly related to turnover ( $b = -.43, p < .05$ ). In step 3, coworker socializing was not significantly related to turnover ( $b = -.23, p > .10$ ), and the Sobel test was significant ( $z' = -1.99, p < .05$ ), providing support for complete mediation.

*Hypothesis 3*, which proposed that coworker socializing would have a stronger relationship with constituent attachment and turnover than fun activities, was supported. The relationship between coworker socializing and constituent attachment ( $b = .48, p < .01$ ) was deemed to be significantly larger than the relationship between fun activities and constituent attachment ( $b = .37, p < .01$ ), as demonstrated by Paternoster et al.'s (1998) formula for testing the equality of regression coefficients ( $t = 1.41, p < .10$ ). Furthermore, coworker socializing was deemed to have a stronger relationship with turnover than fun activities because coworker socializing was a significant predictor of turnover (different from zero), whereas fun activities



was not (not different from zero).

*Hypothesis 4*, which proposed that manager support for fun would have a stronger relationship with constituent attachment and turnover than fun activities, was partially supported. Manager support for fun was deemed to have a stronger relationship with turnover than fun activities because manager support for fun was a significant predictor (different from zero), whereas fun activities was not (not different from zero). However, manager support for fun did not have a stronger relationship with constituent attachment. The effect size for the relationship between manager support for fun and constituent attachment ( $b = .33, p < .01$ ) was smaller than the effect size for the relationship between fun activities and constituent attachment ( $b = .37, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, there was no significant difference between the coefficients ( $t = .55, p > .10$ ).

## **Discussion**

No play? No stay? This study has illustrated that the answer to this question is yes and has contributed to the growing body of research on fun in the workplace in three primary ways. First, this research demonstrated that fun is significantly related to employee turnover, serving to further validate claims in the popular management press that fun has a beneficial impact on individuals and organizations. Second, this research highlighted that only some forms of fun relate directly to employee turnover. These results signal the importance of focusing on the component parts of workplace fun, rather than treating fun as a single construct as has been done in other research (Fluegge, 2008; McDowell, 2004). Third, this research demonstrated that constituent attachment is a key mediator in the fun-turnover relationship. In doing so, the present study has helped to answer how and why fun impacts the turnover process.

This study has also contributed to broader turnover literature by demonstrating that fun is a significant predictor of turnover in the hospitality industry. Scholars have argued that greater

attention be paid to the context in which turnover and retention is studied (Holtom et al., 2008). It was argued that fun would be relevant in curbing turnover among entry-level employees in the hospitality industry in two key ways. On one front, fun would compensate for terms and conditions of employment that may not necessarily be favorable in the hospitality industry, such as limited pay and benefits and opportunities for advancement. That is, fun would enhance the work environment. On another front, fun would be especially valued by younger individuals, who represent a large proportion of individuals employed in this sector of the economy. Our sample was, in fact, relatively young with an average age of 27 years old. Notwithstanding the potential relevance of fun in other contexts, the current findings suggest that fun is relevant in hospitality and may serve as one potential antidote to this industry's perennial turnover challenge.

Of the three forms of fun examined in this research, coworker socializing and manager support for fun were found to have direct relationships with turnover. Thus, entry-level employees in the hospitality industry appear to particularly value coworkers who are friendly, outgoing, and who socialize with one another and managers who allow and encourage fun on the job. Coworker socializing and manager support for fun are more informal aspects of workplace fun vis-à-vis fun activities, and they may have been particularly important because employees and managers in the hospitality industry regularly work alongside each other with job duties that involve constant interactions. Fun relating to coworkers and managers may have largely defined employees' experiences on the job and contributed to decisions whether one remained employed with the organization. In line with previous qualitative studies (e.g., Stromberg and Karlsson, 2009), our findings highlight that scholars and practitioners should pay focused attention to these more informal forms of fun and not just formal activities as may often be the case.

The present study has also made progress toward specifying how fun impacts employee turnover by demonstrating that constituent attachment operates as a mediator in the fun-turnover relationship. The results herein support our premise that fun can enhance the social experience of work, which leads to higher quality relationships and retention. Thus, a central vehicle through which fun reduces turnover is by facilitating opportunities for employees to get to know one another and develop friendships at work. Our findings support previous arguments that young adults, who dominate the hospitality labor force, particularly value the establishment of friendships through work (Erikson, 1968; Tokuno, 1986). On the whole, our results support the view that fun is instrumental in strengthening constituent attachment and are consistent with the relational perspective of turnover that high quality relationships embed individuals within organizations (Allen, 2006; Allen and Shanock, 2013; Mossholder et al., 2005). We are not suggesting that fun in the workplace is the only means to facilitate friendships and constituent attachment, but rather one potential viable strategy.

While fun activities were not a significant direct predictor of turnover, they were positively related to constituent attachment, which in turn, was significantly related. That fun activities were only indirectly related to turnover though constituent attachment indicates such activities have a more diffuse impact on individuals' decisions to remain with or leave the organization. The positive relationship between fun activities and constituent attachment is of note given the debate in the literature regarding the value of fun activities. Our findings suggest that employees are not necessarily resistant to fun activities, as suggested by others (Fleming 2005; Redman and Mathews, 2002). Rather, they may lead to bonding among employees and the formation of friendships. Fun activities are not necessarily valuable in all contexts, but may particularly be so in entry-level jobs with a relatively young workforce.

Even though there was a positive relationship between fun activities and constituent attachment, such activities most likely did not have universal appeal among all employees. Future research should focus on answering what specifically motivates an individual to participate in a given activity and enjoy such participation. For example, it may be that job pressures, such as work overload and work-family conflict, are negatively related to participation in fun activities. Furthermore, participation in these endeavors may be more enjoyable when participation is voluntary rather than mandatory, when an employee likes and shares common interests with his or her peers, and when activities are more informal whereby an individual can be his or her authentic self. When these conditions are met, fun activities may be more akin to leisure and perceived less as formal work obligations to endure.

The practical implication of this research is that incorporating fun into the workplace is a potentially viable strategy to enhance retention. Given the importance of coworker socializing, employees should be appropriately socialized, organizations should facilitate team building efforts, and employees should be selected based on attributes such as personality that may lead to the development of cohesive relationships (Mount et al., 1998). Regarding the importance of manager support for fun, managers should not be “all work and no play” and allow employees to have fun on the job. At the same time, managers should be aware of the potential dangers of workplace fun and ensure that such fun does not translate into playing around whereby productivity and service standards suffer. Thus, managers need to strike the delicate balance between work and play. With respect to fun activities, such endeavors should be strategically implemented and carefully designed to ensure congruence with employees’ needs and interests to help ensure maximum benefit. Overall, it should be emphasized that fun should be aligned with the culture of the organization at hand (Plester, 2009; Warren and Fineman, 2007). A

longstanding corporate value of the restaurant chain studied in this research is “creating a fun environment for guests and employees,” which may have been a contributing factor to the significant results demonstrated herein. What may be fun in one context could be less valued and met with resistance in another.

Our results should be interpreted in the context of two primary limitations. First, the data were collected from one employee group in one organization. While the results are meaningful, future research should assess the impact of fun on turnover in other contexts to substantiate the generalizability of the results herein. In particular, research is warranted to determine where else fun may matter and where it may not be relevant. For example, to what extent does the importance of fun generalize to other industries or more professional occupations? Furthermore, is fun less important for older workers, or is fun valid irrespective of age? A second limitation is that the data on fun were only obtained through self-report survey measures. A valuable extension of the current study work would be to conduct field experiments where fun is experimentally manipulated. Such interventions could focus on manager support for fun, for example, where managers adopt a more causal business attitude, encourage employees to socialize, and allow employees to have fun on the job. This research would further substantiate cause and effect relationships and provide further guidance for applied practice.

Other avenues of research are also worth pursuing. One opportunity is examining the influence of fun relative to other constructs in reducing turnover. For example, research is warranted that simultaneously examines the impact of fun with perceived organizational support and instrumental and emotional support from supervisors and coworkers to place fun in the larger nomological net of workplace support. Similarly, fun should be examined with other potentially relevant constructs, such as work-life balance, work overload, job characteristics, and

opportunities for advancement. While the present study has demonstrated that fun may be important, additional work is needed to establish its relative importance and incremental validity. Another opportunity is to examine the impact of fun on turnover and performance in a single study. They present research has demonstrated that fun curbs turnover, yet research is warranted to test whether fun may or may not detract from other important outcomes at the same time. It may be that fun detracts from productivity, or fun may enhance performance. Finally, research should further examine the relationship between coworker socializing and constituent attachment. It was hypothesized that socializing would enhance attachment, as socializing is a precursor for employees to develop cohesive relationships. At the same time, the relationship is likely bi-directional whereby greater attachment also promotes socialization. It would thus be useful to examine the relationship between these variables longitudinally over time.

Fun in the workplace has long been believed to have beneficial outcomes for individuals and organizations. The growing body of research has validated that fun does in fact matter in promoting healthy workplaces and is not merely a management fad. The present study has contributed to this body of work by demonstrating that fun is instrumental in reducing turnover among entry-level employees. Moreover, this research demonstrated that not all fun is equal in reducing turnover, suggesting that consideration be paid to the form it takes. Despite its limitations, the present study is a step toward obtaining a sharper focus on how workplace fun shapes individuals' experiences on the job and decisions to remain with or leave an organization.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> McFadden's Pseudo  $R^2$  was calculated to estimate the percentage of variance explained.

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**Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis item loadings**

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	Fun activities	Coworker socializing	Manager support for fun	Constituent attachment
<b>Fun activities</b>						
Public celebrations of work achievements	1.89	.99	.72			
Team building activities	1.96	1.01	.70			
Recognition of personal milestones	2.38	1.12	.67			
Social events	2.39	1.07	.63			
Competitions	3.45	.99	.40			
<b>Coworker socializing</b>						
My coworkers and I share stories with each other	3.78	.99		.87		
My coworkers and I joke around with each other	4.13	.92		.79		
My coworkers and I socialize at work	3.95	.87		.69		
My coworkers and I socialize outside of work	3.19	1.15		.66		
<b>Manager support for fun</b>						
My managers encourage employees to have fun on the job	3.15	1.13			.92	
My managers emphasize employee fun in the workplace	3.06	1.08			.91	
My managers try to make my work fun	3.07	1.08			.90	
My managers care about employees having fun on the job	2.90	1.13			.89	
My managers allow employees to play around on the job	2.39	1.13			.56	
<b>Constituent attachment</b>						
I want to continue working with my coworkers here	3.72	.89				.83
I want to continue to work here because I like my coworkers	3.70	.95				.81
I enjoy working at [company name] because of the people I work with	3.82	.96				.78
I would lose valuable working relationships with the people here if I quit	2.99	1.13				.48
I would lose valuable friendships if I quit [company name]	2.86	1.17				.43

*Note.*  $n = 296$ . Factor loadings are standardized estimates.

**Table 2. Factor intercorelations from confirmatory factor analysis**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Fun activities	2.41	.74	—			
2. Coworker socializing	3.76	.80	.18	—		
3. Manager support for fun	2.91	.96	.50	.37	—	
4. Constituent attachment	3.42	.78	.33	.63	.48	—

Note:  $n = 296$ . All correlations were significant at the .01 level.

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics and partial correlations controlling for restaurants**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Previous tenure	2.58	3.42	—								
2. Age	27.16	7.79	.48**	—							
3. Gender	.65	.48	.02	.00	—						
4. Ethnicity	.61	.49	.06	.05	.03	—					
5. Coworker socializing	3.76	.80	-.10*	-.20**	.01	.08	—				
6. Fun activities	2.41	.74	-.01	.00	-.01	-.06	.21**	—			
7. Manager support for fun	2.91	.96	.01	.03	-.09	.02	.34**	.43**	—		
8. Constituent Attachment	3.42	.78	-.07	-.04	.11*	.09	.49**	.35**	.39**	—	
9. Turnover <sup>a</sup>	0.29	.46	-.21**	-.18**	-.09	.04	-.11*	-.05	-.15*	-.16**	—

Note.  $n = 296$ . Gender: male = 0 and female = 1. Ethnicity: other = 0 and Caucasian = 1. Turnover: 0 = stayer and 1 = leaver.

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

<sup>a</sup>Correlations with turnover are point-biserial.

**Table 4. RCM predicting voluntary turnover**

Variable	<i>b</i>	SE <sub><i>b</i></sub>	t-value
Pre-study tenure	-.23**	.08	-2.75
Age	-.04	.02	-1.62
Gender	-.43	.30	-1.46
Ethnicity	.52*	.31	1.71
Fun activities	-.12	.22	0.54
Coworker socializing	-.33*	.20	-1.67
Manager support for fun	-.30*	.17	-1.74
<i>Pseudo R</i> <sup>2a</sup>		.24	

*Note.*  $n = 296$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Gender: male = 0 and female = 1. Ethnicity: other = 0 and Caucasian = 1.

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 5. RCM analyses with constituent attachment mediator**

Variable	<i>b</i>	SE <sub><i>b</i></sub>	t/z	Sobel
Previous tenure	-.23**	.09	-2.71	
Age	-.03	.02	-1.30	
Gender	-.46	.31	-1.52	
Ethnicity	.45	.31	1.45	
<b>Model 1—Mediation of Fun Activities and Turnover Relationship</b>				
Step 1 Fun activities to constituent attachment	.37**	.06	6.43	
Step 2 Constituent attachment to turnover (controlling for fun activities)	-.58**	.21	-2.77	
Step 3 Fun activities to turnover (controlling for constituent attachment)	-.09	.22	0.42	-2.54**
<b>Model 2—Mediation of coworker socializing and turnover relationship</b>				
Step 1 Coworker socializing to constituent attachment	.48**	.05	9.66	
Step 2 Constituent attachment to turnover (controlling for coworker socializing)	-.42**	.22	-1.97	
Step 3 Coworker socializing to turnover (controlling for constituent attachment)	-.23	.21	-1.18	-1.87*
<b>Model 3—Mediation of manager support and turnover relationship</b>				
Step 1 Manager support to constituent attachment	.33**	.04	7.73	
Step 2 Constituent attachment to turnover (controlling for manager support)	-.43*	.21	-2.01	
Step 3 Manager support to turnover (controlling for constituent attachment)	-.23	.17	-1.36	-1.99*

*Note.*  $n = 296$ . Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$