The Effects of Positive Writing on Reported Stress and Job Performance:

1. Approximately 30 participants will be recruited from a local restaurant. All participants will be servers (waiters/waitresses) between the ages of 18 to 35 years of age (mean age 24). Approximately half of the potential participants are female and half are male. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants include African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander. None of the potential participants qualify as belonging to a special class (pregnant women, children, prisoners, etc…). Due to the nature of their job (lifting objects, handling food, communicating with guests), it can be concluded that the participants do not suffer from debilitating physical and/or mental illness.

2. After obtaining permission from the proprietor of the restaurant, I will recruit potential participants as each one enters for his or her shift over a period of one week. They will be briefly informed of the research project and then given a more detailed consent form if they are interested in participating. Potential participants will be informed that the goal of the research is to discover if writing has any affect on stress levels. They will be informed that levels of stress will be assessed using their responses to a questionnaire. In order to prevent bias within the research, participants will not be informed of job performance measures. Job performance measures will be disclosed at the end of the study.

3. The initial instructions will be given individually as participants are informed of the study. All participants will meet at the Outback Steakhouse at a given time for instructions and baseline assessment. Stress assessment will be taken a second time upon completion of the study. Work stress will be assessed using the Work Stress Inventory (WSI). Participants will be informed that the experiment is to assess the effect of writing on measures of work related stress. They will be informed that stress will be measured using a self-report questionnaire. Job performance will be assessed by tracking sales of seasonal specials. Sales are automatically tracked on a daily basis (although the information is not usually presented to the individual outside of special circumstances or upon request). Participants will not be informed of job performance information in order to avoid potential bias.

After participants have completed the necessary forms and assessment, they will be randomly assigned to either the test group (Positive Writing Group) or the control group (Neutral Writing Group). The following instructions for the writing task will be given to each person and read aloud.

***Positive Writing Group (Group A):*** *The writing exercise you will do over the next week is part of research conducted on stress management. Writing about positive events may help to reduce perceived and/or actual stress. During the following week you will be asked to arrive to work 15 to 20 minutes early. You will be asked to write about the most positive experience you can remember. Describe what occurred and explain in detail your deepest thoughts and feelings about the experience. You can write about anything you want, just be sure that the experience you choose is something that has had a deep, positive emotional impact. Please write for only about 10 to 20 minutes before each shift. You can write about a different positive experience each day or you can continue to write about the same experience. When you write, do not worry about spelling, grammar, or sentence structure­­­—these will not be important. Writing will begin on the first day you are scheduled to work next week and will be completed after your work week is over. You will be asked to write everyday you are scheduled for that week. At the end of the week you will be asked to take a final questionnaire at which time you will receive a ticket that will qualify you to win 1 of 6 $25 gift cards.*

***Neutral Writing Group (Group B):*** *The writing exercise you will do over the next week is part of research conducted on stress management. Organized thinking may help to reduce perceived and/or actual stress. During the following week you will be asked to arrive to work 15 to 20 minutes early. You will be asked to describe an object or room with as much detail as possible. Before writing, imagine the object as vividly as possible. Try to avoid writing about your concerns, feelings, worries or problems. Please write for only about 10 to 20 minutes before each shift. Do your best to remain as objective as possible when describing the object. When you write, do not worry about spelling, grammar, or sentence structure—these will not be important. Writing will begin on the first day you are scheduled to work next week and will be completed after your work week is over. You will be asked to write everyday you are scheduled for that week. At the end of the week you will be asked to take a final questionnaire at which time you will receive a ticket that will qualify you to win 1 of 6 $25 gift cards.*

The work stress assessment will be re-administered the day after completion of the writing assignment. A copy of the WSI and a brief description of the test are attached with the application

4. There will not be any strenuous physical demands from the participants. Participants will not be asked to perform tasks that differ from their everyday job duties. The only additional task that will be assigned to particpants will be a writing assignment. Writing will not be intensive (10-20 minutes before the start of each shift) so there are no anticipated physical risks. Because writing will include only positive and neutral topics, there should be minimal or no risk of evoking negative emotions from the participants. In addition, participants will not be penalized for tardiness for their shift due to any extra time that may be taken to complete the writing assignment.

5. Although writing on negative topics may pose a potential risk to participants, writing about only positive or neutral events will safeguard participants from any potential harm that may occur. All participants will be guaranteed complete confidentiality. They will be informed that their writings will not be shared with other individuals or released to the public. Participants will be informed that their writings will be collected to determine completion of the assigned writing task but will not be assessed for grammatical error.

6. If writing about positive events leads to a decrease in measured levels of stress, participants have an opportunity to reduce the stress they experience through a convenient and inexpensive method. In addition, this method of stress reduction could be applied to society as a whole in many other professions and through many different cultures. This could help alleviate the damage caused by job stress, and in turn save a significant amount of money companies spend addressing the impact of stress on employees. In addition, if positive writing is linked to an increase in job performance, companies and employees can benefit from utilizing this form of expression. This particular study could open doors for other areas of expression that may be linked to job performance.

7. Participants will be given an opportunity to win 1 of 6 $25 VISA gift cards upon completion of the study.

8. Because the risks are minimal, the benefits to society as well as the participants greatly outweigh any risks that could possibly occur from the study. Discovering a way to reduce stress through positive writing offers an inexpensive outlet that can apply to a wide variety of professions and individuals.

9. Participants will be recruited from the Outback Steakhouse located in south Austin, Texas. The proprietor, Scott Ruka, has given written consent to use this location and his employees for the study. In addition, Mr. Ruka has agreed that employees will not be penalized for tardiness if it should occur due to the study. A copy of the letter to be signed by Mr. Ruka is attached with the application.

10. I am a graduate student seeking to obtain a Master’s Degree in Health Psychology. The current research intends to discover a way to improve mental health and job performance by reducing levels of stress through positive writing. My supervising faculty member is Dr. Alex Nagurney.

11. All members of my committee have read and approved the thesis proposal.

12. The proposed study has not been reviewed/approved by another IRB.

13. Only the chair, Dr. Nagurney, and I will have access to the data used within the study after the study is completed.