ABSTRACT

SOLEBELLO, NICHOLAS PAUL. The Experience, Use, and Negotiation of Formal and Informal Breaks at Work. (Under the direction of Martha Crowley).

Research shows that non-work-related activities on the job are a fundamental component of the workday for many employees. Most employers formally designate time during the workday, e.g., a lunch break, in which employees do not need to work. In addition, employees often carve out informal non-work-related activity time, including momentary pauses in the work cycle, gaps in production and cycles of customers, five minute smoke breaks, or extended attempts to avoid work or hide from management. Management scholars maintain that employees spend a problematic amount of time engaging in non-work-related activities on a daily basis that management struggles to stop. By contrast, sociologists emphasize that employees feel increasingly squeezed for time at work, have little opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities, and often work through formal breaks and at home. When non-work-related activities occur at work, sociologists often classify them as workplace resistance through which employees attempt to reclaim autonomy and dignity by circumventing organizational rules. Thus, sociologists and management scholars coalesce in the views that management and employees have opposing interests regarding non-work-related behavior and that employees actively create opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities.

Drawing on classic sociological insights about manager-employee relations and the day-to-day realities of production, and interview data with employees and managers across a variety of jobs and occupations, my dissertation reexamines many of the assumptions
inherent in research on non-work-related activities. The interviews suggest that managers have highly variable perspectives around non-work-related activities: while some managers actively attempt to prevent employees from going off task, most express a lax attitude “as long as the job gets done,” and a small number actually encourage informal breaks in moderation. Employees describe setting limits on the amount of time they engage in non-work-related behaviors and offer that they abstain from non-work behaviors altogether when their participation could burden coworkers. Employees explain that they engage in non-work-related activities mainly at times when they have little if any work to complete, specifically during downtime when few pressing organizational tasks (e.g., deadlines, influxes of customers) require attention. My analysis of the findings produces a typology outlining the psychological, interpersonal, organizational, and job-related factors influencing employee opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities on the job. The identification of this typology expands understanding of non-work-related activities and helps make sense of how overwork and non-work coincide in today’s society.
The Experience, Use, and Negotiation of Formal and Informal Breaks at Work

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Sociology

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DEDICATION

To my friends who, probably without realizing it, helped pick me back up after I fell down. And to Hillary for everything else.
BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Paul Solebello was born in Providence, Rhode Island in November of 1985. In 2007 he graduated from the University of Rhode Island with Bachelor’s degrees in Sociology and English. He received his Master’s degree in Sociology from North Carolina State University in 2009, and his PhD in Sociology in 2016. He currently works full-time in the private sector and lives with his partner in Maryland.
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Thank you Mom and Dad, Kara, and all my other friends for never asking too many questions about why it took me so long to finish.

Thank you, Hillary – again, for everything else. For being the reason I should have quit long ago and the reason I kept going.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Non-work-related activities are a regular component of the workday for most employees. These activities can vary along a number of axes; for example, employees may have access to formal breaks at work or breaks from production that are informally negotiated and accepted between managers and employees. Trougakos and Hideg (2009: 42) write that formal breaks are periods of the day employers officially designate as times when “work-relevant tasks are not required or expected.” In practical terms, this means a lunch or coffee break with a pre-determined beginning and end. Informal breaks, by contrast, vary both in length and legitimacy – from momentary pauses in the work cycle to longer experiences of downtime ranging from gaps in production/cycles of customers to extended attempts at avoiding work, hiding from management, or completing non-work-related tasks (e.g., Anteby, 2008).

The subject of non-work-related activities on the job has attracted the attention of researchers across the social sciences. For example, findings from ergonomics, management, and occupational psychology encourage employers to allow employees to engage in some form of non-work-related activity on the job (Kirkcaldy et al., 2002; Lisper and Eriksson, 1980; Mayo, 1924; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Tucker, 2003). This research suggests that breaks are vital for worker health and productivity, focusing the research lens on finding the optimal “duration, frequency, and type of rest breaks for reducing job strains” during the working day (Taylor, 2005: 462; see also Krajewski et al., 2010; Linder and Nygaard, 1998; Trougakos and Hideg, 2009). Empirical results generally show that breaks help employees deal with muscular discomfort, fatigue, accident risk, and stress (Schleifer and Amick, 1989;
Tucker et al., 2003) without compromising overall productivity (Bechtold et al., 1984; Dabeneh et al., 2001; McLean et al., 2001).

Sociological research occasionally describes the benefits of non-work-related activities for workers, as well. For example, Chinoy (1992) reports that automobile workers often viewed formal breaks as the highlight of the day, and Pfeffer (1979: 58) similarly states that formal breaks serve as landmarks to “happily fracture the work rhythm and afford time for relaxation.” Other research suggests that both formal and informal breaks allow workers time to socialize (Wells, 2000), vent and support one another over irate customers (Loukidou, 2009), display competence and, ironically, productivity (Tulin, 1984), build solidarity (Garson, 1975; Pollert, 1981), reduce boredom (Roy, 1959; Subramanian, 2009), keep spirits up through games and humor (Homans, 1950; Perry, 1978), and create stability in an otherwise chaotic work environment (Juravich, 1985). Overall, these findings suggest that both formal and informal breaks provide employees social, personal, and physical benefits and that some non-work-related activity on the job is necessary to maintain employees’ health and well-being.

Despite the benefits of non-work-related activities on the job, scholars across disciplines also agree that non-work-related activities can lead to conflict between employers and employees. The general assumption is that both employers and employees seek to manipulate time to their advantage: employers to maximize production by focusing on efficient time use (Ackroyd, 2012; Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Taylor, 1911) and workers

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1 Health experts, popular management consultants, and advertising campaigns echo these academic findings (Gioia, 2011; Goodman, 2011; Russell, 2007). For example, the “Take Back Your Lunch” movement encourages (mostly professional) workers to “step away from [their] desk, turn off [their] phone…and commit to a lunch hour of renewal” (The Energy Project, 2010). McDonald’s has even recently attempted to profit from these campaigns, inviting workers through their latest commercial to “Put an end to the working lunch and work on eating lunch” (Garland, 2012: 1; Vega, 2012). Overall, advocates consider breaks, especially lunch breaks, essential to good business practice and believe they potentially lower costs related to burned-out workers or through the catching of mistakes (Herin, 2010).
to increase the extent of their autonomy and freedom, decrease work-related fatigue, or balance work and life demands (Fine, 1996; Hodson, 2001). These attempts to control the length of the workday and the number of tasks completed in a given time period (i.e., work intensity) often create employer-employee conflict (Ackroyd, 2012; Marx, 1967; Thompson, 1967), and, historically, some of this conflict has revolved around work break expectations (Linder and Nygaard, 1998). On one hand, employers tend to have an interest in minimizing work breaks and the time employees spend away from productive activities (Marx, 1967; Stevens and Lavin, 2007); on the other hand, some workers are interested in taking breaks from production, perhaps to avoid work, but also to handle personal affairs, smoke, add variety, or rest (Dababneh et al., 2001; Fine, 1990).

This conflict of interests is epitomized in a recent body of research crossing management, human resources, and business literatures on “time theft” (also known as “counter-productive workplace behaviors,” “workplace misbehavior,” and “workplace deviance”).\(^2\) Echoing the neoliberal ideology of the last few decades (Crowley and Hodson, 2014) this literature most often privileges the rights of managers over employees (Snider, 2002; Stevens and Lavin, 2007). This is made apparent by the use of the phrase “time theft,” but, is manifest more specifically in the computation of estimates that non-work-related activities cost companies billions of dollars every year in lost productivity (Akremi et al., 2010; Henle et al., 2010; Lim and Chen, 2012). In addition, employees are portrayed as “time thieves” who disregard policies restricting non-work-related activities either knowingly or unknowingly and engage in non-work-related activities with ease, regularity, and little regard

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\(^2\) Throughout the paper I use the more neutral term “non-work-related activities” to refer to what these researchers call “time theft.” I use “non-work-related activity” because the term does not imply that these actions are wrong or criminal, and they allow researchers to investigate if and when these actions may lead to positive, negative, or neutral outcomes for an organization.
to negative consequences (Lim and Teo, 2005; Martin et al., 2010; Mastrangelo et al., 2006). As a result, the time theft literature plays up conflict between employees and managers (who are assumed to act on behalf of employers), maintaining that employees and employers have different, un-negotiated interests regarding non-work-related activities. It is not surprising, therefore, that the emphasis of this literature is on understanding the extent to which employees engage in non-work-related activities on the job and determining what managers should do and actually do to eliminate this costly behavior (Ang and Koslow, 2012; Ketchen et al., 2008; Richards, 2008; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2012).

By contrast, sociologists maintain that employees often have little time to engage in non-work-related behaviors. Research shows that employees work long hours and feel squeezed for time at work, with work activities often spilling into home life (Fraser, 2001; Jacobs et al., 2004; Kalleberg, 2009; Kunda, 1992). Indeed, the sociology of work provides few examples of employees without an abundance of work to complete (Paulsen, 2015). However, sociologists also recognize the conflict of interests between employers and employees regarding non-work-related activity on the job. Non-work-related activities conflict with (or at least appear to conflict with) the desires of employers to maximize productivity (Ackroyd, 2012; Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Taylor, 1911) and ensure short-term profit generation (Narayan, 1985; Jackall, 1988). In addition, employees might use break time at work for collective organizing (e.g., Garson, 1975; Pollert, 1981). As such, employers historically have attempted to minimize or eliminate employee non-work-related time at work (Linder and Nygaard, 1998; Thompson, 1967). For example, employers may

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3 This increased interest in non-work-related activity has ironically coincided with “a time when employers are increasingly stealing time from employees” (Snider, 2002: 108). For example, over the last 30 years the average hours employees work per week in the US continues to outpace other countries (Jacobs et al., 2004), and organizations continue to force unpaid overtime while wages remain relatively stagnant (Snider, 2002).
attempt to alter company policies to extend the hours an employee must work before receiving a break (Nichols, 1991), avoid assigning shifts long enough, legally or formally, to require breaks (Rubery et al., 2005), or lobby to remove state break laws altogether (Duckler, 2012; Gullo, 2012).

Of course, sociologists acknowledge that employees care about having access to non-work-time, especially formal lunch breaks, and resist attempts by employers to minimize their time away from work. Sanders (2012) finds the U.S. Department of Labor issued eight citations in the previous two years over lunch hour requirements, and Wal-Mart recently paid $172 million in damages to 116,000 workers for violating California’s 30-minute break policy (Allen, 2005). A recent New Hampshire proposal to remove the state lunch break law generated backlash from workers’ rights groups and the general public (Duckler, 2012; Webster, 2012). Hotel workers and housekeepers in California and North Carolina received publicity for protesting their employers’ break violations (Cohen and Murphy, 2010; Schwartz, 2010), and brokers in Hong Kong recently marched through downtown protesting plans to reduce time allotted for lunch breaks (O’Keeffe and Steger, 2012). Employees care about and seek out opportunities for informal non-work-related activities on the job, as well. Westwood (1986) details a battle between workers and management in a British hosiery factory over the right to use “company” (i.e., on-the-clock) time to celebrate events like birthdays. Ditton (1979) describes industrial bakers manipulating their ovens to create gaps

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4 At the same time it is worth noting that some employees may willingly choose to forego breaks in exchange for meeting higher-order needs, such as leaving early (Garey, 1999; Perry, 1978) or maximizing income (Adler and Adler, 2004; Ouellet, 1994; Paules, 1991). Paules (1991: 84) argues there is an “implicit exchange of interests” between wait-staff and management regarding breaks: by waiving their right to formal breaks (so management need not find someone to cover the shift), workers can maximize tip income and gain autonomy over, and leniency regarding, brief periods of informal relaxation throughout the day. Paules’ findings are partially dependent on a tight labor market that gives wait-staff a degree of power that they would not normally have if management could replace them easily. This exchange of interests may also depend on the presence of a competitive tipping system. In organizations where workers share their tips, they may take advantage of official breaks more regularly (e.g., Sallaz, 2002).
in the workload, and thus, extra time for cigarettes and tea. In call centers, workers may secure themselves more free time by “bumping” calls out of their queue or continuing their script after customers hang up (Bain and Taylor, 2000; Townsend, 2005).

At the same time, insights from sociological research on the effort bargain (e.g., Baldamus, 1961; Edwards, 1986), negotiated order (Strauss et al., 1963; Strauss, 1978), and “shop-floor” level negotiations between management and employees (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Sykes, 1958) show that employee-manager conflict over non-work-related activities is not inevitable. Indeed, managers may tacitly or openly endure workers’ attempts to create extra break time as a way to buy “compliance or obedience in certain areas at the cost of tolerating disobedience elsewhere” (Sykes, 1958: 56). In other words, managers may use non-work-related activities as a “leniency” or trade-off that keeps workers happy and the organization running smoothly (Ackroyd, 2012; Anteby, 2008; Burawoy, 1979; Fine, 1992; Gouldner, 1954). For example, Morgan (1975) describes workers often returning from break late or “preparing” for break by slowing their pace and inching closer to the door (see also Molstad, 1986; Webb and Palmer, 1998). Morgan argues that management tolerates these practices because they keep worker morale high and provide management leverage to ensure that workers complete their tasks efficiently.

Thus, sociological research challenges and calls into question a one-sided view of employee “misbehavior,” suggesting instead that non-work-related activities occur less frequently than often assumed and that management may not always try to stop employee non-work-related behavior. Yet, we are left with unanswered questions and opportunities for research development. First, if we take seriously the claims made about managers from both management/business scholars and sociologists, we are led to assume that some managers
may police non-work-related activities and some managers may tolerate it. Yet what drives this variation in managerial response and how else might managers respond to employee non-work-related activity?

Second, despite acknowledging tradeoffs, sociological literature often mirrors that of their business and management counterparts by focusing on “management control versus worker resistance” (Karlsson, 2012: 17), and how workers carve out time at work for themselves (e.g., Anteby, 2008; Roy, 1959). Indeed, sociologists generally classify all non-work-related activities as workplace resistance in response to organizational injustices. Even more innocuous non-work-related activities like daydreaming (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Molstad, 1988; Prasad and Prasad, 1998) and taking extra breaks to “waste time” or “fool around” (Roy, 1952: 432; see also, Garson, 1975; Hodson, 1995) fall under the umbrella of purposeful acts enacted against management and the organization. However, Paulsen’s (2014; 2015) research suggests that “time waste” can result from organizational inefficiencies (e.g., lack of meaningful work to do) rather than employees’ desires to avoid work or take back labor time. Thus, given the reported ubiquity of non-work-related activity on the job (e.g., Blanchard and Henle, 2008), sociologists should question where and when time spent in non-work-related activity on the job might be a form of resistance and when it might be instrumental and void of greater meaning. Additionally, given that employees have a large amount of work to complete each day, we need to understand how employees make decisions about when to engage in or abstain from non-work and the social and organizational factors that influence these decisions.

Third, researchers need to reconcile sociology’s current focus on intensification, globalization, and wage theft (e.g. Kalleberg, 2009) with claims from business and
management literature that a large amount of non-work-related activity on the job occurs every day. Most employees likely have access to some opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities on a daily or weekly basis, but whether employees act on these opportunities is likely influenced by a host of psychological, social, and structural factors related to the type of work they do. Yet researchers have done little by way of systematically outlining the variables that lead to opportunities to engage in non-work-related activity on the job. In doing so, we can better specify why these behaviors occur, better understand and predict where and when conflict over non-work-related activity might arise, and provide insight into how organizations can manage non-work-related activity in ways that do not alienate employees.

DATA AND METHODS

This dissertation seeks to provide insight into these questions through an analysis of interview data with 52 employees and managers across a variety of service, manufacturing, administrative/office, and professional workplaces in the United States. Of the 52 respondents, 34 are classified as employees and 23 are classified as managers. “Employee” is defined as anyone who self-describes as being in a hierarchically low or front-line position, and who does not have supervisory duties. “Manager” describes anyone who has official sanctioning and supervisory power over subordinate employees. This managerial definition is broad, encompassing the entirety of low-, mid-, and upper-level supervisors and/or

\footnote{Note: Three of the employees interviewed became managers soon after their initial interview, one participant recently became a manager (within the last six months of the interview), and one participant held two jobs – one with and one without supervisory duties. These five participants were interviewed extensively and separately about their experiences as employees and managers so their interviews are counted twice. Four employees were also relatively new to their low-level positions – I initially interviewed them about previous work and first impressions of their new position and then held follow-up interviews three to six months later. Follow-up interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour depending on the interviewee’s availability and presentation of new information.}
management.\textsuperscript{6} Despite varying self-reported job titles, all respondents defined as employees or managers meet these criteria. I conducted the interviews for the study between January and December of 2012, with each interview lasting on average an hour and a half.\textsuperscript{7} All respondents participated in the study voluntarily without promise of incentive, and everyone was assured that identities would remain confidential. I digitally recorded each interview with the participants’ permission and transcribed them verbatim, assigning all employees and managers pseudonyms.

I recruited employees and managers mainly through network referrals, i.e., through word-of-mouth and recruitment announcements across social media outlets, because I wanted to interview a wide range of people across organizations and did not want to get anyone in trouble by soliciting them in front of the businesses where they work.\textsuperscript{8} I asked my contacts to refer me to anyone they knew who was currently employed and might be willing to participate in my study. Over time, I also began to ask my contacts if they knew anyone who worked in specific types of workplaces (e.g., low-level service work; factory settings) to increase the variability of the sample. I accessed most of the respondents through these recruitment strategies.

Although some of the employees (five in total) to whom my contacts introduced me turned down or failed to respond to my requests, my relationships with network contacts appeared to make respondents feel comfortable participating. I ultimately accessed a wide

\textsuperscript{6} As I explain below, it was difficult to recruit managers for this study. This difficulty prevented me from focusing my investigation on a particular section of management hierarchy (e.g., low-level supervisors). I discuss the implications of this difficulty in chapter five.

\textsuperscript{7} Interviews with employees lasted closer to two hours. Shorter interviews, as I mention below, were often the result of the managers’ busy work schedules.

\textsuperscript{8} Initially, I attempted to solicit interviewees at managers’ workplaces. Lacking any formal, institutionalized link to a network of managers, this seemed like the most viable option. However, this strategy was most often met with refusals.
range of employees across occupations, organizations, and state lines (Small, 2009). Managers, by contrast, were more difficult to recruit. In my initial solicitation period, 13 managers refused to participate. It was common for managers to say they were busy and to express worry that participating in research would get them in trouble with their company. On three occasions, low-ranking managers who had agreed to speak with me abruptly cancelled after a higher-level manager learned of the interview. Other managers referred me to the company’s public relations representative where emails and phone calls were either unreturned or requests immediately turned down (see Edwards and Wajcman [2005: 89] for a brief discussion of why managers can be difficult to study).

Some of these refusals may have resulted from the fact that some companies have official or unofficial policies against speaking with “outsiders.” Upper-level management may fear spying or bad publicity from outsiders, and low-level supervisors may simply worry about potential job loss for doing anything “company-related” without approval. Of course, it is possible that those who chose not to participate had no desire to contribute to the study, so they attempted to “save face” by finding a convenient scapegoat on which to blame their inability to participate. Despite these setbacks I met with success eventually by utilizing network referrals. Still, five referred managers refused to participate after hearing more details about the study, and overall the managers seemed to participate reluctantly, mentioning repeatedly how busy they were, and often scheduling their interviews during an extended lunch break or late at night.

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9 My sample does not systematically represent the potential variation in employee experience; thus, I cannot generalize my results to all workers. Although interviews with multiple employees or observations at each workplace would have been ideal, practical constraints (e.g., travel, time, money), as well as the fear that management would find out about the study (e.g., if a manager overheard an interviewee tell a coworker about the study), prohibited such an approach.

10 One manager who eventually turned me down cited Chick-fil-A’s controversy over the chief operating officer’s same-sex marriage comments (see Severson, 2012) as the reason he felt uneasy about participating.
Half of the interviews with employees were conducted over the phone, and the other half were in person. A comparison of the interviews does not reveal any discernable differences based on the format of the interview. By contrast, almost all interviews with managers took place over the phone due to their busy schedules and geographic distance. Although this may have restricted my ability to interpret body language, it also allowed me to take notes during the interview without distracting the respondent. In this way, I was able to return to previously mentioned topics and explore them more thoroughly. In addition, the spatial and social separation may have increased the managers’ and employees’ feelings of anonymity and ultimately their openness about the topics covered.

Of the employees interviewed, twenty-eight identified as white, three identified as black or African-American, two identified as Asian, and one identified as bi-racial (black/white). The median age of the employees was 27 (ranging from 18 to 65); seventeen interviews were with women, and seventeen were with men. Nearly all of the respondents reported at least some college experience, with most having received a bachelor’s degree or higher. Twelve worked in service industries, such as retail or food-service; four worked in industrial or manufacturing settings; and eighteen worked in professional or administrative/office workplaces. Six currently belonged to or were represented by unions, and two others had worked for years, until recent career changes, in unionized workplaces. None of the employees expressed aspirations to become management, but three were promoted to management shortly after their initial interviews. I re-interviewed these employees a few months later about their new position as a manager. For information on the age, race, job title, industry, and pseudonym of each employee, see Table 1.
Of the managers interviewed, eighteen identified as white, while four identified as Black or African-American, and one identified as Latino. The median age of the managerial respondents was 33 (ranging from 21 to 54), and over half had managed employees for at least 5 years (ranging from three months to 25 years). Four managers worked for their company as employees prior to becoming managers, and of these four, only one was currently managing former coworkers at the time of the interview. Nine interviews were with women, and fourteen were with men. A little over half of the respondents reported earning a bachelor’s degree or higher, and the remaining managers reported some college experience. Thirteen worked in service industries, like retail or food-service; three worked in industrial settings; and seven worked in professional or administrative/office-type workplaces. Only one managed unionized employees. Thirteen could be described as having significant control over organizational resources and/or decision-making (e.g., store/general manager, director, president), while the remaining ten managers were largely responsible only for “front-line” supervision and occasional paperwork (e.g., shift supervisor, team leader, department head). Despite these differences in decision-making power and control over resources, almost all of the respondents reported having daily, face-to-face contact with subordinate employees. Most oversaw and interacted with at least 10 employees every day, though in service industries this could vary significantly depending on the particular shift (e.g., day, midday, evening). For the age, race, job title, industry, and pseudonym of each manager, see Table 2.

In my initial contact with interviewees, I told them I wanted to hear about their daily work experiences and challenges, broadly defined. Managers were also asked to differentiate between their experiences as a worker (i.e., with their own set of tasks) and as a supervisor of employees. I provided more details in follow-up correspondence, informing employees and
managers that the interview would also focus specifically on how they deal with time-related issues (e.g., whether they have break or down time; how they manage their employees’ time). Semi-structured interviews began with questions about the respondent’s workplace and position. From there, the interview topics included how they deal with time-related issues (e.g., how quickly or slowly the day seems to pass, whether they have access to break time, what they do on their breaks), what they like and dislike about their current position, what they see as the most challenging aspects of their job, and how they manage their own, and, in the case of managers, their employees’ time throughout the day.

Employees were asked to provide extensive information about their daily routines across typical and atypical workdays. As such, it was surprisingly easy to hear about potentially sensitive issues (e.g., slacking off) as respondents often spontaneously spoke about their level of access to and use of break time at work, i.e., the general policies and procedures regarding time use at their workplace and whether they participated in any sanctioned or unsanctioned non-work-related activity. To the extent that an interviewee spoke about non-work-related activities, such as taking extra breaks, having long conversations with coworkers about non-work-related issues, surfing the Web, etc., I asked them to describe these activities and to describe the context surrounding their participation (i.e., organizational rules, how closely management monitors behavior). I also occasionally brought up examples of common non-work-related activities and asked whether the respondent participated in that activity and, if so, when and why. All employees were forthcoming about the interview topics and needed minimal prodding to provide examples of positive and negative experiences for themselves or their coworkers regarding non-work-related activities. Subsequently, I endeavored to draw them into a discussion of their personal
boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable non-work-related behavior on the job. This often led to discussions of inappropriate behavior or stories of non-work-related activities in which either he or she or a coworker engaged that were particularly memorable. I also cautiously attempted to solicit information about how management responded to their activities, seeking examples of behavior that led to positive or negative outcomes for the interviewee or their coworkers.

I asked similar questions of managers, but these interviews also focused on describing specific occasions when they had to address issues related to non-work-related activities with their employees. These interviews were more difficult to wade through as I felt that some managers were resistant to admitting that non-work might occur on “their watch.” If respondents were not forthcoming, then I asked a series of probing questions, including: “Do workers tend to stay on task throughout the day? Why or why not? How do you feel about that? Can you give me an example of how you handled…?” I consciously avoided using value-laden phrases (e.g., “do workers waste time?”) to limit biasing the respondents’ answers. In some cases, I even proceeded to ask the manager about their past work experience and how they behaved on the job when he or she was an employee. By doing so, I eventually extracted from the managers rich examples of employee non-work-related behavior both past and present, and, in some cases, their own non-work-related behavior.

Overall, I approached the interviews with a broad interest in how employees and managers experience, use, and negotiate their labor time at work. For the interviews with managers I was interested also in how they handle their own time and the labor time of their employees. In assessing the data, I relied on inductive coding methods associated with grounded theory to identify themes and patterns in the interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967;
Strauss and Corbin, 1998). I read and reread the interview transcripts and my notes (written immediately following each interview) several times. I coded the interview data using Atlas.ti analysis software, writing memos to define and elaborate initial coding categories. As the analysis developed, coding became more focused and coding categories were compared and combined (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 2 focuses on the interviews with managers. For this chapter I identified passages in which participants described their views on break time at work, and where they described monitoring their employees’ time use. I also paid attention to passages in which participants described how they felt about, and dealt with, employees who engaged in non-work-related activities, and whether they engaged in these activities themselves. Managers reveal highly variable opinions regarding employee non-work-related activity on the job. Some managers seek to prevent employees from engaging in non-work-related activities, some tolerate these behaviors, and some encourage them within reason. To a certain extent, occupational differences among the managers explain this variation, but other factors like past experience with their own management also shape how managers act. Managers who claim to tolerate non-work-related activity seem to do so less because they actively want to “trade” leniency regarding non-work-related activity for compliance in other areas and more because they feel these behaviors are inevitable. They engage in “satisficing” behavior and tolerate employee non-work-related activities as long as employees maintain a “bottom line” level of productivity.

Chapter 3 spotlights the employee interviews. For this chapter I identified passages in which employees described their participation (or lack thereof) in non-work-related activities
on the job. I also paid attention to passages in which participants described making distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and how they felt about engaging in non-work-related activities in general. Employees describe engaging in non-work-related activities on a regular basis, but they ridicule colleagues who they think abuse and waste time. Employees seem to exert a level of concertive control on one another (Barker, 1993; Crowley et al., 2013), and many expressed concerns that their colleagues think they waste too much time so they self-police their own actions. Employees talk about protecting their coworkers and ultimately the interests of their employers by establishing boundaries on their own and their colleagues’ non-work-related actions. The employees also express an awareness of their surroundings and seek out time to relax and “waste time” when least problematic for the organization. Yet, many employees reveal that they often have few tasks to complete and end up engaging in non-work-related activity to pass the time, suggesting that some non-work-related activity may derive less from employee agency or a desire to resist organizational injustice and more from a lack of meaningful work.

Chapter 4 draws on my interviews with both managers and employees to describe how non-work-related activity varies and changes depending on the social and structural contexts in which employees and managers are embedded. Here I develop a theoretically and empirically informed typology outlining how variation in non-work-related activity reflects an array of psychological, interpersonal, organizational, and job-related factors previously unexplored or underexplored in the literature. The typology serves as an important critique of the literature to date and encourages future researchers to investigate how organizations, rather than employees, create opportunity for non-work-related activity, as well as how psychological, interpersonal, organizational, and job-related factors interact with one another.
Finally, chapter 5 offers a summary of my findings and a discussion of the study’s limitations and possible extensions. In particular I outline the social and economic consequences of research on non-work-related activities, highlighting how a continued research focus on the individual antecedents of non-work-related activities encourages employers to take punitive action against employees that may further jeopardize productivity (e.g., by fostering employee resentment from the loss of downtime). Instead, I call on employers and managers to concentrate on improving the work environment for employees (Crowley, 2013; Eddy et al., 2010), and for researchers to investigate how employee non-work-related activity can benefit managers and the organization.
REFERENCES


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TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYEE SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Reported Race</th>
<th>Self-Reported Job Title (Industry)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arthur</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Administrative support (health-care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Shift supervisor / Sales associate (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colby</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sales associate (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Cashier (food-sales)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Repair technician (health-care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Senior designer (non-profits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jillian</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Administrative support / Team leader (banking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Fabrication mechanic (manufacturing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Stock analyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>CAD Technician (engineering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Cashier (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Shift supervisor / Cashier (entertainment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Research scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Graphic designer (advertising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenny</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Server (food-service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Lab technician (health-care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Sales Associate / Shift Supervisor (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marigold</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Nurse (health)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mischa</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Lab technician (health-care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nessa</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Staff member (food-service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Striper (manufacturing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Delivery driver (packaging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggie</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bartender (entertainment) / Laborer (construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Staff member (fast-food) / Intern (law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Administrative support and designer (construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sales associate / Sales manager (food service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher (education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skyler</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bi-racial white/black</td>
<td>Staff member (fast-food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Server (food-service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Computer analyst / Pharmacy assistant (health)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Civil engineer (engineering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>African/African-American</td>
<td>Nurse (health)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Software developer (computing) / Sorter (packaging)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Many interviewees held more than one job or had recently transitioned between jobs. These interviews lasted significantly longer to compare both positions when answering questions. Current position is listed first in the table.
### TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MANAGER SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Reported Race</th>
<th>Self-Reported Job Title (Industry)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alvin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Inventory and compliance manager (manufacturing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>General manager (fast-food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Shift supervisor (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>General manager (fast-food) Rate and sales manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>(manufacturing/shipping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>General manager (fast-food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Manager (manufacturing/retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Owner/manager (food-service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Director of compliance (real estate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>President (computer support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Manager (electronics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Head pharmacist (health)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Manager (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jillian</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Team leader (banking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sales manager (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Shift supervisor (entertainment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lou</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Store manager (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Shift supervisor (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Shift supervisor (fast-food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Assistant store manager (retail)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikoli</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Shop manager (engineering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sales manager (food-service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Vice president of finance (non-profits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Five interviewees are included as employees and managers. At the time of their initial interview, Bella, Kristina, and Jillian were employees. All three were promoted to management positions soon after and re-interviewed a few months later. Lucas had recently moved into a management position (within the last 6 months), and Sarah held two sales jobs – one with and without supervisory duties. Both Lucas and Sarah were interviewed extensively about their roles as an employee and separately as a manager.
CHAPTER 2: “AS LONG AS THE JOB GETS DONE”: MANAGERS TALK ABOUT NON-WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

"The spies entered the factory looking for signs of social revolution, but they found scant evidence of the deep-seated discontent that fueled upheavals...Rather, the spies discovered an overwhelming degree of everyday rebelliousness...workers who took hour-long breaks in the bathroom; conversations about baseball and prohibited baseball pools...and most frequently, workers who left their jobs to smoke...[The owner] probably imagined his relaxing attitude on the...issue as a tradeoff: cigarettes and breaks in exchange for worker cooperation in other matters..." Smoking, Spies, and Shopfloor Culture at Hammermill Paper Company (Wood, 2011: 89-98)

According to management and business school literature, non-work-related activities, or activities where employees are not working while on the job (including daydreaming, using work computers for personal purpose, surfing the internet, personal conversations with coworkers, taking unauthorized, informal breaks, even sleeping), cost companies billions of dollars every year in lost productivity (Akremi et al., 2010; Atkinson, 2006; Ketchen et al. 2008; Henle et al., 2010; Lim and Chen, 2012). The emphasis of this literature is on understanding the psychological antecedents of employees’ non-work-related activities and determining what managers should do to eliminate these behaviors (Ang and Koslow, 2012; Ketchen et al., 2008; Richards, 2008; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2012). Yet, studies explicitly focusing on what management actually does when faced with employee non-work-related activities are rare, as “little attention is paid to the day-to-day managerial role” (Bolton and Houlihanin, 2010: 381). Rather than prescribing what managers should do to eliminate employees’ engagement in non-work-related activities on the job, it may be necessary to step back and first assess the extent to which this is an expressed goal of management. After all, despite a heavy emphasis on employee-manager conflict at work
(Karlsson, 2012; Paulsen, 2015), sociological research reveals that management may actively trade “compliance or obedience in certain areas at the cost of tolerating disobedience elsewhere” to ensure organizations run smoothly (Sykes, 1958: 56; see also, Ackroyd, 2012; Burawoy, 1979; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Edwards and Whitston, 1989). Given the benefits that breaks can have for worker productivity (e.g., Mayo, 1924; Tucker, 2003) some managers may be unconcerned with or even supportive of their employees’ non-work-related behavior. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to step back and explore how managers think and feel about employees’ non-work-related activities.

The chapter begins with a review of the literature regarding employee and employer control over labor time, scholarly perspectives on “time theft,” and the potential benefits of non-work-related activities. Next I fill a gap in the literature by investigating managers’ perspectives on employee non-work-related activity. I do this through an analysis of 23 interviews with managers across a variety of workplaces in the United States where I ask them to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the use of informal breaks by their employees. The interviews also explore how each manager’s own experiences and positions appear to shape understandings of non-work-related activities on the job. The findings reveal that some managers view non-work-related activities negatively and try to ensure that workers stay on task, while other managers encourage workers to engage in limited amounts of non-work-related activity on the job because they believe these activities increase employee cohesion and organizational effectiveness. A majority of these managers express ambivalence about non-work-related activities, arguing that non-work-related activities are unproblematic “as long as the job gets done.” These managers often view non-work-related activities as unavoidable and adjust their expectations about how much productivity they
could reasonably expect from employees. Overall, many factors play a role in determining how managers approach employee non-work-related activity, including past experiences with their own management, their power to hire and fire employees, and the occupational field in which they are employed. By highlighting variation in managerial experiences and concerns, this study challenges the assumption that managers invariably disapprove of non-work-related activities on the job under the belief that such activities have only negative organizational consequences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Changes in the organization of work have profound effects on employee-employer relationships, especially regarding control over labor time. Prior to the implementation of wage labor under industrial capitalism, the working day was often structured around particular tasks or the natural cycles of day and night and the seasons (Thompson, 1967). Workers often had control over their work time and moved between work and non-work-related tasks (e.g., cooking; conversations with neighbors) at their discretion throughout the day, and many workers maintained the freedom to complete tasks at their own pace under the “putting-out system,” where merchants subcontracted the production of goods to employees who worked out of their homes (Clawson, 1980; Pollard, 1963).

Employee control over the length and intensity of the putting-out workday was antithetical to the interests of the merchants employing them, however, and employers increasingly became dissatisfied with the amount of time workers took to complete tasks. In an effort to gain more control over the work process and employees, employers began to organize workers in factory settings where they could engage in a level of supervision and discipline previously unattainable (Clawson, 1980; Marglin, 1974; Pollard, 1963). They
began to subject workers to a rigorous clock discipline where they set predetermined starting and quitting times and increasingly held workers accountable for the hours, minutes, and seconds of the day (Pollard, 1963; Thompson, 1967). As Elger (1990: 69) notes, quoting Marx (1967), we saw changes to the “‘porosity’ of work routines, through the paring down of pauses, resting and waiting time and thus [a] ‘closer filling up of the pores of the working day.’” As a result, employers could now heavily regulate or limit the time workers spent on non-work-related activities, and many employers even began to disregard or encroach on a worker’s lawful break times. In the early British factory system, for example, evidence suggests that many employers blatantly disregarded the Factory Act of 1850, which required two meal breaks in a 12-hour workday. Employers attempted to “nibble” and “cribble” away minutes of meal times (Marx, 1967: 242), and some even barred employees from wearing watches at work, giving workers little recourse to challenge employers when the bell for the start of break rang late or the bell for the end of break rang early (Thompson, 1967).

Long after the advent of industrial capitalism, labor time remains a central concern for employers (Crabtree et al., 2011; Heyes, 1997). Short-term profit generation continues to dominate managerial thought; thus, labor time remains a key resource to be manipulated and controlled (Crossan et al., 2005; Rubery et al., 2005). Indeed, though a worker sells his or her time to an employer (i.e., labor power), the conversion of time into actual work (i.e., productivity) is a problem of organization and control (Braverman, 1974; Marx, 1967; Paulsen, 2014). Control over people and their labor time continues to play a key role in the capitalist drive for efficiency; and given management’s continued emphasis on maximizing output from the labor time they purchase, management typically is assumed to begrudge breaks from production (Stevens and Lavin, 2007).

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11 In the early 1900s, this process was echoed and intensified by scientific management (Taylor, 1911).
Despite steady rises in worker productivity and the stagnation of workers’ wages over the past 30 years, management and human resources research increasingly portrays non-sanctioned breaks from productive activity as a significant organizational threat (Snider, 2002; Stevens and Lavin, 2007). Labeled variously as “time theft,” “counter-productive workplace behaviors,” “workplace misbehavior,” or “workplace deviance,” this literature maintains that when workers engage in non-work-related activities on the job, they are stealing valuable private property (Atkinson, 2006; Henle et al., 2010; Lim, 2002). As Half (1983: 80) writes: “Time theft steals money as sure as someone picking your pocket.” This line of research warns that the costs of non-work-related activities have reached “alarming” levels, especially with the advent of computer use in the workplace (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2007: 464). Indeed, it is estimated that companies lose billions of dollars every year in lost productivity from non-work-related activities (Henle et al., 2010; Liberman et al., 2011; Lim, 2002; Lim and Chen, 2012; Martin et al., 2010). Thus, researchers claim that non-work-related activities in the workplace have detrimental organizational consequences and assume management is invested in minimizing or eliminating non-work-related activities that happen on “the company’s time” (Eddy et al., 2010).

Critics of time theft research point out that many of the claims made in the literature are based on inadequate research (Snider, 2002; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2012). For example, there is a dearth of research on the actual organizational and individual outcomes of non-work-related activities (Askew, 2012). Claims that non-work-related activities cost

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12 Sociologists and criminologists have contributed to the rise of “time theft” literature as well. For example, Hollinger and Clark’s (1982) study of occupational crime represents one of the first empirical studies explicitly to reference “theft of time.” However, most of the “academic claim-making around theft of time…has come from other disciplines. Social scientists working in business schools, human or industrial relations, or private think-tanks and consulting firms, have been particularly active” (Snider, 2002: 95). In the last decade, social scientists in management, organizational behavior, and psychology have been especially active in conducting research on non-work-related activities.
companies billions of dollars in lost productivity are based on cost estimates that multiply the
time an employee reports spending weekly participating in non-work-related activities by the
employee’s weekly pay rate. These estimates are crude measures at best because they reveal
nothing about the context in which employees engage in non-work-related activities, how
productive a worker is when not engaging in these activities, whether non-work-related
activity is a result of lack of work to do, or whether some amount of downtime actually
increases productivity during active periods. Studies investigating the organizational costs of
non-work-related activities have also relied on convenience samples and juxtapose employee
performance appraisals conducted by supervisors with employee self-reports of engagement
in non-work-related activity (Askew, 2012; Bock and Ho, 2009). These studies, in fact, find
little evidence that non-work-related activities have negative consequences for performance
appraisals. Thus, the extent to which non-work-related activities are actually problematic for
employers or are viewed as such by managers is debatable (Ackroyd, 2012; Ivarsson and
Larsson, 2011; Klotz and Buckley, 2013; Richards, 2008).

Indeed, research in ergonomics, sociology, and occupational psychology shows that
non-work-related activities in the form of breaks from production may actually benefit
workers and employers.\(^{13}\) This research finds that breaks from production are vital for worker
health and productivity (Mayo, 1924; Tucker, 2003). For example, breaks allow workers to
reduce boredom (Roy, 1959) and keep their spirits up through games and humor (Homans,
1950). Other researchers show that breaks aid employees in reducing muscular discomfort,
fatigue, accident risk and stress \textit{without compromising} overall productivity (Dababneh et al.,

\(^{13}\) More recent time theft research has acknowledged that non-work-related activities (particularly personal
computer use) may benefit workers and organizations (Anandarajan and Simmers, 2005; Anandarajan et al.,
2011; Coker, 2011; Eddy et al., 2010). Unfortunately, these researchers still tend to maintain the belief that non-
work-related activities represent deviant (i.e., behavior that defies organizational norms, rules, and expectations)
employee behavior and need to be monitored closely.
2001; Tucker, 2003). In other words, as employee production levels begin to decline (e.g., due to fatigue), breaks allow workers a chance to refresh themselves. Employees return to work with greater enthusiasm and energy, ultimately translating that energy into heightened productivity. This boost in productivity gives workers who take breaks the ability to make up for lost productive time and even potentially to surpass the productivity of employees who work all day without breaks (Dababneh et al., 2001). This benefits employers because they are able to maintain production levels. Employers also have an extra incentive to provide workers with official down time when states or companies create formal break policies regarding, for instance, lunch breaks.\textsuperscript{14} When breaks are mandated by law or company regulations, the government may fine, or employees may sue, employers for not providing them (Sanburn, 2012).

The characterization of non-work-related activity as theft is also subject to debate, especially given the focus on intensification, globalization, and wage theft in much of the sociology of work literature (e.g., Kalleberg, 2009). Underlying the “time theft” concept is the belief that employers own the time they purchase from employees in exchange for wages and have absolute rights over the direction of that time. The term implies that every moment of time spent at work (outside of formally allotted periods) must be used by an employee to further the goals of the employers, and that failure to comply constitutes a criminal and costly breach of contract (Snider, 2002; Stevens and Lavin, 2007). This is problematic because it undermines workers’ autonomy in the allocation of their labor time (as seen in many professional and administrative/office workplaces). Additionally, it precludes the idea that

\textsuperscript{14} Currently no federal law in the US mandates break periods (except for minors, nursing mothers, and certain workers who may endanger others, e.g., bus drivers), and less than half of US states require breaks after a given period of labor time (Department of Labor, 2016; Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, 2016). Employers and individual associations may have their own policies; yet, the extent to which employers follow them is an empirical question.
organizations may actively or latently create “empty” labor time for employees, where no work is required or needed (Paulsen, 2014; 2015). Finally, the “theft” label is subject to further scrutiny given that workers create surplus value for organizations through the creation of goods and/or services. Employers may own the means of production but cannot obtain and sustain a profit without harnessing and exploiting labor power (Marx, 1967). Historically employers have maximized surplus value through increasing the length of the working day and intensifying production – actions that have often led to labor law violations and negative consequences for employees. Indeed, recent research shows that “wage theft” is common, as employers withhold wages, pay workers lower than minimum wage, and/or force them to work off the clock (Bobo, 2009).

Despite criticisms, “time theft” researchers continue to see the issues surrounding non-work-related activities on the job as relatively black and white, playing up conflict between employees and managers (who are assumed to act on behalf of employers) and maintaining that employees and employers have different, nonnegotiable interests regarding non-work-related activities (e.g., Anandarajan et al., 2011). As Coker (2011: 239) writes, in reference to personal Web use, “While workers believe they should be allowed to [browse the Internet], management believes they should not be allowed.” Interestingly, despite a strong history of examining compromise between management and employees, recent sociological research tends to fall back on the management versus employees dichotomy. Sociological research on non-work-related activities in particular tends to focus on “management control versus worker resistance” (Karlsson, 2012: 17), emphasizing that workers actively carve out time at work for themselves (e.g., Anteby, 2008) or classifying a wide array of non-work-related activity under the umbrella of workplace resistance (Paulsen,
As such, research on worker resistance portrays even innocuous forms of non-work-related activity (e.g., taking an extra break, daydreaming, chatting with coworkers, etc.) as overt and purposeful acts perpetrated by employees against management and the organization. Given the reported ubiquity of non-work-related activity on the job (e.g., Blanchard and Henle, 2008), the depiction of all non-work-related activity as resistance should be called into question by considering the contexts in which time spent in non-work-related activity on the job is a form of resistance versus when management allows it.

Unfortunately, researchers rarely investigate how managers actually think and feel about non-work-related activities (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; D’Abate, 2005; Liberman et al., 2011), which is problematic because “the social meanings given to a form of behavior [at work] will depend in part on managerial definitions,” and what managers actually do and think will affect worker behavior (Edwards and Scullion, 1982: 2; see also, Ackroyd, 2012; Richards, 2008).

There is evidence that managers do not have the same wants, needs, and interests as owners and are less monolithic in their opinions about non-work-related activities than often assumed, especially across different hierarchical levels. For example, Wood’s (2011) epigraph at the beginning of this chapter illustrates this point, and the “negotiated-order” perspective emphasizes how organizations require all kinds of “understandings” between employees and management to function (Strauss et al., 1963; Strauss, 1978). As Edwards (1986: 32-24) writes, management “cannot foresee every eventuality and cannot describe exactly what must be done” at all times; thus, it is likely that “workers and managers will

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15 Management/business scholars often take for granted the idea that management laments the loss of productivity from non-work-related activities (Anandarajan et al., 2011; Lim and Teo, 2005), tasking managers with the responsibility of preventing workers from engaging in non-work-related activities (Ketchen et al., 2008; Liberman et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2010). This assumption may exist, at least in part, because phrases like “time theft” (or “workplace deviance”) imply how managers should feel.
reach some sort of shared understandings about effort levels.” Indeed, sociological research shows that management actively trades “compliance or obedience in certain areas at the cost of tolerating disobedience elsewhere” to ensure that organizations run smoothly (Sykes, 1958: 56; see also, Ackroyd, 2012; Burawoy, 1979; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Edwards and Whitston, 1989). For example, Lupton (1963) describes how management actively tolerates workers who engage in “fiddles” (e.g., using company materials to do home projects at work). Lupton argues that management understands how enforcing the rules too tightly can lead to loss of employee effort, so managers tolerate a small amount of rule-breaking.

Management/business studies also show that social norms of acceptance of non-work-related activities – measured by the extent to which workers witness other coworkers or managers engaging in non-work-related activities in the workplace – predict the extent to which employees engage in non-work-related activities (D’Abate, 2005; Henle et al., 2010; Lim, 2002; Martin et al., 2010). This suggests that there are work contexts in which managers not only allow but sometimes themselves engage in non-work-related activities in the workplace. A further example comes from Anandarajan and Simmers (2003: 778) who asked 316 study participants, some of them managers, to respond to the open-ended question “Do you think it is ok for a person to use the Web for non-work purposes during working hours in the workplace?” The responses suggest that managers believe non-work-related activity has both positive and negative consequences and that a manager’s position in the organizational hierarchy may influence his or her opinion about such behaviors.

Despite these exceptions, more often than not sociologists and business scholars maintain that managers object to employee non-work-related activity and tolerate it only when other needs are met. Thus, more research is necessary to understand how managers feel
about non-work-related activity and in what ways or under what circumstances managers’ perceptions of non-work-related activities differ. It is possible, for instance, that while some managers tolerate employee non-work-related activity, others may actively encourage non-work-related activity on the job. Additionally, managers may vary in their opinions about non-work-related activities across different types of workplaces. Indeed, one might expect that managers in professional and administrative/office workplaces are more lenient toward non-work-related activities compared to managers in low-skill, low-wage workplaces because employees in the former category often require a wider range of movement and a higher degree of autonomy to complete tasks (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Fraser, 2001; Kunda, 1992). By contrast, low-skill, low-wage employees often experience high levels of coercive control, and there is greater emphasis on short-term profit generation in the organizations in which they are employed (Crowley, 2012; Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

Thus, this chapter seeks to uncover variation in managerial experiences and opinions about non-work-related activities on the job through interviews with managers across a range of workplaces. The analysis highlights individual and occupational circumstances that influence whether managers actively prevent, tolerate, or encourage their employees’ non-work-related activities during work hours. In this way, my research casts doubt on core assumptions in the literature about the universality of managerial disdain for non-work-related activities and about the negative consequences of non-work-related activities for employers.

16 Surprisingly, despite greater leeway in day-to-day activities, prior management research typically focuses on administrative/office workers and the consequences of “cyberloafing” in the workplace (also known as Internet deviance or personal Web use; see Kim and Byrne, 2011 for a discussion of different conceptualizations).
MANAGERS TALK ABOUT NON-WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Nearly all the managers interviewed report that their employees engage in varying degrees of non-work-related activities at work—from chatting with coworkers to hiding in backrooms.\textsuperscript{17} Given the strong assumption that non-work-related activities are costly and destructive (see e.g., Lim, 2002), the onus put on management to counteract these activities (see e.g., Ketchen et al., 2008), and the general association of the managerial function with control and rule-enforcement (Ford and Collinson, 2011), one would expect managers to describe how they actively work to keep employees on task at all times. Although this is the case for some managers, most claim not to care about or show ambivalence toward non-work-related activity, and a few encourage non-work-related activities in moderation.

\textit{"I Keep Them Hustling": Policing Non-Work-Related Activities}

About a third of the managers interviewed\textsuperscript{18} describe actively seeking to prevent workers from engaging in non-work-related activities in their workplaces. These managers are most often, though not exclusively, from retail and service settings and are held responsible for the success of the business (especially store managers, rather than low-level supervisors). Overall, these managers are determined to ensure that employees make the most of their time at work, and they are able to describe specific instances when they reprimanded their employees for non-work-related activity. Edith, a compliance manager in the real-estate industry, recalls:

\textsuperscript{17} Two managers report that their employees are either too busy to engage in non-work-related activities or unable to leave their post. As Kristina, a shift supervisor at a theater, discusses in reference to her cashiers: “[They] could duck behind the counter but it wouldn’t be very effective. So there’s no getting out of work.”

\textsuperscript{18} Again, because my sample is not representative of a specific population, this proportion cannot be generalized.
The one area that I think people tend to abuse, which drives me a little bit crazy, is the time clock…We actually had a clock that they would punch, and for some reason…you could punch out seven minutes before the hour and it would bring you up to the hour. So people were punching out seven minutes early, and so what I did one day is I put on a Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses and sat in a beach chair by the clock.

Similarly, Andrew, the general manager of a fast-food chain, explains:

I see people, you know, walking around sometimes trying to get on the cell phone real quick, and I put a curb to that…Recently on one of my night shifts one of the girls disappeared for a while on her phone, and I talked to her about it. And, obviously, if we have any more issues, [Andrew makes a neck cutting gesture implying he will fire her]…And I always tell people that through lunch…nobody moves. And I’ve said to them: ‘If there’s a fire in the building, I want you to find me and say: ‘Can I leave this position?’’ [laughs] And then I’ll tell them yes or no.

Because as soon as somebody walks away, that’s when I get angry.

Finally, Jordan, a retail store manager, relates: “One associate—last week I gave him a task and he didn’t finish it. So I went back and looked at the cameras and watched that he was hanging out at the cash wrap, not doing anything. So when he came in we had a conversation about it [and he said] ‘I won’t do it again.’” Taken together, through direct supervision and surveillance these managers ensure that their employees refrain from non-work-related activity. In some cases, these managers are able to stop non-work-related activity as it happens, while others attempt to put a stop to future occurrences.

Why do the managers engage in these policing behaviors? For some, their disapproval of non-work-related activities seems to stem from a condemnation of their
employees’ work ethic more generally. Colin, a general manager in food-service, explains: “Sometimes when people are acting like children you have to be a babysitter and a manager.”

Similarly, Gwen, a retail manager, discusses that on a frequent basis she has to break up “little crowds” of employees, and tell them to get back to work. She then jokes: “It’s a weekly thing where…a couple of people decide that they’re not going to do what they’re supposed to do…There are some moments where I’m like, aren’t we all adults? [laughs]…You’re twenty years older than I am; aren’t you way more of an adult?”

Nikoli, a shop manager in an engineering firm, recounts his own experience working for his previous boss:

We used to call it the hairy eyeball when my boss would creep out of his office…he was keeping a secret eye on everyone on the floor. Making sure they weren’t slacking off or anything. But everyone was completely competent. He was just an asshole…If I took a quick [walk] with my engineer…he would come rushing over and say ‘Hey, hey, what are you doing? Why aren’t you getting this done? What’s this project doing?’…He would just attack you like a wild wolverine.

Echoing the claims of Taylor (1911), these managers do not think their employees engage in non-work-related activities occasionally; instead, they seem to hold the belief that some employees might not do any work if left unsupervised. They argue that an employee’s natural tendency to “soldier,” as Taylor put it, leads to problems for management and the organization as a whole.19 Ultimately, a manager’s assumptions about their employees’ work ethic or perhaps human nature more broadly appear to fuel a desire to keep a watchful eye on them and actively police their behavior.

Note: Marx (1967) argues that soldering results from flaws in capitalist organization and alienation, not human nature.
At the same time, the managers are constrained by higher-level employer expectations. As my interviewees explain, a large part of their job is to ensure the smooth functioning of the organization, and this often depends on making efficient use of employees. In other words, managers exist, at least in part, to control workers by directing their actions and keeping them on task (Ford and Collinson, 2011). If they do not perform this duty, there are consequences for employer profit. For example, Edith, who described earlier how she prevents employees from clocking out early, describes matter-of-factly the organizational problems that can result from non-work-related activities: “When you do the math and see how much time that is, it translates into dollars that we’re not getting a service for, you know?” Edith’s language and logic directly reflect those used in the literature on non-work-related activities. Researchers assert that these behaviors occur with regularity, and thus, a few extra minutes taken during the day by each employee turns into a few hours by the end of the week, and the equivalent of a few work weeks by the end of the year (Lim and Teo, 2005). Thus, “when you do the math,” researchers claim that employers suffer billions of dollars in lost productivity every year.

Despite the potential financial consequences of non-work-related activities, Edith is one of only two managers interviewed who discussed policing non-work-related activities as a way to protect the company’s profits. More often, the managers who describe policing non-work-related activities connect their behavior to feelings of job insecurity, i.e., they police their employees to avoid losing their own jobs. This is especially true of managers in retail and service work.20 Interviewees describe feeling immense pressure to get things done and

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20 Retail and service work is labor-intensive so management has a special incentive to ensure workers remain productive at all times. By contrast, managers in capital-intensive industries make profit as long as the machinery is running, so the interest is in keeping extra workers on duty in case of an emergency (e.g., the
having very little free time to do so or control over their budget (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010; Redman et al., 1997; Smith and Elliott, 2012). These managers explain that corporate’s weekly labor-hours allotment often leaves them short-handed despite having a large number of projects to complete or a high volume of customers in the store. As a retail store manager, Jordan’s response is typical: “The company’s payroll expectations really make my life difficult.” Similarly, Andrew, a fast-food manager, stated: “It’s hard to run the labor they want and still provide the service they want.” One manager even suggests that inadequate payroll could lead to employees engaging in non-work-related activities. Despite blaming her childish employees earlier, Gwen explains how low payroll does not help the issue: “If you staff the store appropriately, it doesn’t matter if you have a thousand customers walk in...when the schedule’s right...people don’t feel like they need to run off some place to hide and breathe for a moment.”

Yet, as Jessica, a retail store manager, reports: “Payroll is our number one most controllable expense.” She explains that if she is diligent in keeping her workers on task, she can maximize the amount of work completed and cut payroll costs at the same time:

As a manager, that is my number one priority….My job, my biggest job of the day is walking around my store and just saying ‘Hey, what are you working on? Hey, what are you doing? How much longer until you finish this?’ Because then that gives them

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21 Although some of the managers describe feeling increased pressure as a lingering effect of the recent recession, others made it seem like this was typical of the retail managerial occupation in general. However, Lou, a store manager with over 20 years of retail experience, mentions that he worked at two previous organizations as they went public and the result in both cases was a drastic reduction in payroll allotment in order to make, in his words, “the numbers look as good as possible for the investors.” This suggests that larger organizational shifts (e.g., going public, mergers and acquisitions) affect how much pressure managers feel and this may have an effect on how strict or lenient a manager is with employee non-work-related activities.
the sense of urgency…And then that’s going to save me money at the end of the day because I didn’t have to call in someone extra to do all that work.

Similarly, Andrew brags, “I keep them hustling on my day shifts. I keep everybody moving [so] when there’s not much to do I can start cutting people.” Thus, by ensuring that employees stay on task and eliminating opportunities for workers to engage in non-work-related activities, these managers make their payroll pressures, and their jobs in general, less problematic. Ultimately being a successful manager seems to mean transferring pressure and its consequences downward to employees, creating scheduling unpredictability and a work environment that is less accepting of employee non-work-related activity.

“As Long as the Job Gets Done”: Ambivalence Toward Non-Work-Related Activities

Despite the emphasis in past research on the financial consequences of non-work-related activities for companies and the pressure placed on managers to act on this issue (e.g., Ketchen et al., 2008), half of the managers in the current study do not view non-work-related activities as a problem. These managers come from every level of hierarchy (i.e., from shift supervisor to CEO) and from a variety of professional, service, and industrial workplaces. Overall, these managers display a high level of ambivalence and, in some cases, indifference towards non-work-related activities during work hours. Edgar, the owner of his own catering service and restaurant, showcases this feeling:

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22 Lou, a retail store manager featured in the next section, is the only interviewee to frame payroll pressure as a way to obtain rewards rather than to avoid consequences. He explains that a manager may receive a bigger quarterly or end-of-year bonus if payroll costs are minimized and the store hits its revenue targets. However, he mirrors the managers in this section when he says: “At my last store we weren’t doing well, so they started cutting payroll. Which made it even harder to do well. So I’m coming in working longer days because I’m one of the only salaried employees. And it wasn’t long before I started hearing from my boss – ‘Lou, you need to turn this around’ – with the implied ‘or else’ at the end.”
I mean, there’s a lot of goldbricking going on, you know, for instance, I [recently had an] inspection, [and the inspector asked] ‘Do these employees get breaks?’ And I bust out laughing. And I said, well, look around right now, while we’re sitting back here talking, two of them are sitting up there watching television [laughs], one’s outside smoking [laughs again]—I said ‘Get breaks? It’s more like, do they do any work?’

[Edgar laughs, pauses, and then sighs] Whatever.

Although Edgar may see his workers’ non-work-related activity as more comical than detrimental, when asked if his business is hurt by it, Edgar admits that he could probably be more profitable if he were strict with his employees. However, he then states: “Well, you know, I got people in place that I think will at least half-ass do the job. You know what I mean? So, you know, most of them are good. Pretty good.”

Clearly Edgar displays a high level of ambivalence (and indifference) towards non-work-related activities (e.g., “Whatever”; “Pretty good”). This may be because of the “type” of workers he claims to employ. Similar to the managers who actively police non-work-related activities, Edgar describes his employees as unmotivated and immature:

Productivity wise…I think that hourly employees aren’t motivated employees. Need and want—well, maybe not want—need to be told what to do because they are unmotivated, uneducated, um, a lower part of the workforce, I guess…They’re going to sit down if you don’t tell them any better.

However, unlike the other managers who generally assume they can prevent workers from engaging in non-work-related activities with diligent supervision, Edgar seems to accept the inevitability of these actions and does not worry about it.
Edgar’s ambivalence may also stem from feelings of empathy and how he imagines an ideal boss should be: “I’m not a whip cracker or a guy that’s always pushing, pushing, pushing… I know I don’t want somebody breathing down my neck all the time, and so I feel that my employees probably feel the same way.” Indeed, other managers claim to be lenient about non-work-related activities for similar reasons:

I don’t want to be a [the interviewee growls/barks] in your face kind of manager. I had that past experience, and I didn’t like it. I’m more laid back. (Kristina, shift supervisor, entertainment)

A lot of senior managers come from outside the company…but they don’t have a true understanding of what it takes to produce something or to complete something as well as an employee does. Me coming up through those ranks, I’ve seen it. I’ve lived it. I’ve felt it. So, as a manager, I have a better understanding that these things [non-work-related activities] do occur. (Alvin, inventory and compliance manager, production)

My boss taught me how to be a boss by not being him. In every way possible. That’s why I’m a successful boss. Because I’m not him. Like I said before, I should be thanking him—“Hey thanks for teaching me to not be you. Now I have guys that respect me, and they work pretty hard. You jerk.” (Nikoli, shop supervisor, engineering)

Being on the receiving end of management efforts to eliminate non-work-related activities has led Kristina and Nikoli to take a more relaxed approach with their employees. Their past
experiences of bad management have shaped their understandings of what it means to be a good manager and this has led them to be more lenient regarding their employees’ non-work-related activities. By contrast, Alvin seems to suggest that workers have a better understanding of the production process and when breaks from work are necessary. The fact that he “came up through the ranks” similarly suggests that his former experiences shaped his current mindset. Of course, one can imagine the opposite effect as employees learn how to be strict and controlling from their management or feel pressure, upon becoming management, to act differently than they would have as an employee. Similar to Alvin, three other managers – Lucas, Kristina, Bella – currently manage in the same company at which they started out. Of these managers, only Bella, a retail shift supervisor, describes occasionally rooting out former bastions of non-work-related activity. She maintains that “abuse” is rare, but (reminiscent of the life of Frederick Winslow Taylor) knows how her former colleagues “waste time” and stops it when necessary. The other managers (Alvin included) are far more empathetic to employees engaging in non-work-related activities on a regular basis.

Edgar’s comments also imply a sense of “satisficing,” i.e., accepting work that is “good enough” rather than optimal (Simon, 1956) and “bottom-line mentality” (Greenbaum et al., 2012). Edgar satisfies the goals of peak employee production and customer service (i.e., he is more lax concerning non-work-related activities) in exchange for an overall, steady and dependable level of production (the work is at least “half-assed”), as well as a relatively harmonious employer-employee relationship. He optimizes these latter outcomes and allows a certain level of rule-breaking to occur as long as his employees meet his bottom-line expectations. Edgar may have the freedom and flexibility to act this way because as the owner of his own business he does not have anyone breathing down his neck and/or is
not worried about losing his job. However, managers from a wide variety of workplaces and ranks in the organizational hierarchy echo this idea:

As long as my time expectations get done, or whatever job that needs to be done, I don’t see any problem with anyone, you know, just taking a minute, taking five minutes, just to have a quick conversation on a personal level. (Nikoli, shop supervisor, engineering)

I don’t want to see you every hour on the hour going to spend fifteen minutes outside or smoking a cigarette or something like that. I don’t want to see you for extended periods of time not working. But I should say, as long as you get your job done, you know, I don’t mind the breaks. Playing a game on your computer, surfing the internet or whatever, I don’t complain about that. (Charlie, sales/rate manager, shipping)

I kind of put up with it. I think it’s just depending on who it is and how often it happens…If someone’s been here for six or seven hours already and they just want to…clear their mind for a second…chat with an associate for two minutes…then I don’t have a problem with that. (Lou, retail store manager)

Happy employees – you can ask them to do anything you want and it’ll get done. So you want that cigarette break? Okay…go clean the parking lot…Listen to your iPod? Shit, do whatever you want with your iPod while you’re cleaning my coolers. Because, guess what? I’m still getting productivity from that person. (Brandon, food-service manager)
Even Edith, who recounts the story about sitting in front of the time clock, explains: “If I don’t notice it, if you’re taking a little bit of extra time but the work is still getting done, it’s probably not a big deal.” Indeed, some of the managers who actively attempt to eliminate employee non-work-related behavior describe occasional allowances for non-work-related activities either as a reward for good work or to secure future production. Andrew, a fast-food manager, explains: “My opener comes in with me early as crap in the morning. Helps me get the open knocked out by ten o’clock like we’re supposed to. So I’m often like: Why don’t you go ahead and take the trash out and take a break real quick?” Another fast-food manager, Colin, makes exceptions for smokers: “So the thing is, sometimes I do [let it slide]. Like if I don’t give my employees a smoke break, the next thing you know they kind of go into a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type thing [laughs]…I know it’s going to make a difference in my employees’ quality of work, so I have to manage that.”

Taken together, these quotes suggest that the formal rules and expectations of employers may be superseded by an informal, negotiated order (Strauss, 1978) in which managers trade a certain level of non-work-related behavior in exchange for the completion of larger organizational goals (Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Lupton, 1963; Sykes, 1958). As such, managers may disregard rule-breaking if production can be ensured (Edwards, 1986). In other words, it may not be worth the aggravation or potential conflict to eliminate employees’ non-work-related activities completely, as long as the employees complete what management believes is an acceptable amount of work each day.23 As long as baseline productivity or efficiency expectations are met, not much else may matter.

23 This may be a day-to-day process as both managers and employees continuously attempt to renegotiate effort levels (see, for example, Burawoy, 1979).
Lastly, though Edgar believes non-work-related activities occur frequently, other managers’ nonchalance over non-work-related activities may stem from a belief that abuse is rare. Despite the vast majority of managers reporting that they have seen employees engage in non-work-related activities, many spoke as if this is atypical. Bella’s response is common: I have had a couple of employees—um, you know, I don’t mind them being a little late back from break, 35 minutes [instead of 30]—but this one new girl, she took about a 45-minute break and I told her as soon as she got back that she was going to stay an extra hour, because not only did she come back late but she didn’t do what I told her to do beforehand...But, I mean, it’s not a lot of employees that waste time.” Similarly, Edith reports: “I think it’s something that actually just happens once in a while. Once it’s addressed it seems to go away...Occasionally someone just needs a reminder [and] you just deal with it and move on.” Others suggest that their employees know the boundaries of what separates acceptable behavior and abuse. For example, Vicki, a vice-president of a non-profit, describes how her employees often chat with each other during the day and then states: “And nobody takes advantage of it...Five or ten minutes and that’s it. They know...everybody’s got stuff to do, so let’s move on.” Danny, a store manager of a paper manufacturer and retailer, describes an employee who goes out on smoke breaks: “It was always real quick. And if she saw that there were a couple of cars pulling in the lot then she would just cut it short. Never an issue where I had to go out and track her down or anything like that.”

One could argue that these managers may be playing down the extent that their employees engage in non-work-related activities, or that they may be unaware of some of their employees’ activities; however, many managers are quick to point out that their
employees often report their coworkers’ non-work-related behavior. For example, Danny states: “[My] older employees, they’re always trying to make sure that they’re keeping a watchful eye over the younger ones [laughs], even though that’s not in their job classification. But it also provides a little added eye for me whenever I might have to leave the floor, you know?” Nelson, an assistant manager at a retail store, echoes Danny: “So if somebody’s sitting back in the break room taking breaks every half hour, you know somebody’s going to come up and say something to you about it…I’ve got tons of sets of eyes all over the building from just the other associates who will tell me what's going on.”

In addition, when abuse does occur it seems to be easily remedied as these managers maintain that they have the power to dismiss their employees. Lou, a retail store manager, explains: “You simply just address it, and if it continues to happen, then you no longer need the services of that person.” Nelson echoes:

If you’re abusing your breaks…you’re abusing lunches, stuff like that—eventually it catches up to you…[Like this one associate] I literally went up to him one day and said ‘Look, if I have to, I’ll pull out a chair and I’ll sit here in a chair and watch you work.’ He transferred out to another store because he realized that we were watching him…but when we build the schedule we can go in and change [it] and adjust this and that…[so] if you’re…for lack of a better way to put it, a waste of my payroll, you’re not going to get that much of my payroll.

Thus, the managers have the power to address the issue if it ever gets out of hand by either limiting a person’s hours or removing the employee altogether. Although this may create costs for the employer in other areas (e.g., the cost of a new hire), the managers’ control over who stays or goes likely contributes to thinking about non-work-related activities as a non-
issue. At the same time, not all managers may feel they have this kind of power and it may be that managers without much organizational power supervise their employees more closely (Kanter, 1977). However, as Kristina’s and Nikoli’s earlier testimonies suggest, a manager’s level or type of supervision may be shaped more by his or her prior experiences with abusive management.

“It Enhances Your Work Environment”: Encouraging Non-Work-Related Activity

Finally, four managers suggest non-work-related activities in moderation are beneficial to workers and the company. Echoing findings from ergonomics, management, occupational psychology, and sociological literatures (Dababnah et al., 2001; Garson, 1975; Mayo, 1924; Roy, 1959; Tucker, 2003), these managers see non-work-related activities as similar to formal breaks in that they allow workers to reenergize, refocus, engage their creativity, or create a better work environment. As a result, they do not reprimand employees engaged in non-work-related activities, and non-work-related activity is a common, everyday occurrence. As Vicki, the vice-president of a non-profit organization, recalls:

Throughout the day…I stop and start chatting with someone for five or ten minutes, and that’s pretty common for just about everybody in the office. (So that’s allowed?) Yeah. It happens all the time. [It helps to create] a social aspect to the relationship you have with your colleagues…It’s not just straight business. We realize people are people. Everybody’s got personal things going on.

Similarly, after describing how he “works with a bunch of guys, and, yes, we do talk once in a while just about what’s going on in the world…a few minutes here or there,” Alvin, an inventory and compliance manager at an engineering firm, explains:
So those different things always happen and they happen on a daily basis and I’m part of that…[And] that’s perfectly okay, because…it enhances your work environment if you can just open up and talk to someone about common interests…it helps people…[instead of] just being, you know, ‘Oh my gosh I have to get this done and if I don’t I’m in so much trouble and I’m going to have my manager barking at me because I didn’t get it done’…It allows for more of a family environment. Although employees may not be actively working every minute on the clock, Alvin believed that they would be calmer, less stressed, and become more committed to the organization overall if he grants some leeway regarding non-work-related activities. As Alvin continues: “[If you allow it to happen], you’ll get a better response from your employees.”

It is not surprising that these managers come exclusively from professional or administrative/office environments. Unlike low-skill, low-pay occupations where work is tightly controlled and there is an acute emphasis on short-term profit generation (Crowley, 2012; Edwards and Scullion, 1982), professional and administrative/office settings often give employees a wider range of movement and a high degree of autonomy to complete tasks (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Kunda, 1992). These latter workers often require space to be creative, and coercive control is antithetical to this type of atmosphere. Practically, this may mean that brief episodes of non-work-related activities like chatting with coworkers, daydreaming, or surfing the Web are a part of the daily flow of the organization. As these interviewees point out, this does not mean employers suffer consequences; in fact, employers may benefit. Thus, non-work-related activity may be work-related to the extent it helps employees stay focused and complete tasks, and determining when non-work-related activity is beneficial or problematic is highly subjective.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite steady rises in worker productivity, the stagnation of workers’ wages over the last 30 years, and persistent reports of “wage theft” (e.g., Kalleberg, 2009), business and management-centric research on non-work-related activities increasingly suggests that employees who engage in these behaviors cost companies billions of dollars annually and represent a serious problem that management seeks to eliminate (Akremi et al., 2010; Ketchen et al., 2008; Lim, 2002). They present employers as the “rightful owners” of employees’ labor, constructing non-work-related activities as unauthorized “theft” perpetrated by employees who have little regard for potential negative organizational consequences of non-work-related activities, and they assume that managers seek to prevent employees from engaging in these behaviors. Sociological research provides compelling criticisms of the “time theft” research (e.g., Paulson, 2014), demonstrating that managers allow employee non-work-related activity under certain conditions (e.g., Anteby, 2008). However, sociologists and business scholars tend to share the assumption that management and employees have opposing interests, presenting employee engagement in non-work-related activity as opposition or resistance to management’s desires and goals (Karlsson, 2012; Paulson, 2014).

The managers in the present study describe varying examples of, opinions about, and approaches to handling employees who engage in non-work-related activities. The managers who report being strict about non-work-related activities tend to be in low-skill, low-wage workplaces where corporate payroll pressures and cost-saving expectations provide them with an incentive to exert a high level of control over employees. By contrast, the few managers who actively describe encouraging their workers to engage in non-work-related
activities feel these behaviors benefit the company through fostering good coworker and employee-manager relationships. These managers come from administrative/office and professional environments where workers are harder to replace and tend to enjoy a wider range of movement and autonomy (Fraser, 2001; Kunda, 1992). Thus, managers’ opinions and actions regarding non-work-related activities appear to reflect, in part, occupational variation in employee control (Crowley, 2012; Leiter, 1986), as well as workplace culture. In other words, control strategies “shape work experiences through impacts on workplace interactions” (Crowley, 2012: 1401; see also Hodson, 2001), and managers may be more or less lenient towards non-work-related activities as a result.

In between these two poles, managers from a variety of different workplaces and levels of hierarchy express ambivalence (and perhaps indifference) towards non-work-related activities as long as employees complete their tasks. Echoing the insights of the negotiated-order perspective (Strauss, 1978; Strauss et al., 1963) and classic sociological studies on the effort bargain (Baldamus, 1961; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Sykes, 1958), these managers seem to allow small amounts of formal rule breaking as long as employees meet management’s baseline level of production and efficiency expectations. Indeed, given the financial targets and day-to-day performance expectations for many of these managers (and managers in general—see Edwards and Collinson, 2002), it makes sense that some managers look the other way or decide that non-work-related activities are not worth getting upset over “as long as the job gets done.” Of course, the specifics of what constitutes “the job” will differ across organizations and vary over time, so what constitutes a job “getting done” will vary, but managers seem to “know it when they see it” and respond accordingly. At the same time, in some workplaces, work outputs are more easily measured and monitored, so
managers may have a much more concrete idea of what it means for employees to complete their work. It is also worth noting that past research often emphasizes how managers (and by proxy, employers) end up receiving the greatest benefit from these employee-manager time use negotiations (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Sallaz, 2002). Yet this may not always be the case, especially for the managers in my study whose satisficing behavior and “bottom-line” mentality toward production lead them to treat how employees reach production goals as less important than whether employees reached those goals eventually.

Managers appear also to reflect on their own experiences as former employees, which seems to influence their relative lenience towards non-work-related activities. This is further influenced by the physical proximity and extent of interactions between managers and their employees, and perhaps between managers and their own supervisors (e.g., upper-level management). Indeed, some managers report resisting engaging in high levels of direct control to avoid the feeling that they were “breathing down the necks” of their employees. These managers do not appreciate it when they are subjected to that type of managerial style in the past, so they avoid making a similar mistake with their employees. Moreover, managers likely differ in the extent of their own autonomy and those managers with more freedom may grant their own employees more latitude as a result. At the same time, evidence suggests that supervisors’ ability to deal with “abuse,” and their relationship with their employees, may influence perceptions of non-work-related activities. For example, if managers have the power to remove workers who abuse the system, or if managers feel they can rely on “good” employees to police their coworkers for them, they may not perceive non-work-related activities as a problem.
This study adds to the literature on managerial control and criticizes time theft literature by reexamining taken-for-granted assumptions about how managers think about and react to non-work-related activities. This research questions the universal portrayal of managers as discouraging non-work-related behaviors by highlighting potential differences in managerial experience and outlook regarding non-work-related activities. Specific contributions to the literature include the understanding that labeling non-work-related activities a serious social and organizational problem that management seeks to eliminate (e.g., “time theft,” “counter-productive,” and “deviant”) is an oversimplification of the issue. The findings suggest that managers have different views of non-work-related activities, seeing these activities as having negative, neutral, or positive consequences depending on a variety of individual- and system-level factors. Individual-level factors shaping managerial opinions include the managers’ past personal experiences with abusive management, their power to discipline workers perceived to be shirking, whether the managers can rely on employees to monitor their own and each other’s time use, and the extent of each manager’s personal autonomy. Important system-level factors include the type of occupation (e.g., professional work versus service work) and control strategies present in the workplace. These findings suggest that if managers’ success is “contingent on their subordinates’ performance” (Greenbaum et al., 2012: 354; see also Ackroyd, 2012) then moderate levels of employee non-work-related activity may simply be a small cost of doing good business. In other words, non-work-related activities may be less serious, worrisome, and damaging than frequently assumed, especially in administrative/office workplaces.

This study is not without limitations. First, although every attempt was made to interview managers from a variety of workplaces, these data do not systematically represent
variation in managing experiences; the findings are nonetheless suggestive of patterns that may be found in the wider population. More research in the United States (and abroad, where break regulations, experiences, and opinions may differ widely) is necessary to see if the patterns identified here apply in different types of samples or in other settings, as different types of labor processes will allow more or less room for negotiation. Second, the non-work-related activities discussed here do not encompass the full range of actions described in the literature. Past research tends to lump together activities such as theft of property, sabotage, absenteeism, verbal/physical abuse, and taking an extra break. Inclusion of theft of property, sabotage, and abuse – behaviors that can be criminalized outside the workplace setting – in a study on informal breaks – a noncriminal behavior – certainly would obscure findings and make it appear more likely that managers care deeply about controlling the behaviors of their workers. As such, I narrowed the scope of the study to non-work-related time activities, though I did not distinguish between types of activities. A more detailed analysis of how employees spend their non-work-related time – talking, smoking, daydreaming, union organizing, etc. – may uncover additional ways in which the level of managerial concern with non-work-related behaviors is contextually shaped.

Third, due to time and funding limitations, these data represent the self-reported perceptions and opinions of one member within a given organization. This limited my ability to understand the nuances and dynamics at play in these workplaces. Interviews with other managers and employees, as well as observations at each workplace, would likely provide a more complex picture than the one the respondents reported from their unitary vantage point. For example, employees may engage in non-work-related activities more frequently than managers think. Yet, some managers in this study suggest that employees may actually help
detect and police the non-work-related activities of coworkers, especially if a coworker’s behavior affects other workers’ ability to get work done. Thus, managers may be less concerned about non-work-related activities because employees engage in self-monitoring and peer-monitoring behavior (Barker, 1993; Crowley et al., 2013). As a result, it is possible that some managers may profess leniency towards non-work-related activities only because they know that other watchful eyes ensure productivity continues.

Similarly, researchers should study how and to what extent managers make known their feelings about non-work-related activities to employees. Only then can researchers know whether managers’ “talk” translates into real outcomes for employees. Indeed, given that interviews are subject to self-presentation bias, managers who used the “as long as the job gets done” mantra may have done so to improve their image, simultaneously presenting themselves as both competent/disciplined as well as a good person. However, more research is necessary, including interviews with employees and observations of workplaces in action, to investigate these queries completely. In particular, having matched employee-manager pairs to interview or observe would provide a way to assess the extent to which those who are managed perceived leniency, ambivalence, and control the same way the manager describes his or her practices. Additional ethnographic research that analyzes non-work-related activity at the intersections of organizational structure (e.g., career ladders, control/surveillance, etc.), workplace culture, and individual personality would be welcome.

Future research should move past identifying the antecedents of non-work-related activities or estimating the costs of these actions for employers to investigate the actual opinions, feelings, and experiences of managers, owners, and workers. An important next step is to identify typologies of non-work-related activities based on benefits/acceptability
from the vantage of managers, workers, and owners (see Kim and Byrne, 2011 for a preliminary framework). Researchers concerned with improving manager-employee relations and the work experience in general may be especially interested in understanding how employees view different types of non-work-related activities and why employees engage in these activities. It may be that employees engage in non-work-related activities at least in part due to perceived injustices on behalf of their organization or management (Lim, 2002), and knowing this could help improve organizational relations in the future.

Future investigations might also identify systematically the factors that influence management’s strictness, indifference, or permissiveness towards non-work-related activities, regardless of the activity in question (Anandarajan and Simmers, 2005; Dahling et al., 2012). Another next step includes investigating how employees react when managers strictly police non-work-related activity. For example, employees may resist attempts to restrict their access to non-work-related activities, especially if managers engage in strict policing at times when the organization is experiencing a low level of activity (e.g., a gap in production or cycle of customers). At the same time, employees who are in constant contact with management on a daily basis may have little room to resist surveillance. However, these possibilities are likely heavily influenced by the presence or absence of union representation, and studying non-work-related activities at unionized organizations would be a fruitful future avenue of investigation.

Finally, an additional interesting avenue for future research is to examine differences in the acceptance of non-work-related activities between low-level supervisors, middle-managers, and other highly-ranked company officials like CEOs and store owners (see Anandarajan and Simmers, 2003, 2005), as well as managers who come into close contact
with employees on a regular basis versus managers who do not. The managers in this study vary significantly in their opinions about non-work-related activities, and though I interviewed a mixture of mid- to highly-ranked (e.g., a vice-president of a non-profit, store managers) and low-level (e.g., shift supervisors) managers, almost all of the respondents in this study have direct and daily contact with employees. Additional interviews with managers across levels of organizational hierarchy, especially those with a high level of social distance from employees, may reveal important distinctions. For example, high-ranking managers, like owners and CEOs, may not have the same negative assumptions about human behavior that low-level managers may have. At the same time, high-ranking managers may be more concerned with overall profits and shareholder value, so they may desire to increase efficiency and eliminate non-work-related activities completely. Indeed, given the great social distance between high-ranking officials and the “shop-floor,” these managers may not understand how important non-work-related activities are to the well-being of employees, or the potential effort-bargain negotiations necessary to keep the organization running smoothly on a daily basis (Burawoy, 1979; Sykes, 1958). After all, “Supervisors have to live with the consequences of their [decisions] in a way that more senior managers do not” (Ackroyd, 2012: 24). Thus, low- and mid-level managers, who interact with employees more frequently, may be better situated to appreciate when negotiation and leniency are necessary, and ultimately understand when and where non-work-related activities have negative, neutral, and positive effects.
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CHAPTER 4: EMPLOYEES REVEAL THE LIMITS OF THEIR NON-WORK-RELATED ACTIVITY

INTRODUCTION

Business school/management researchers and sociologists alike have established that many employees engage in non-work-related activities while on-the-job, like daydreaming, extended conversations with coworkers, or browsing the internet (Anteby, 2008; Atkinson, 2006; Henle et al., 2010; Molstad, 1986). However, both literatures provide a narrow view of why employees engage in non-work-related activity, focusing heavily on how non-work-related activities are a form of resistance against management to maintain their autonomy and dignity at work (Hodson, 1995; Karlsson, 2012; Paulsen, 2014, 2015) or a response to organizational injustice (Akremi et al., 2010; Lim, 2002; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2007). As such, researchers have not fully explored the circumstances under which employees make decisions to engage in or refrain from non-work-related behaviors.

Using 34 interviews with non-managerial workers across a variety of service, industrial, and professional/administrative workplaces in the United States, this chapter investigates the types of non-work-related activities employees engage in while at work and under what circumstances employees engage in non-work-related activities that are often (but not always) against the rules. The chapter also investigates if and when employees police their own and their coworkers’ behavior. I begin by reviewing the literature on employee engagement in non-work-related activities. This is followed by a report of findings that question fundamental assumptions in the literature regarding employees’ feelings about and enactment of non-work-related activities on the job. These findings reveal that many employees criticize and refrain from certain types of non-work-related activities. Most employees limit the time they spend on and frequency of their non-work-related activities.
and claim to actively police themselves and coworkers so that non-work-related behaviors do not interfere with completing important organizational tasks. They seek out time to relax when it is least problematic for the organization, which usually occurs during organizationally produced (rather than employee created) lulls in business activity. As such, the findings suggest that not all non-work-related activity results from the desire to resist organizational injustice.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Employee engagement in non-work-related behaviors on the job has long been a research topic of interest for scholars across social science disciplines. For example, the industrial psychology literature of the early 1900s warns employers that “everywhere men and women engaged in monotonous occupations steal their rests in case authorized rests are not allowed” (Hersey 1925: 37; see also Linder and Nygaard 1998). While more recent research provides little support for this assertion (for an exception, see Lim 2002), sociological literature suggests informal break use and non-work-related activities more generally are still common (Anteby, 2008; Hodson, 1995). However, sociological research suggests that opportunities for non-work-related activity may be growing scarce, as more and more work now spills into formally designated break times and into home life (Fraser, 2001; Jacobs et al., 2004; Kalleberg, 2009; Kunda, 1992).

By contrast, management and business scholars argue that employee engagement in non-work-related activities remains a “perennial cause of concern” (Akremi et al., 2010; Lim and Chen, 2012: 343), especially with the advent of computer use in the workplace (Atkinson, 2006; Liberman et al., 2011; Lim, 2002; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2007). Researchers argue that anywhere between 68% and 80% of workers engage in non-work-
related behaviors on the job (Garrett and Danziger, 2008; Vitak et al., 2011), and employees may spend from a half hour to two hours per day participating in non-work-related activities outside of regularly scheduled work breaks (Eddy et al., 2010; Malachowski and Simonini, 2006). As such, business scholars often portray employees as “time thieves” who engage in non-work-related activities with ease, regularity, and little regard to the organizational costs (Lim, 2002; Lim and Teo, 2005; Martin et al., 2010). As Lim and Teo (2005: 1082) write, “While most Internet users feel that activities such as...e-mailing a note to a friend takes only a few seconds...often the few seconds can add up to hours and...[become] a problem to the company.” Similarly, Mastrangelo et al. (2006: 738) argue that “employees may be unable to know when [non-work-related activity] has become detrimental to necessary performance.”

Of course, business/management researchers acknowledge that a significant amount of work is still completed each day across organizations (Blanchard and Henle, 2008; Martin et al., 2010). After all, research shows that employees generally want to do good work and often receive fulfillment from a job well done (Hodson, 1995), and there are at least some individuals who claim to refrain nearly entirely from non-work-related behaviors (Garrett and Danziger, 2008; Vitak et al., 2011). Additionally, research indicates that employees who have strong personal values oriented toward fairness are less likely to participate in non-work-related activities even if coworkers engage in them (Holtz and Harold, 2013). All of this suggests that employees must make decisions about whether and when to engage in non-work-related activities, as well as the types of activities in which they participate (Klotz and Buckley, 2013).

24 Although these figures suggest that many workers participate in non-work-related activities, it is notable that these studies focused explicitly on administrative/office and professional workers with access to computers. It may be that the rate of participation in non-work-related activities among other types of workers (e.g., service workers) is much lower given their lack of access to computers and exposure to heightened levels of surveillance (e.g., Crowley, 2012; Hodson, 2001).
Little is known concerning what employees think about when deciding whether to engage in non-work-related behaviors because business/management scholars and sociologists tend to provide narrow views of why employees engage such activities. Sociologists argue that non-work-related activity usually takes the form of workplace resistance in response to organizational injustice (Karlsson, 2012; Paulsen, 2014; 2015). Yet employees may not have any particular reason (e.g., injustice) to engage in these activities, especially if non-work is a part of normal day-to-day activity. Indeed, despite evidence of intensification and overwork, employees may still find themselves at times in situations where little work is required of them (Paulsen, 2014; 2015). As such, employees may engage in non-work-related activities by default, and, therefore, they are not engaged in resistance.

Management and business scholars also argue that non-work-related activities may be a response to organizational injustice (e.g., Holtz and Harold, 2014; Lim, 2002), but most often these researchers portray employees as willing or unknowing “time thieves,” engaging in non-work-related activities without much thought for the potential organizational consequences and blame managers for not properly enforcing performance expectations (e.g., Henle et al., 2008). However, although many employees desire to take breaks from work outside of formally allotted time periods (perhaps to avoid work, but also to handle personal affairs, smoke, add variety to the day, or rest—see e.g., Dababneh et al., 2001; Fine, 1990), it is likely that employees do so while taking the needs of management and employers into account. After all, employees initially learn formal rules for proper behavior from their employer when they join an organization. Of course, informal norms among employees may reinforce or challenge these formal rules (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1950), but it is reasonable to expect employees to develop a “responsible autonomy” or a sense when it is “okay” from an
employer’s perspective to engage in non-work-related activity (Paulsen, 2014; see also Askew, 2012). As Askew (2012: 48) speculates, “People have a certain amount of work to get done and they [engage in non-work-related activities] when they have the time.” Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the limits or boundaries employees set and the conditions under which they engage in or refrain from non-work-related activity.

THE LIMITS OF NON-WORK-RELATED BEHAVIOR

Most respondents reveal engaging in some form of non-work-related behaviors on a daily or weekly basis, and interviewees describe engaging in a wide-range of activities, including talking with coworkers, browsing the internet, taking a walk around the establishment, or hiding out in backrooms. They report engaging in activities individually, as well as in groups. Notably, the activities appear to vary based on the type of workplace; for example, in service occupations, employees describe resting periodically in some type of backroom away from customers or generally slowing their movements down. Reggie, a bartender, describes occasional nights when he also works as a bouncer: “You’ll see the bartenders behind the bar at 10 o’clock and you look around the room and there will be 40 bouncers on the schedule but only two upstairs. The rest, they’re all out on the back patio having a cigarette, or they’re just bullshitting, texting, or something.” Wesley, now a software developer, relates a story of a previous job working for a shipping company where he and his colleagues would rest in between truck shipments by “[taking] turns trying to throw packages onto a steel beam and make it stay.” Jim, a fabrication mechanic, describes seeking out “busy work” or “finding a couple of guys to shoot the shit with” to avoid falling asleep (an offense that would lead to termination) on his “graveyard” shifts.
Administrative/office and professional workers discuss computer-related activities and taking extra breaks outside their official lunch period. Wesley, at his current job as a software developer, admits that during a recent state holiday that he and his coworkers came to work, but spent most of their time browsing Reddit.com. He goes on to disclose: “I would say [that] probably happens a good deal.” By contrast, Thomas, a computer analyst at a medical billing office, explains what he does: “There [are] definitely times where I need to get out of the office for a [few] minutes and clear my head…Today I…went for a walk to get up and move around a little bit.”

Given the literature’s general association of non-work-related activity with counterproductive and criminal behaviors that prove costly for employers (e.g., Ketchen et al., 2008; Lim, 2002), it is somewhat surprising how readily most respondents reveal the extent of their non-work-related behavior. Perhaps employees do not view engaging in non-work-related activities as particularly harmful (and supervisors may reinforce this view explicitly or implicitly through inaction against violations). At the same time, the ease with which employees report on their non-work-related activity may have resulted, at least in part, from the limits they describe placing on their actions. The following sections showcase the various ways employees describe boundaries and limits to non-work-related behavior, with particular emphasis on how employees distinguish between unacceptable and acceptable types of non-work-related actions, and how most employees set prohibitions on the length, frequency, and timing of non-work-related activities.

**Setting Boundaries on the Type of Non-Work-Related Activity**

Short of refraining from non-work-related activity completely, many respondents quickly make distinctions between the kind of non-work-related activities in which they
engaged and the behaviors that they believe constituted abuse. Nessa, currently a restaurant worker, makes this clear as she recounts her recent past experience staffing the front desk of a student dormitory:

There are some things that are just…kind of obvious. Like you can’t watch a nudie flick on the TV…You shouldn’t be watching Jerry Springer…these kinds of things [are] inappropriate. And we actually had an issue with that [laughs]. We had this one employee…[who] was reprimanded for trying to watch softcore porn.

Similarly, Reggie, a bartender, criticizes his coworkers who were responsible for keeping the bartenders stocked throughout the night: “We’ve had a few bar-backs that would try and sneak out to a back room or something and hook up with a girl. We’ve had bar-backs just like grab a bottle and go to the bathroom and try and get drunk. We’ve had a few bar-backs kind of take advantage of their freedom.” Finally Karen, a cashier, reports that she and her coworkers banded together to get another worker fired for constantly coming back late on breaks and showing up to work on drugs:

Our manager had a passive relationship with her. He would kind of let her do whatever because it would keep her out of his hair…But it wasn’t fair…And the customers would know. They’d look at her and be like, what’s wrong with her? So [we ended up] calling our loss prevention supervisor and he came in and watched tapes and watched her, you know, leave at twelve for her fifteen and watched her come back at 12:40…And he ended up firing her because of it.

Respondents see these examples as gross violations of policy and appropriate employee behavior. The employees are concerned with the potential consequences of these actions for their employer, and they make it clear that they refrain from engaging in anything so severe.
Indeed, in Karen’s example, they are so concerned that they take managerial surveillance and policing into their own hands by bypassing their direct manager and contacting the loss prevention supervisor directly. In effect, despite admitting their own involvement in non-work-related activities, these employees use examples of coworkers’ non-work-related behavior to present themselves as less deviant than others. To the extent that employees share these experiences with others (e.g., Karen’s example), the behavior may also serve to bolster the employee’s own identity as a “good” person/employee/co-worker, reinforce group cohesion, establish boundaries and limits on what is acceptable, and ultimately help employers and management secure their desires and goals.

Other actions elicited similar co-worker criticism. For example, the interviewees look down on sleeping at work, even if an employee sleeps during their formal break. As George explains:

I have my own office right now, but for a while I had an officemate. And he would frequently fall asleep on the job. Almost daily. [How did you feel about that?] I felt it was inappropriate…I told him that as contractors working on-site at the client’s office, it reflected poorly on the company and gave the impression that we had nothing to do, thus, putting my job in jeopardy because…why have the contractor folks at the office if they’re not doing work and just going to sleep?

Jim, a fabrication mechanic, sees sleeping as a similarly unjustifiable and unambiguous waste of time: “You could be anywhere on that facility and someone asks you what you’re doing and you could give them an excuse for being somewhere, but if you’re asleep there is no
excuse…Because at that point…you are clearly not producing anything.” Thomas, a computer analyst, also provides a critical perspective:

One of my friends, right before I got hired, he had his half hour break and what he would do is set his alarm and crawl under his cubicle and take a nap. He got shit for it and he was like, ‘Well, it was my half hour!’ …[And I said] well you’re under your desk…What if we were having a client over and they saw you passed out snoring under your desk? Or what if you had a night terror and started screaming? [And he’s like] ‘Oh, well, I don’t, so it’s not a big deal’. I’m like, just don’t, dude.

Overall, these respondents deem sleeping inappropriate workplace behavior, costly potentially to both employers and employees. In particular, George and Thomas seem concerned about how sleeping “looks” to outside clients and worry that sleeping coworkers might even send the wrong message about themselves if they associate with that person.

Smoke breaks also draw the ire of many respondents. Research shows that smokers admit taking extra breaks outside of their formally allotted time (Borland et al., 1997; Wood, 2011), and supervisors perceive smokers as less productive (Halpern et al., 2001). The interviewees in this study make the same claims about their coworkers. For example, Jillian, an administrative worker, explains: “There are some people in the building who probably do take more than their fifteen minutes, breaks all totaled up, just by the amount of times I’ve seen them up walking around outside to have a cigarette break…I think that they do definitely take advantage of smoking breaks. Which isn’t fair.” Reggie recounts his recent summer experience as a construction worker:
I was building a marina… I sent two [coworkers] that happened to be smokers, up to the shore to pick up a couple of tools that we needed. After 30 minutes of waiting down on the dock for them… I walked up just in time to find them coming back from the store. They said they went to get cigarettes real quick. In the middle of a job you have two other guys waiting for you to get tools and they were like, ‘Oh, we don’t have cigarettes’… Like cigarettes were more important than the work. When you’re not a smoker you feel like ‘F[ck] cigarettes.’ We needed that tool.

Surprisingly, current smokers are sometimes their own toughest critics. Kylie, a research scientist, explains that she recently received a complaint from a coworker about her smoke breaks. Later in the conversation, she reveals:

You know, I don’t feel okay with [my smoking]. And…it was reaffirmed when I got the complaint. I felt like I took too many breaks…I think, just for me personally, taking a break every hour…doesn’t really give me enough time to get focused on what I need to get done…And so…when I got the…comment about it, I was like I don’t want to be perceived as being irresponsible.

In other words, Kylie feels she has lost the respect of some of her coworkers by constantly going outside to smoke, and she makes several comments throughout the interview about trying to minimize her smoke breaks in the future.25

There are a small number of exceptions concerning sleeping and smoking among interviewees. A few employees (particularly in professional and administrative/office jobs) describe working in organizations that actively tout the benefits of breaks from work,

25 Unrelated to smoking, many other employees expressed similar apprehension about being seen as someone who is constantly away from their desk.
including sleeping, and provide a variety of “employee wellness” amenities (Johnson, 2010; Wescott, 2012). Lee, a graphic designer explains: “There was this one time where I was actually really sick and I took medication that made me drowsy…so I went to my car and took a nap. [Why did you go to your car? Is that frowned upon?] No. Actually, I just found out from a coworker…she told me we have like a wellness room where you can actually go in there and take a nap. I might use it now.”

Regarding smoking, some smokers and non-smokers alike defend the practice as no worse than any other non-work-related activity in which someone might engage. Sarah, a smoker who works in the catering department of a restaurant, states definitively: “I don’t feel like it slows down my productivity.” Lenny, a non-smoking restaurant server, explains: “Well, I feel like in the restaurant industry there are more smokers you know, on average, per capita…It’s something about the lifestyle…To that extent, we’re all a little more tolerant of it because we work with more of them.” Finally, Johnny, a CAD technician who smokes, argues: “Most of [my coworkers] are like me with smoking, they’ll just do it with other stuff like phone calls, perusing the internet, stuff like that…They’ll have other things that they do while they’re working that sporadically end up being like a ten-minute [smoke] break.”

In sum, most interviewees speak negatively about certain non-work-related activities, especially sleeping, smoking, and drinking. Many employees bring up examples of coworkers who engage in these activities, and interviewees seem to treat these activities as different from other non-work-related behaviors, such as taking a personal phone call or chatting with coworkers. It does not seem to matter to interviewees how long or how frequently someone participates in these behaviors; instead, it matters whether employees engage in them at all. As Sally, who works in an administrative support role, said when
referring to drinking and drug use: “Everybody knows not to do that.” Employees imply that there exists a standard of acceptable behavior that all employees should understand and they justify their non-work-related behaviors at the expense of their coworkers who engage in different types of unproductive (and potentially counterproductive) actions. Employees’ examples of coworkers who sleep, smoke, or get drunk on the job serve as foils to establish the acceptability of their own actions and the limits or boundaries of acceptable types of non-work-related behavior. Additionally, employees seem to worry about how these activities might reflect on themselves and their employers, sometimes invoking notions of professional image and professionalism. If this is the case, it is likely not an accident, as researchers argue that employers “actively encourage professionalism” among their employees (Merton, 1968; Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 357). In other words, employers may use the rhetoric of professionalism to limit “bad” employee behavior, including non-work-related activities. At the same time, definitions of professionalism likely differ across professional fields and industries. For example, given the prevalence of smoking in some industries (e.g., food service) and research showing that smoking prevalence is inversely related to education (e.g., Hiscock et al., 2012), employees (nonsmokers and smokers alike) and employers may not view smoking as unprofessional. Similarly, employees and employers in professional workplaces may be more likely to view sleeping as standard behavior because work naps may be promoted as valuable break activities.

The Length, Frequency, and Timing of Non-Work-Related Activities

In addition to limiting the types of activities in which they engage, employees who engaged in non-work-related activity stress that some of the more acceptable types of non-

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26 It could be argued that these employees are engaging in neutralization techniques to legitimize their behavior (see Maruna and Copes, 2005; Sykes and Matza, 1957).
work-related behavior – checking personal emails, chatting with coworkers, or taking a long bathroom break – could be problematic if not kept within limits. Indeed, respondents seem to describe the acceptability or unacceptability of non-work-related activities more often in terms of how long or when they engage in these activities, rather than declaring forms of activities as acceptable or unacceptable. Overall, employees seem to have rules about the length, frequency, and situational context or timing of their non-work-related behavior.27

First, similar to past research (Askew, 2012; Lee et al., 2004; Stratton, 2010), respondents emphasize the amount of time they spend doing non-work-related activities and how frequently they engage in these behaviors. That is, respondents see non-work-related activities as acceptable in moderation, as long as they do not spend too much time away from work. As Marigold, a registered nurse, reveals: “I sometimes will check into Facebook and see what’s going on, but I don’t spend a lot of time there. Five, ten minutes to see what people have updated, and then I’m off.” Similarly, Colby, a retail sales associate, notes his occasional visit to the storeroom to relax: “[I will] maybe go back there and have a conversation with someone. Not for an extended period of time, but a few minutes here and there, you know? If there’s no one [at your station] for an extended period, it becomes glaringly obvious that there’s a hole in the coverage and that’s when we get in trouble.” Of course, these are the small moments that “time theft” researchers argue can add up to millions of dollars in lost productivity every year (Lim, 2005); however, these employees view these moments as inconsequential.

27 Given that these interviews took place at one moment in time and that these employees had varying ranges of tenure in their current position, it was difficult to gather information on the history of a given workplace’s rules and management’s expectations. As such, I cannot comment validly on whether the rules presented in this section on the length, frequency, and timing of non-work-related activities are a product of an employee’s personal expectations and feelings and/or past experiences of monitoring/surveillance at their workplace.
Employees consider the frequent or regular participation in non-work-related activities as a potential problem, especially if this interferes with their ability to complete work. Colby continues his discussion about his breaks in the storeroom: “As long as it didn’t become such a habit that it affected your work, it wasn’t a big deal.” George, a lawyer, echoes: “If I felt that using Gmail so often was keeping me from meeting my responsibilities, it’d be one thing, but that doesn’t feel like it’s the case.” Wesley, a software developer, argues: “We get, like, 45 minutes to bill for lunch, and I don’t usually go to lunch… so I sort of feel like as long as I’m not [engaging in non-work-related activities] excessively, I’m certainly within whatever time I would normally bill for lunch break.” Even Reggie, who denounces smoking, admits he does not care if the work level is maintained:

Usually there’s an understanding where the smokers will have a cigarette when they can, while they’re doing something. I know a lot of guys when they’re on the saw…they’ll have a cigarette hanging out of their mouth all day long because it doesn’t stop them. It’s fine if they want to have that cigarette while they’re using that saw, as long as they’re still making the cuts.

Taken together, the employees judge acceptable lengths and frequencies of non-work-related activity based on an assessment of whether they complete their work. The interviewees know that their organizational duties are important (Askew, 2012; D’Abate, 2005), and they are concerned with doing a job well (Hodson, 1995); thus, their work tasks factor into their decisions about engaging in non-work-related activities. In effect, employees develop a keen understanding of when it might be “okay” or at least not organizationally detrimental to engage in non-work-related activities (what Paulsen [2014] refers to as “responsible
autonomy"). As such, one could argue that it would be difficult to classify these behaviors under the umbrella of resistance or a response to organizational injustice. Instead, these behaviors seem more a part of normal day-to-day activities and decisions around when to work and when to take a break.

At the same time, risk aversion or avoiding getting in trouble with management or coworkers may underlie these employees’ desires to follow the rules. This is especially apparent when interviewees denounce coworkers who participate in non-work-related activities and thereby cause problems for others. As Phyllis, a factory worker, makes clear: “I have a big problem with [coworkers] on their cell phones…Because it interferes with their jobs...And if you’re trying to do a job and they’re on their cell phone, then, you know, who’s doing their job then? Somebody else. Picking up the slack.” Many others echo this theme:

I’m the one that goes to the back room…because I know that that is a way for people to waste time…and it makes more work for the closing people…It’s just not fair to have employees who know that they’re not closing to just waltz around and do those things. (Bella, former sales associate turned shift supervisor)

As long as we get our work done. It’s not like we’re putting our work on someone else and disappearing for a while. (Joey, stock analyst)

You couldn’t hide [in the back during Christmas season]…it just wasn’t possible. There was just too much going on to take something like that informally. [Did people get in trouble?] Yes, by everybody. Supervisors, coworkers, [they] would say something…Because then you wouldn’t be pulling—it wouldn’t be right. Pulling
your fair share. To the extent that you were actually making other people work harder. (Colby, sales associate)

Yeah, we just sit around when there’s nothing to do…But, like, we make sure everything gets done. It’s not like we sit back there while, like, one person is serving everyone. (Sunny, restaurant server)

When it starts affecting your work, when it starts affecting other people around you, that’s when you’re starting to abuse it. (Lenny, restaurant server)

Although employees generally describe non-work-related activities as informal and spontaneous, these comments suggest an element of planning and consideration is involved. In particular, these employees convey a high level of concern about possibly burdening their coworkers (or being burdened by their coworkers), and they criticize anyone who engages in non-work-related activity when there could be consequences for their peers. They also fear being labeled as a bad worker. For example, Lee, a graphic designer, insinuates that at her previous position in the company employees “compete with each other” over who stays the latest at work with some employees going so far as to “leave their office light on overnight” so colleagues would think they are working late. This suggests that employees may be engaging in “concertive control” (Barker, 1993; Crowley et al., 2013), as employees try to live up to (or enforce) the informal norms of their work group regarding non-work-related activity, most likely in an effort both to keep their day and the work running smoothly and to stay out of trouble with management.

Further evidence of concertive control emerges as employees express apprehension toward anyone who leaves their post at a time when the “organization is in need.” Indeed,
perhaps the biggest boundary placed on non-work-related activities by employees has to do with *when* they engage in them. In other words, *why* an employee engages in non-work-related activities is very much wrapped up in *when* they believe engaging in these activities is acceptable, or at least, when these activities have no impact on the flow of work and each other’s productivity.\(^{28}\) In particular, according to all types of employees, there is no excuse for engaging in non-work-related activities when the business is busy or active. For example, administrative/office and professional workers value being available when needed, especially in the time (whether it is a few hours to a week) before an important deadline. Johnny, a CAD technician, discusses his smoke breaks: “When my boss comes in, I’ve never gotten grief about ‘oh, you smoke too much’ or ‘you’re not available when I need you’ or something like that.” Similarly, even though Sarah takes regular smoke breaks, she mentions that these breaks are as work permits: “If I’m in the groove and I got to get this done and I’m pounding through some stuff, then no break. I just choose not to do it at that moment. I mean, if I’m at a breaking point or a stopping point, you know, like I’m going to go on to the next project, then I’ll take one.” Other respondents echo this theme and imply that they feel some degree of social pressure to maintain their productivity:

> I guess on days where everyone is there, I kind of want to feel more like, ‘Yeah, everyone’s doing something. Yeah, I’m doing stuff too.’ It doesn’t feel like the most opportune moment to take a break when everyone else seems really productive.

(Sally, administrative worker)

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\(^{28}\) As previously shown, many employees also worried about their ability to get their work done if they engaged in non-work-related activities too frequently.
Depending on what’s going on, I don’t make a habit out of [taking an afternoon walk]. If I’m real busy I’ll just stay at my desk and keep working. But if I’m having a normal day and nothing exciting is going on, and I can have the luxury of taking that, I will. (Thomas, computer support)

There are things that we do that are very time sensitive and there are dependencies built in where other people can’t start their work until we finish ours, but I would say people are pretty responsible…you know, we sometimes might take ten breaks a day at a time like this when there isn’t a lot going on. But when there are things that need to be done in a timely manner, we may only take five breaks a day. We’re cognizant of it. (Kylie, research scientist)

Some employees even suggest that they forfeit their own formal break time (e.g., lunch) when the employer requires it (see Fraser, 2001). As Liam, a medical lab assistant, explains:

Sometimes if it’s really busy…I’ll drink my coffee and quickly eat…instead of taking the full half hour…And sometimes when it’s really busy and I’m on my forty-five minute break, I’ll take a half hour…[and] just get back to work…[And] I’m fine with it. To me it’s just part of something I have to do because of the workload.

Similarly, George, a lawyer working for a contractor, explains:

There are days where it is so busy that I actually don’t have that half hour to use for my own free time…So you know, because of deadlines in the litigation or what not, oftentimes something will have to go out by close of business on a given day…anyway, the point being that there’s a lot of work to be done in a short amount
of time. And so, it’s just hustling to really make sure that you are extra productive and getting value out of every minute in the day to make sure that that deadline is met.

Service workers are acutely cognizant of when to engage in non-work-related activities, as well. Employees generally accept that if the organization is active (e.g., a lunch rush, many customers in the store), then they should not leave their post. By implication, “dead” or slow periods at work represent fertile ground for potential participation in non-work-related activities. For example, Lucas, a retail sales associate turned shift supervisor, discusses a former coworker who smokes: “He would never do it when it was busy, it was always kind of a downtime thing when, you know, when he knew there was a second he could go back and stuff, so I didn’t care and I don’t think [management] really cared.” Many others echo this theme:

The only time [non-work-related activities] get annoying is when there’s a lot to do. Like with the bussers, a lot of them disappear…[and] that’s annoying. But it comes to a point where there’s only so much you can do. There’s so much downtime that you can’t always be doing something…This year…we have a lot of time to talk [laughs]…So at times it’s good to disappear. [And my boss,] he’ll start telling people to go find something to do because he doesn’t want to have to send people home.

(Sunny, restaurant worker)

We don’t really ask [to go], but [you tell people]. It’s like, ‘Hey, I got to go to the bathroom’. But it’s a bit different when it’s really busy. You can’t do that, we kind of really frown—that’s really bad. We tell them to hurry up; don’t take forever. Or we say can’t you wait until it dies down? (Richard, fast-food worker)
When I first started working here, I was complaining that some of our people took smoke breaks at inopportune times, like in the middle of lunch [rush]. You should not get a smoke break because we’re super busy…That’s not appropriate…And when we brought it up to them they thought we were complaining because they were smoking. I could care less that you’re taking a smoke break…that’s not my issue. My issue is that when we get busy and you’re still outside…that’s a problem [laughs]. (Nessa, restaurant worker)

Well, I mean, there are literally days where there is no work…[and] from a worker on my level’s perspective, and even the bosses of the workers on my level…they know when they don’t have work for an employee to do. So there are, definitely, cases, when some days it’s just like grab a broom…or go find something to do. (Jim, fabrication mechanic)

These accounts suggest the presence of informal rules and norms that govern proper employee behavior (e.g., Blau, 1963; Homans, 1950) and that employees police and monitor each other, which may help ensure organizations achieve a high level of production when the organization needs it the most (Barker, 1993). These employees convey an awareness of what is required of them and what is necessary to ensure that they (and ultimately the organization) succeed. They describe rules or boundaries around acceptable non-work-related activity and show concern when these rules were broken by their coworkers. As part of this process, employees recognize that the flow of work is not constant at their organizations. Each person runs into periods of time on the job when very little is required of them, and employees take advantage of these moments when deciding to engage in non-work-related
activities on the job. Ultimately, they are able to justify non-work-related activity by getting the rest of their work done, they have an opportunity to engage in these activities when business is slow or non-existent, and they know which activities are acceptable and how/when to engage in these behaviors so as to not anger their coworkers and/or management.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Business and management-centric researchers claim that employee non-work-related activity has negative consequences for employers, especially with the advent of computer use in the workplace (Atkinson, 2006; Henle et al., 2010; Lim and Teo, 2005). They argue that, though employees complete a significant amount of work each day, small moments of non-work-related activity can add up to billions of dollars in lost productivity every year (Malachowski and Simonini, 2006; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2007). As such, they portray employees as “time thieves” who participate in these actions with ease, regularity, and little regard for any organizational consequences (Lim and Teo, 2005; Martin et al., 2010; Mastrangelo et al., 2006). Sociologists, by contrast, highlight the positive benefits of non-work-related activity (e.g., Anteby, 2008; Roy, 1959), but still lump employee non-work-related activity in with other activities under the umbrella of “workplace resistance.” Doing so underscores how non-work-related activities go against management and the organization’s desires (Karlsson, 2012; Paulson, 2014). Researchers in both camps have put little effort into discovering the boundaries of employee non-work-related behavior, what employees take into account when deciding on the appropriateness of non-work-related activities, or how employees balance work expectations with non-work-related activity.
This chapter addresses the gap in knowledge about boundaries and limits of employee non-work-related behavior through an investigation of the non-work-related behavior of 34 employees across a variety of workplaces in the United States. Findings illustrate how employees make clear distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable types of non-work-related activities. Many employees denounce certain non-work-related activities – like viewing pornography, sleeping, and smoking – and worry about the consequences of these behaviors both for themselves and their employers. At the same time, some employees view activities like sleeping and smoking as acceptable, possibly because of their own personal engagement in these activities and/or their exposure to an organizational environment that allows or endorses such behaviors. Regardless, employees cite examples of coworkers engaging in these behaviors, suggesting that employees’ constructions of limits and boundaries regarding non-work-related activities are collectively defined in relation to a variety of non-work-related activities in the workplace (D’Abate, 2005; Henle et al., 2010; Lim, 2002; Martin et al., 2010).

Employees further report setting time limits and boundaries on their non-work-related behavior. Specifically, employees express apprehension about non-work-related activities if they last too long or if they engage in the behavior too frequently, with “too long” and “too frequently” defined in reference to whether engaging in non-work-related activities jeopardize completing required work (D’Abate, 2005). Most importantly, employees claim not to participate in non-work-related activities when their actions would result in someone else having to “pick up their slack.” Concerns about hurting fellow workers often influenced the timing of employee engagement in non-work-related activities. Interviewees are adamant that no one should engage in non-work-related activities at inopportune moments, that is,
when the organization is busy or active. At these times, the interviewees express concerns about fairness and a general apprehension toward any type of non-work-related activity. They also claim to avoid non-work-related behaviors and attempt to prevent coworkers from participating in non-work-related activity. Ultimately, the accounts reveal the potential presence of informal norms regarding the acceptability of non-work-related activities (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1950), and the possibility that employees may engage in a type of “concertive control” by actively regulating and policing coworkers who violate informal rules of behavior (Barker, 1993; Crowley et al., 2013).

Taken together, the employees’ reports have significant implications for the literature on non-work-related activities. Instead of engaging in non-work-related activities with ease and with little or no concern for their employer or colleagues, the employees describe doing exactly the opposite. Employees report thinking about their participation in non-work-related activities in relation to the work they need to do in order to maintain employment and how their behavior looks to and affects their coworkers. Thus, these findings confirm what Paulsen (2014) and Askew (2012: 48) have speculated: it is likely that “people have work to get done, and they [engage in non-work-related activities] when they have the time;” the implication is that employers and management see very few consequences from employee non-work-related behavior. Moreover, it is hard to classify non-work-related activity described in these contexts as workplace resistance given employees seem to go out of their way to ensure the organization is disrupted as little as possible. Most importantly, this research suggests that sociologists need to take seriously the notion that even in a time of precarious employment and widespread feelings of overwork (Fraser, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009; Paulsen, 2015), some employees may have little actual “work” to do on a regular basis.
These moments are often organizationally and/or externally created (e.g., lulls in customer activity), which pushes (and potentially forces) employees to make a choice between “looking busy” by completing meaningless or otherwise redundant tasks (e.g., straightening clothes; washing windows) or engaging in non-work-related activities while technically remaining “on duty.”

By describing the boundaries and limits employees place on their non-work-related activity, this study provides evidence suggesting that non-work-related behavior should be much less of an organizational concern than is often claimed by management-centric researchers. Despite admitting engaging in a high level of non-work-related activities, the workers convey a sense of responsibility for their actions as they describe taking the needs of others into account in efforts to minimize potential negative ramifications of their actions. They describe an “all-hands-on-deck” mentality when essential tasks need to be completed, potentially forfeiting both formal and informal breaks from work. Thus, they report engaging in non-work-related activities when they feel it will have the smallest impact on the work and describe making informed decisions as to when it is appropriate to engage in non-work-related activities. Overall, this research shows that employees are, in fact, thinking about the costs of non-work-related activities and making their own efforts to minimize or contain those costs. Employees do not simply engage in non-work-related activities whenever they feel like it; instead, they weigh the particular situation and moment and act accordingly. This is not to say that employees engage in non-work-related activities only at opportune moments; indeed, the examples provided by the interviewees of other employees’ behavior show that perceived problematic non-work-related behavior does occur. However, this behavior is likely far less prevalent than management-centric literature claims it to be.
This research may also help explain why so many employees across workplaces view non-work-related activities as acceptable (Martin et al., 2010; Lim, 2005). Indeed, if employees are visible and available when they are needed, and their work is completed, then non-work-related activities may be of little consequence. Thus, this study suggests that when an employee engages in non-work-related activities may be just as important as if and why they engage in these behaviors in the first place. In addition, it is possible that management will not care, or, at the very least, not notice employee non-work-related behavior if managerial expectations are being met and/or when the organization seems to have few pertinent or present needs. This may be especially true if employees also engage in control and peer monitoring behaviors that benefit management.

This study is not without limitations. There are potentially valid concerns about interview selection bias especially due to how highly educated most of the interviewees were at the time of the interview. The employees may be saying what they think is socially acceptable, and they may be more cognizant of the consequences of their behavior than the average employee. In addition, one could argue that many interviewees spoke about other people rather than themselves; therefore, the employees may be engaging in identity work/othering to make it appear as if they are model organizational citizens. However, over half of the interviewees freely volunteered information about the non-work-related activities in which they, themselves, engage before I asked any questions about the topic, and almost all respondents eventually admitted to engaging personally in some kind of non-work-related behavior. This is likely because they see nothing wrong with the behaviors given the boundaries they set for themselves, the comparisons they make between their non-work-related behaviors and the behaviors of others they describe, and the routine nature of their
non-work-related activities. This is especially true in administrative/office and professional workplaces where employees described having a lot of autonomy. Regardless, these data suggest employees’ development of limits and boundaries regarding non-work-related activity are shaped by the activities of others. In other words, employees’ constructions of limits and boundaries may be based on observations of their coworkers’ behaviors and ultimately how management and customers react to these behaviors.

Second, these data are the self-reported perceptions and opinions of one employee within a given organization. This limits my ability to understand fully group-level dynamics (e.g., norms) at play in these workplaces. Observations at each workplace or interviews with other managers and employees would provide a more complex picture than the one the respondents report from their unitary vantage point. Thus, although I made every attempt to interview employees from a variety of workplaces, these data do not systematically represent variation in work experiences. The findings from this study, thereby, only suggest patterns that may be found in the wider population. Additional research is required to investigate non-work-related activities among a more diverse and representative set of respondents, especially through observational data to gain greater insight into workplace dynamics.

Future researchers should focus on investigating how social context matters regarding employee non-work-related activity, especially the individual and structural level factors that may account for variation in how employees define the boundaries or limits of their non-work-related activity. In particular, research shows that employees may engage in non-work-related activity in response to being treated poorly by their employer (Holtz and Harold, 2013; Lim, 2002), but it is unclear how differential treatment will influence employees’ boundaries and limits. One might expect that someone who feels he or she has been treated
unfairly might attempt to engage in non-work-related activity more frequently, but they still may limit their behavior in other ways (e.g., if their actions negatively affect their coworkers). In addition, studies should uncover other limits employees place on their behaviors and investigate how employees determine these limits. One could easily imagine that, for example, management’s leniency or strictness towards non-work-related activities will influence what employees are willing or unwilling to do and interviewing or observing matched pairs of employees and managers would have helped reveal nuances. Similarly, employee lore, i.e., seeing and hearing what happens or does not happen to coworkers who engage in non-work-related activities, will likely influence how employees, especially new recruits, determine the limits and boundaries of acceptable non-work-related behavior. These stories serve as cautionary tales through which an employee develops a sense of what is or is not acceptable and may bind employees together around unofficial norms of behavior. In other words, socially observed punishments help reinforce social cohesion around established rules (Durkheim, 1915).

It is also worth investigating further how different employers influence employees’ perceptions about “professionalism” and the acceptability of certain behaviors (Merton, 1968; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), as well as how the physical and technical organization of workplaces limits employees’ access to non-work-related activities. As this research shows, most employees emphasized maintaining a baseline level of decorum while at work, but what this baseline includes may vary by workplace and occupation. This research also shows that employees may have little recourse to participate in non-work-related activity if they work in jobs characterized by a high degree of interdependence between tasks or where the work is unpredictable and rapidly changing; however, there may be other social and organizational
factors that lead to variation in employee non-work-related activity. Examining how different workplace control schemes (Barker, 1993; Crowley, 2012; Edwards, 1979) affect employee participation in non-work-related activities will be especially productive.

Additionally, researchers should investigate how the presence or absence of worker organization (e.g., unions) affects employees’ perceptions of and engagement in non-work-related activities. Unionized workplaces may have more formalized rules and expectations around behavior written into employees’ contracts, but these rules may not displace informal norms that develop around non-work-related activity. Given employees’ emphasis on “completing their work” as a criterion for determining limits and boundaries of non-work-related activity, researchers should also examine how employees (both unionized and non-unionized), managers, and employers shape what constitutes an acceptable level of output and how this is negotiated, as well as investigate the consequences of various output measurements for employee non-work-related activity. Past sociological work on output restriction (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Roy, 1952) shows that definitions of what constitutes acceptable output are always contested to some degree; thus, it is likely that what constitutes unacceptable types or levels of non-work-related behavior is based partly on how output is measured or defined in a given workplace.

In sum, the current project explains what employees take into account when deciding to engage in non-work-related activities. This study highlights how employees balance their engagement in non-work-related activities with the needs of the organization. This research shows that acceptance of and participation in non-work-related activities is often contextually dependent on the type of activity in question, the presence or absence of important work that needs to be completed, and whether or not employees are leaving their coworkers
shorthanded. This might be cold comfort to executives and other researchers who decry the
detrimental consequences of any and all non-work-related behavior; at the same time, this
research questions what these consequences actually are. If employees are present and
working when they are most needed, do employers and management have anything to fear?
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CHAPTER 5: EXPLAINING VARIATION IN NON-WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES ON THE JOB

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades research on non-work-related activities has stagnated. Business and management scholars maintain that non-work-related activity is pervasive, has its roots in the “dysfunctional attitudes” and personalities of employees (Paulsen, 2014: 352), and is the responsibility of management to correct (Ang and Koslow, 2012; Ketchen et al., 2008; Liberman et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2010; Richards, 2008). By contrast, sociologists argue that employees have little time to engage in non-work-related activity (given widespread evidence of overwork over the years – e.g., Fraser, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009; Schor, 1991) and engage in non-work-related behavior as a form of resistance against overbearing management to take back some of their time, autonomy, and dignity. The preoccupation with the psychological antecedents of non-work-related activities and manager-employee conflict has thwarted exploration and discovery of other factors that may produce variation in non-work-related activities regardless of variation in individuals’ proclivity to engage in these behaviors. Only Paulsen’s (2014; 2015) recent research challenges dominant perceptions in both literatures; for example, by showing how “time waste” can often be the result of organizational inefficiencies (e.g., a lack of meaningful work to do other than cleaning) rather than a “bad” individual employee’s desire to avoid work or an employee resisting organizational injustice (see also, Juravich, 1985). However, Paulsen does not go far enough, and sociologists have yet to investigate systematically the organizational, occupational, and job-related variables that produce opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities on
This chapter builds on the two previous chapters by focusing on the systematic features of jobs and organizations that help explain variation in employee non-work-related behavior. In chapter 2, I investigated how managers perceive employee non-work-related activity on the job. In chapter 3, I examined the limits and boundaries employees place on their own non-work-related activities. Evidence presented in both chapters suggests that manager and employee experiences vary by occupation, with professional and office employees having greater flexibility to engage in non-work-related activities compared to service and industrial workers. The current chapter explores multiple aspects of occupational variability in depth by drawing from interview data and prior research to develop a theoretically and empirically informed typology. The typology outlines how variation in non-work-related activity reflects an array of psychological, interpersonal, organizational, and job-related factors. These include relations among employees and between employees and management, as well as a job’s potential output, level of interdependence, opacity, and the extent of organizational surveillance mechanisms. In doing so, I highlight how diverse psychological, interpersonal, organizational and job attributes promote and/or limit employees’ capacity and inclination to engage in non-work-related activity at any given time, leaving some with ample opportunity to avoid work and others with little choice but to work without breaks. I also dispel ingrained assumptions about the antecedents and frequency of employee non-work-related activities by developing a more nuanced framework for understanding why employees engage in non-work-related behaviors on the job. My research makes possible more dynamic investigations of non-work-related activities and their impacts.

29 For classic discussions of how job-related factors influence employee behavior, see Kanter (1977), Kohn and Schooler (1969), and Merton (1968).
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND ELABORATION

Below I review dominant perspectives in the management and sociological literatures, I offer a framework that brings together individual and psychological (e.g., employees’ sense of work obligation), interpersonal (e.g., relations between employees and management), organizational (e.g., surveillance mechanisms), and job-related attributes (e.g., opacity, predictability, and output) that influence engagement in non-work-related activity across organizations and occupations (see Figure 1). Throughout the discussion I illustrate this framework using my own interview data (57 interviews with employees and managers from a variety of jobs and occupations) to show how the opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities varies from job to job and workplace to workplace.

*Individual/psychological antecedents to non-work-related activity*

Research investigating the individual and psychological antecedents of non-work-related activity stems almost exclusively from business school and management scholars. This research centers on analyzing employees’ personalities and willingness/motivation to engage in non-work-related activity. For example, expectancy theories related to organizational behavior (Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964) predict that employees’ will be most productive when they perceive that effort is strongly correlated with or has a high probability of leading to desired intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, preferences for which vary across individuals. As such, if employees do not see a link between their effort and desired outcomes, or face obstacles that make obtaining rewards difficult, then they may be more inclined to engage in non-work-related activities (Pee et al., 2008). More recently, researchers have investigated how personality influences perceptions of and responses to
perceived “organizational injustice” in the workplace and how this ultimately leads to employee engagement in non-work-related activity (Akremi et al., 2010; Holtz and Harold, 2013; Zoghbi-Manrique-de Lara, 2007). For example, Holtz and Harold (2013) find that employees with strong interpersonal justice values may refrain from non-work-related activity even in the face of perceived mistreatment because the idea of engaging in “deviant” and/or retaliatory behavior is a bigger affront to their dignity than the perceived mistreatment. Other researchers have made use of sociological and criminological research like Sykes and Matza’s (1957) techniques of neutralization to understand how employees rationalize their “deviant” non-work-related behavior and to discuss what managers can do to stop these rationalizations from forming (Lim, 2002, 2005; Warkentin et al., 2011). For example, Lim (2002) finds that employees often use the “metaphor of the ledger” to justify their non-work-related activities, maintaining that the tasks they complete each day “add up” and entitle them to “cash in” their good behavior through respites from work (e.g., chat with a coworker, look something up online, take a lap around the office).

Sociologists have also cited individual/psychological explanations for non-work-related behavior. Paulsen (2015: 355) highlights how an employee’s sense of work obligation, or an employee’s “inclination to work within the frames of the firm regardless of collegial and managerial pressure,” influences employee engagement in non-work-related activity (see also Baldamus, 1961: 85-87; Taylor, 1911). In other words, some employees may be more personally inclined to slack off and soldier than others. As such, those employees with strong work obligations will engage in non-work-related activities less frequently than employees with weak work obligations even when given ample opportunity.

My interviews provide some support for the notion that social-psychological factors,
including personal values, play a role in employee engagement in non-work-related activity. For example, Lenny, a restaurant server, says he chooses not to participate in non-work-related activities even though his coworkers frequently do so. He knows his income depends on providing good service, but he values good service and likes taking care of people: “I’ve seen people who just kind of, like, go hide and find somewhere they can just go away from it…I don’t like to do it, personally. If I’ve got people in the dining room, it’s my responsibility to, you know, be taking care of them.” Similarly, after explaining that her coworkers sometimes come back late from break, Mischa, a medical lab assistant, emphasizes that non-work-related behaviors do not match her personality as a conformist, stating: “I try to stay within the timeframe. It’s the rules [and] I’m pretty much a rule-keeper. I stay within the guidelines for the most part.” Non-work-related activities do not seem right to Mischa and Lenny because of their own personal values and views of self; thus, they avoided going off-task and obeyed the employer’s rules.30

My interviews also suggest that the tendency to engage in non-work-related behavior may vary with employees’ tenure, confidence, and/or desire for security in their current position. For example, Jim, a fabrication mechanic, states: “I am far too new to try to hide from people. I feel like it’s my duty as a new employee to always stay busy…I need to show the people that I work for that I’m worth having around.” Erin, a supermarket cashier, echoes Jim: “I’m still new, I’m not about to step on anyone’s toes…I’m not about to go piss anyone off.” However, my follow-up interviews (three to six months later) reveal that they began to participate in some level of non-work-related behavior on the job. Thus, refraining from non-

30 Though Lenny and Mischa both claim to be cordial with and active among their coworkers, it may also be that some employees refrain from participating in non-work-related activities because they are barred from membership in the informal work group at their job (see, for example, Roy, 1959). If this is the case, then the work group would have difficulty enforcing its norms of break abuse on these outsiders (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1950).
work-related activity may, in such cases, stem less from personality and more from feelings of insecurity and needing to prove oneself as a hard worker and trustworthy. Indeed, research suggests that counterproductive activity (e.g., stealing, wasting resources) decreases when job insecurity is high, particularly for employees with low employability outside of their current organization (Berntson et al., 2010), as “employees focus their attention on those aspects of performance that are typically rewarded by the organization in an effort to retain their job” (Probst et al., 2007: 483). Additionally, the eventual decision to engage in non-work-related activity may also have less to do with personality and more with employees’ growing familiarity with management’s expectations for and reactions to non-work-related behavior, the informal norms of their coworkers, and the comfort in knowing that they have proven themselves as an employee and now have a justification for non-work-related breaks.

Interpersonal relations and their effect on non-work-related activity

Coworker relations. Management and business school researchers rarely discuss the role of interpersonal relationships on employee engagement in non-work-related activities on the job (for a review, see Boyle et al., 2011). When they do, it is almost always in reference to how employees rationalize their non-work-related behaviors, which are depicted as deviant despite their prevalence. For example, some studies find that employees report basing whether to engage in non-work-related activities on the job, at least in part, on whether they see their colleagues engaging in non-work-related activities (e.g., D’Abate, 2005; Henle et al., 2010; Lim, 2002; Martin et al., 2010). Yet, sociologists have long known that coworkers influence employee behavior through the creation of and adherence to informal rules and norms (Blau, 1963; Gouldner, 1954; Homans, 1950). Research shows that these rules and norms can be especially effective at influencing employee productivity. For example, several
studies have shown that informal groups may discourage hyper-productivity through the admonishment of individual members for ratebusting, i.e., completing work faster than the group’s informally sanctioned rate (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Roy, 1952). Additionally, informal groups may draw new employees into rituals of non-work-related behavior, like Roy’s (1959) coworkers who regularly stopped working for small periods of time outside of their formally allotted break times.

Some of my interviews with employees highlight the importance of these informal group influences. For example, Jim, a fabrication mechanic, explains to me that he adheres to “unspoken rules” regarding completing work in a certain amount of time:

There’s an unspoken rule with everybody – if it’s a ten hour job and you do it in three, the next time it comes around they’ll [management] expect you to do it in three. So they give you a time, that’s how long you take to do it. (*Unspoken rule? How did you learn about it?*) Uh, word of mouth I guess. Everybody plugs it into you.

By contrast, Lee, a graphic designer, describes having difficulty showing her employer that everyone is “over-scoped” (i.e., understaffed – there are too many projects to complete and not enough people to complete them on time) and that they need more support. She blames her struggles, at least in part, on her inability to corral her coworkers into action:

We were asked to keep track of our time so that we can prove to them that we are over-scoped for our projects. But we have so many people on our team, so it’s really hard to get everyone to do that and do it accurately…We don’t all sit together, so it’s like, there might be some people who just didn’t get the memo and others just don’t care.
Similarly, Nessa describes struggling to keep some of her coworkers from engaging in breaks during busy customer activity until she purposefully starts doing the same thing: “So I started to take my long breaks, and they were like ‘hey, what are you doing?’ I was like now you see how I feel [when you do this] and I think that made an impact because we don’t have that problem anymore [laughs].” Taken together these interviewees suggest that the frequency of non-work-related activity may vary based on how well existing employees get along with one another and how much control more tenured employees exert over new employees in policing or encouraging them to follow previously established informal rules (Blau, 1963; Homans, 1950). For example, employees isolated from the informal work group may miss out on opportunities to engage in group non-work-related activity (Roy, 1959). Unionization may also influence individual participation in non-work-related activity; for example, unionized employees may have more opportunities than non-unionized employees to engage in group forms of non-work-related activity, especially if engaging in such behaviors is considered a sign of solidarity with the collective.

Manager-employee relations. Most business and management scholars staunchly maintain that managers and employees have different interests regarding non-work-related activity. As Coker (2011: 239) writes, “While workers believe they should be allowed to [engage in non-work-related activities], management believes they should not be allowed.” To acknowledge otherwise would be to undermine the assumption in this literature that non-work-related activities are bad behaviors in which employees engage against the desires of management instead of activities in which both employees and managers might freely
engage.\textsuperscript{31} Similarly, the sociological literature on resistance tends mainly to study “management control versus worker resistance” (Karlsson, 2012: 17).

Yet, most of my interviewees could describe instances in which their managers participated in non-work-related activities with workers. For example, Karen, a cashier, makes clear that she sometimes takes her time restocking the freezers to chat with her boss: “So it’d be like I’m kind of taking a little bit of a break from what I should be doing, but I’m still actually kind of doing something. And then there are times when I’m taking a break and it’s with my boss [laughs]. And I’m just talking to him. Just talking to my boss.” Similarly, Colby, a retail sales associate, describes how he would often go hang out in storage away from customers: “And sometimes you go back there and you’re having a conversation with one of the supervisors [laughs]. About nothing.”

Regardless of whether managers engage in or refrain from participating in non-work-related activities with employees, they may still vary in their application of the organization’s rules and how they feel about employee non-work-related activity. For example, decades of sociological research on managerial “leniencies” show that managers and employees often make informal agreements about productivity and employee time use to ensure organizations runs smoothly (e.g., Anteby, 2008; Burawoy, 1979; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Lupton, 1963; Strauss, 1978; Sykes, 1958). Perhaps some of this variation stems from personality differences among managers (e.g., a manager’s personal penchant for following rules), but we know from chapter two that managers engage in more or less policing of non-work-related activity based on a variety of factors, including how much pressure they are under or responsibility they have to deliver results, positive or negative experiences with their own

\textsuperscript{31} Only Ketchen et al. (2008) explicitly suggest that some managers may not police non-work-related activities because they want to avoid conflict with employees or do not want to appear hypocritical because they also engage in these behaviors.
management (both past and present), how much power they have to hire/fire employees, and whether employees meet their production expectations on a regular basis. Additionally, former employees who become managers within the same work group may have more sympathy for non-work-related activity in which they used to engage. For example, Kristina, who worked both as a low-level employee and manager in the same organization, recalls her time as a cashier: “I had plenty of downtime. Sometimes I’d speak to other employees or I’d bring a newspaper and browse that. I organized everything…If I didn’t have anything else to do, I’d clean. But you can only do that so much.” Now, as a manager, Kristina continues to allow cashiers to bring books to read or engage in conversation with employees because she realizes the limits of the work in which these employees can engage.

Taken together, the effect that coworker relations and manager-employee relations may have on employee non-work-related activities cannot be understated, as each relationship can lead to more or less opportunity to engage in non-work-related behavior. Overall, these findings fit well with differential association/social learning theory (Akers, 1996; Sutherland and Cressey, 1955), which posits that employees will engage in a behavior if they learn an excess of definitions favorable to the behavior (e.g., trusted coworkers say the behavior is okay), have the opportunity to engage in the behavior, and know how to engage in the behavior effectively (i.e., without getting in trouble). The quotes from employees and managers alike suggest that employees learn definitions favorable and unfavorable to non-work-related activities, as well as the proper techniques or rules to follow if attempting to engage in these behaviors. However, it is important to note that these relationships exist in and are shaped by larger organizational- and job-related contexts, a discussion to which I turn below.
Organizational-level influences of non-work-related activity

Beyond individual and interpersonal influences on non-work-related activities, researchers know that no two organizations are exactly alike. Non-work-related activities likely vary due to nuances in organizational design, but this has not been discussed in the current literature at any length. My interviews reveal two main ways organizations influence the frequency of employee non-work-related activity: the first involves setting expectations for behavior through the creation of formal policies, and the second involves developing surveillance systems to enforce expectations.

Presence of Formal Policies. In the management and business school literatures, discussion of formal policies prohibiting non-work-related activities on the job only occurs when referenced by researchers as a deterrence mechanism to help limit non-work-related activity in their workplace (Boyle et al., 2011; Ugrin and Pearson, 2013). Researchers rarely ask respondents in their studies if their organization has written policies against non-work-related behavior. Most research starts with the assumption that non-work-related activities are costly and violate organizational rules; then, researchers survey employees about the types of non-work-related activities in which they engage, how often they participate in these activities, and/or how they justify their actions (e.g., Eddy et al., 2010; Lim and Chen, 2012; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2012). An exception is Lim and Teo’s (2005) study of computer use among a non-representative sample of 226 adults at work. Their survey includes the question: “Does your organization have policies regarding the use of the Internet? If yes, please provide details.” Findings reveal that only 45% of respondents reported that their company had policies restricting personal Internet use, but the implications of this finding are not explored. Instead, Lim and Teo (2005) simply recommend creating policies as a way to
curb employee non-work-related behavior.

One might imagine that organizations with policies restricting non-work-related activities have fewer employees who engage in non-work-related activities. After all, stated policies likely cut down confusion and the proliferation of “gray areas” where it is unclear what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable.32 This seems to be true for my interviewees. Some employees (mostly from office and professional occupations) perceive having few, if any, formal restrictions on their behavior outside of some websites that the organization actively blocked (e.g., music streaming websites), and this seems to influence the extent of non-work-related activities that occur. Working as a lawyer, George’s response is typical. When I ask him to describe his employer’s break policy, he replies: “Uh, I honestly don’t even know [laughs].” He went on to explain: “People can sort of just come and go as they please. Um, so you know, I could step out for a fifteen-twenty minute break and you know go for a walk outside or whatever I want to do, and nobody would either know or care.”

This sense of organizational laxity regarding work and break time is especially evident among office and professional workers who fill out timesheets or “bill” their time to their employer. Echoing past research (Brown and Lewis, 2011; Fortney, 2003), these employees describe the method of billing time as far from an exact science. Working as an engineer, Tony’s response is typical. I quote him at length:

I’m usually decent about it. I know some people who are like on Friday, right before it is due, and they’re like ‘Oh crap, what do I do?’ And they have to like just totally make something up…And not everything you do has a time stamp for it, so if you’re

32 It is important to note that though formal rules can influence employee behavior, employees do not consider all rules to be legitimate and may actively disobey formal regulations including admonishments against non-work-related behavior (e.g., Gouldner, 1954).
filling out paperwork online or just doing sketches, you have no record of it unless you literally wrote it down on a piece of paper…I’m probably ninety-percent accurate. Sometimes I’ll flub it…and just correct for it next week…And a lot of companies don’t even keep track [that well]—it’s per quarter hour of whatever you’re working on. And we do that here, but it’s not super critical. Like if you work thirty-five minutes on something, you might put forty-five. At my old place it would just be like an hour. Because it wasn’t worth trying to knock out quarter hours of stuff. It was just, if you work on something for two and a half hours, it’s three hours…The [timekeeping] software literally just did not have increments [lower than an hour].

As Tony makes clear, although he claims to be mostly accurate, the practice of keeping time in his organization lacks precision. This seems due, at least in part, to each employee’s personality (e.g., proneness to procrastination), but also to the relative looseness of the employer’s timekeeping system and the lack of policies around time use.33 Moreover, one gets the sense from Tony’s description that making the time-keeping process more stringent would have diminishing returns, especially considering the company does not charge clients by time increments smaller than an hour. Lee, a graphic designer, also makes the point that keeping accurate accounts of work time takes time away from productive labor: “When you’re focused, when you’re working on something, you just want to keep working on it. You don’t want to get out of that and [log your time].” Thus, in some cases it may be in the best interests of employers to maintain a level of laxity in time-keeping/accounting.

By contrast, almost all of the service and production workers I interviewed could

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33 A similar historical example comes from Burawoy (1979) who describes how relatively lax bookkeeping and managerial surveillance allows employees to build up “kitties” of extra goods to help themselves or others make production goals or not work as hard.
easily describe the organization’s time schedule. As is typical in these lines of work, employees often describe having access to formal break periods that are heavily regimented, relatively fixed from day-to-day, and mandatory. By implication, employers intend that all other time outside of formal break periods be dedicated to organizational production.\footnote{Perhaps with the exception of regular bathroom breaks. Yet, research shows that even these types of “extra” breaks may not be guaranteed (see Linder and Nygaard, 1998).} For example, Richard, a fast-food worker, explains that when employees go on lunch break, it is common practice to make lunch before clocking out and heading to the break room. Richard explains that this practice was recently banned after the store manager called a meeting to put a stop to it because “[he] thinks that we’re stealing time…that was his main point…It’s like a similar thing about being on your cell phone. He doesn’t like that because you’re like stealing time and you’re stealing money and you’re fired.” Erin, who works at a grocery store, echoes Richard:

They told me [at training] that if you take longer than fifteen minutes [on break] something bad is going to happen…[because then] it’s like they’re paying you but you’re not working, therefore you’re kind of stealing money from them by not working…[and] if everyone takes an extra minute—we have at least one hundred employees at this store—and whatever they pay you for that one minute I mean it adds up after a while. If you do it every day, that’s going to add up.

Finally, Wesley describes how his previous employer at a package sorting plant would get the message across: “We used to have these ridiculous meetings…And the concept was if you spent time getting paid by them and not working for your pay, you were committing time theft which was the same as stealing from them…It was almost like those stupid piracy ads
where they’re like, ‘you wouldn’t download a car’ but in the form of time theft.” The above examples show how employers may attempt to indoctrinate workers into the dominant business view of non-work-related activities, and in some cases, like Erin’s, employees may embrace the organizational logic behind the prohibitions. In others, like Wesley and Richard, employees may see these rules as “ridiculous” or unfair. Ultimately these employees still find ways to engage in non-work-related activities on the job, but compared to office and professional workers they are much more cognizant of the possibility for punishment and probably limit or better conceal their behavior as a result.

*Surveillance mechanisms.* Beyond formal policies restricting certain behaviors, organizations also differ in the extent that they actively monitor employees. As such, the opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities may be more or less limited from organization to organization, as well as between jobs within an organization. In some organizations, management may actively attempt to thwart non-sanctioned activities almost completely through the use of monitoring technology (e.g., Sallaz, 2002; Townsend, 2005). Skyler, who works in an ice cream shop, certainly feels that her management severely limits her ability to engage in even very minor forms of non-work-related activity: “We have cameras everywhere. The owners [are never here but]…they sit at their house and watch the live feed sometimes. To like watch us…And, like, they get mad—they call into the store and people get written up for, like, leaning.” Raymond, a delivery driver, echoes Skyler: “As delivery drivers, they’re constantly on you for production and performance. We’re timed to the one-hundredth of a second. Your whole day is…They know how fast you’re going, how

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35 Again, these examples are in line with differential association/social learning theory (Akers 1996; Sutherland and Cressey, 1955), as they represent ways in which employees receive definitions unfavorable to non-work-related activities.
hard you’re breaking, how many times you opened the doors or stop.” At the end of the day these employees may still find ways to resist electronic surveillance, but the total number of opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities across the workday is likely less and these employees might be less eager to act on any potential opportunities because of the threat of punishment.

The physical layout of a workplace may also serve as an effective way to block employees’ opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities as some employees may find themselves structurally locked in one place. The cashier position in any type of service work represents an archetypal example. Colby, a retail sales associate, states succinctly: “When I was a cashier, I was kind of more stuck in my spot. Which is why I hated being a cashier.” He prefers working on the floor which allows him the occasional opportunity to head to the backroom and take his time finding an item for a customer. Similarly, Kristina, a shift supervisor at a theater, speaks about her cashiers: “[They] could duck behind the counter but it wouldn’t be very effective. So there’s no getting out of work.” Kristina then goes on to contrast the cashier position against ushers who largely move freely in and out of theaters cleaning and occasionally standing in place tearing ticket stubs.

Even some of the office workers I interviewed, like Jillian and Thomas, discuss how their cubicle arrangements make goofing off less appealing as anyone walking by could see what is on your computer screen. Edith, an office manager, confirms this concern saying: “We have pretty strict IT policies here, so your computer needs to be locked when you’re not using it…and employees can only go to certain websites during their lunch break. So I’m the person that goes around and puts sad faces on people's computers when they're not locked or if I see them at a website and they don’t have their lunch sign up.” Thus, the physical
arrangement of the workspace affects an individual’s freedom of movement and relative autonomy by influencing the proximity of management and coworkers who may actively or covertly monitor employee non-work-related behavior (e.g., Leiter, 1986).

Finally, surveillance may be more or less intense at different moments throughout the day. For example, in his ethnography of a casino, Sallaz (2002) shows how blackjack dealers have some autonomy during their shifts to engage in unsanctioned activities to increase their potential tips from customers. However, when a “high roller” sits down at a table, management becomes much more involved, engaging in high levels of both in-person and electronic surveillance of the dealers and customers. In my interviews a few retail employees report that management seems more lenient on late night shifts because fewer customers are in store and, according to Karen, who works as a cashier, “it’s hard to get people to work those shifts.” By contrast, Jim, a fabrication mechanic, explains that management keeps a careful eye on night shift workers at his plant because of safety concerns about drowsiness, and “if you fall asleep, you’re fired.” Thus, by themselves the presence of surveillance mechanisms may not be sufficient to halt non-work-related activity: time and circumstance interact with available surveillance mechanisms to create variation in the opportunity for employees to engage in non-work-related activities within organizations.

Job-level influences on non-work-related activity

The closest business school and management researchers come to acknowledging the influence of job characteristics on non-work-related activity comes in occasional references to how habitual access to computers may lead to more non-work-related activity on the job (Eddy et al., 2010; Pee et al., 2008; Vitak et al., 2011). As such, sociologists can make an important contribution to the current literature on non-work-related activities through the
description and exploration of how job characteristics influence employee behavior. Of course, this is a topic that sociologists have studied thoroughly over the last century (e.g., Fraser, 2001; Kanter, 1977; Kohn and Schooler, 1969; Kunda, 1992; Leiter, 1986; Merton, 1968; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). However, surprisingly few researchers discuss job-related influences on non-work-related activity directly. Below I describe four job-level factors that influence an employee’s opportunity to engage in non-work-related activity: potential output, interdependence, predictability, and opacity.

**Potential output** refers to the amount of work required of a single job, or the bundle of tasks associated with a given position and how long those tasks take to complete (Paulsen, 2015; see also, Baladmus, 1961). Past research from both management and sociology tends to assume that every job has a high level of potential output; for example, the popular managerial phrase “if there’s time to lean, there’s time to clean” fits neatly with sociologists’ claims about work intensification, overwork, and time pressure (e.g., Kalleberg, 2009). However, Paulsen argues that many employees often find themselves without direction or “real” work to do in jobs characterized by low potential output. Though management scholars often assume that there is no limit to the work in which employees can engage while on “company time,” Paulsen shows that employees often have to “endure” an alarming number of trivial or meaningless tasks that force them to “pretend” to look productive or find other ways to pass the time (i.e., engage in non-work-related activities). Thus, where potential output is low, “the main work tasks require little effort in relation to time” and secondary tasks are so menial as to be considered unnecessary or even potentially problematic if an employee engages in them (Paulsen, 2015: 355). In other words, employees find themselves forced to either engage in “meaningless” tasks (e.g., cleaning the same
window that was cleaned an hour earlier) or seek alternative ways to pass the time (i.e., engage in non-work-related activities). Paulsen provides an example of a florist who keeps her shop in “perfect order” but runs out of tasks to complete on a regular basis. She becomes more of a “shop minder,” creating the illusion of productivity through the repetition of menial tasks.

Surprisingly, the management and business school literatures provide some evidence to support Paulsen’s claims. For example, when researchers ask employees why they engage in non-work-related activities on the job, a common answer is that they are “bored” (D’Abate, 2005; Eddy et al., 2010; Skowronski, 2012), though these researchers tend to pass this off as employees not fully understanding all of the tasks that need completing. Indeed, many of the employees and managers I interviewed argue that there is always enough work to go around. For example, Wendy, a nurse, tells me: “Well, there’s always something to do. Whether or not you do it right then and there, that’s not a big deal. But I could always find something [laughs]. The paperwork is endless.” However, this belief is by no means universal, and many employees (and managers) report occasions of having nothing to do except for menial busywork. For example, Skyler, the cashier at the ice-cream parlor, states: “Like, there’s only really so much you can do, you know what I mean? So, like, cleaning and getting everything prepped. But there’s a bar behind the register and people would always lean back on it because… there’s nothing else you can really do.” Other interviewees offer similar revelations:

By no means do we work in a slop house, but things do get out of place, so we have to straighten up. So you know, that’s primarily what we do during our downtime. But there are sometimes where if we are pretty slow during a period of the week or
something like that and we have everything cleaned up, I have the opportunity to take my guys out to lunch. (Alvin, manager)

I’ve only worked three retail jobs my entire life and they’re all pretty much the same as far as break time goes, but with my time at [] – that was a prime example – there were just not enough projects to keep the day going by. So I think it depends on the type of business you’re in where there’s only so much straightening and cleaning that you can do…and that makes the day draw by a lot slower. (Lou, manager)

Though we know that employees may actively seek to create downtime (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Lupton, 1963; Roy, 1959), Paulsen (2015) is right in that researchers must acknowledge that organizations may force downtime on employees. Some jobs simply require less total labor than others and the small amount of time it takes to complete the integral tasks of a job may mean that some employees have nothing to do for parts of the day. This may be especially true in customer-service oriented jobs, as a lull in customers may mean becoming a “shop minder” for large periods of time. Indeed, without the uncertainty customers provide these types of jobs become deskilled (Braverman, 1974), as employees like Lou may have nothing more complex to do than clean or straighten shelves.

At the same time, Paulsen describes these moments of forced downtime solely in terms of “unintentional” organizational or managerial outcomes. Yet, management may keep extra skilled workers on active duty even in highly-automated jobs to ensure that machinery stays running. In these workplaces it may be common to see workers engaging in non-work-related activities as they wait for something to do (see Blauner, 1964). Despite payroll pressures to minimize headcount at any given time, this may happen in service and retail organizations, as well. As Hilda, a supervising pharmacist at a retail store, offhandedly
remarks: “I could send people home when it gets slow, but somedays you don’t know if a bus of customers is coming around the corner.” Thus, service and retail managers need to balance lean staffing pressures with ensuring that enough people are available to cover busy periods, and this may mean maintaining a larger workforce even when business activity is low and required tasks are complete.

*Production interdependence* refers to how interlinked one employee’s work is with other employees’ work (Thompson, 1967). The archetypical example of a job with a high level of production interdependence is one involving assembly-line technology that links each employee’s tasks to everyone else’s labor. Production lines often force employees to limit participation in non-work-related behaviors because a stoppage in one part of the line usually means a stoppage somewhere or everywhere else (Graham, 1993). Phyllis, who has worked every job at a motorcycle factory, discusses how she could not complete her work without every other employee’s continued and permanent presence. In reference to coming back from their formal breaks on time, she explains: “People in general, you know, got back on time. There would be slackers once in a while, but in general, everybody would get back…because they knew that if they weren’t there, the line couldn’t start without them…and if one ain’t doing something, nobody’s doing anything usually [laughs].”

Yet, employees may experience a high degree of production interdependence outside of assembly-line work. Professional and office settings often require employees to engage in high levels of teamwork, which usually includes multiple and reciprocal inputs from each team member. Thus, employees who work together to complete projects or tasks may exhibit

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36 I say “usually” because some employees may create/have access to a surplus of materials to ensure they can continue working even when production stops elsewhere (e.g., Burawoy, 1979), but this runs counter to “lean” or “just-in-time” production ideologies.
a high level of concertive control/policing behavior (e.g., Barker, 1993; Crowley et al., 2013) to prevent each other from engaging in non-work-related activities (especially during busy times at work like a rush of customers or in the time leading up to an important deadline). Additionally, the restaurant and fast-food workers I interviewed describe relying on each other and needing to work as a well-oiled team to maintain quality customer service. In particular, Lenny describes working in a restaurant that championed “team service” where each table had three servers who collectively took care of customers. In some ways this helps employees take breaks (e.g., if someone needs to take a quick smoke break then Lenny could cover), but it also makes team members less inclined to slack off because their coworkers depend on them to help out.

Taken together, one can easily see that employee non-work-related activity likely decreases as the production interdependence of a job or task increases (presuming employees get along and function cohesively). After all, teamwork requires (and helps to create) trust and an emphasis on putting forth a “fair share” of the labor. At the same time, production interdependence could lead to greater personal connection between employees who may work together to create pockets of time in which non-work-related activities are enjoyed collectively. Yet, the structure of the relationship between the employees (e.g., whether the employees are of the same rank; whether employees are in competition with one another; presence or absence of friendship ties; how effective the team is at obtaining desired goals) likely influences the effect interdependence has on participation in non-work-related activities (see Crozier, 2009[1964]), but more research is needed to examine when and where production interdependence leads to more or fewer non-work-related activities on the job.
(Un)predictability refers to the amount of “chaos” an employee experiences on a daily basis as a result of unanticipated events that cause a change in the workflow (Juravich, 1985). Generally speaking, not all unanticipated events lead to chaos, but all jobs include some degree of chaos and the frequency of unanticipated events may vary from day to day. It may be the case that employees experience the highest degree of unpredictability in work that involves fluctuations of customers or the possibility of machinery failure, as these events may heavily influence an employee’s available opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities. However, similar to job interdependence, chaos can lead to more or less participation in non-work-related activity depending on the source of the disruption. For example, any work-related emergency may mean working through lunch and foregoing any potential opportunity to engage in non-work-related activity (e.g., an afternoon coffee break) that an employee may have had on a normal day. By contrast, events that bring work to a standstill (e.g., a machine breaks down) can lead to an opportunity to engage in non-work-related behavior and justifications for such behavior if there is nothing else to do.\footnote{Interviewees had mixed feelings about these unplanned opportunities to engage in non-work-related behaviors. Indeed, many expressed a desire to keep working as the interruptions would either prolong the end of their day or make time seem to move more slowly towards the end of the day (Baldamus, 1961).}

Interviewees across all types of jobs describe running into unanticipated events from time to time. For example, Arthur, who does medical billing, explains that he receives an impromptu break every once in a while when his IT system fails: “Yesterday the whole system crashed. Everybody’s looking around just waiting. Ended up going to get coffee for the next 15 minutes.” Yet, chaos is especially apparent for those employees who deal with customers on a regular basis. For example, Richard, a fast-food worker, describe a particularly “hellish” day when, on a “random Tuesday afternoon at 3PM when my supervisor already told one of my coworkers to go home because we were so slow,” three
buses filled with senior citizens decide to eat at his establishment. Similarly, Gwen, a retail store manager explains:

If it’s a busy Saturday and we’re being slammed with customers, I can be out there being with them all day long. Or if it’s a quiet Monday, maybe I get some time to go get some coffee with some employees and touch base and see how things are going. But it really revolves around what’s going on in the store that day, so as much as you try to plan for the future, you have to be really flexible.

Even the fear of unanticipated events may prevent employees from leaving their post, ultimately limiting entirely any opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities or even take a formally sanctioned lunch break. For example, Joey, a stock analyst, limits his non-work-related activity almost completely because of the rapidly changing nature of his work environment: “I don’t really take a break at all. Nah. I’ll take like five minutes and run to the bathroom…once every hour or once every two hours…[but if I take too long] I have to get re-acclimated to the market. Anything can happen at any time so…I wouldn’t really be comfortable doing that.” For Joey, walking away from his desk would negatively affect his ability to keep track of the market, potentially getting him into trouble with clients or his boss and ultimately jeopardizing his earnings.

*Job opacity* refers to whether other people, especially management, know how long it takes an employee to complete a certain set of tasks (Paulsen, 2014, 2015). Employees with the sole knowledge of how long their tasks take to complete have more latitude to prolong their work by engaging in non-work-related activities (though whether the employee acts on this opportunity is a different question). Generally speaking, jobs requiring little skill or that can be easily monitored tend to be transparent. By contrast, jobs requiring a high level of
skill or technical competence tend to be more opaque.

Paulsen argues that job opacity increases the higher one climbs in an organization’s hierarchy, and this point is particularly powerful as management and business school researchers often frame non-work-related activity as behaviors in which low-level employees engage to the chagrin of management and senior leaders. Yet, senior-level employees may theoretically have more opportunities to engage in non-work-related behavior than entry-level employees because these “higher-up” individuals may have fewer people with a detailed understanding of what they do or need to do to complete their work on a regular basis. Indeed, this could lead to situations where opacity is actively “cultivated” as these individuals learn to “look busy” and lower-level employees just assume they are completing work. Thus, it may be as important to investigate the non-work-related activity of managers and executives as low-level employees.

My interview data cannot provide evidence for Paulsen’s argument about opacity increasing the higher up in the organization one goes because I did not interview many top level management or senior leaders, and almost every manager I interviewed claims to have little time to engage in non-work-related activities. At the same time, my interview data suggest that variation in opacity may occur at the occupational level with service and manufacturing work having lower levels of opacity than office and professional work. Indeed, research shows that work in industrial and service settings tends to be routinized, deskilled, and tightly controlled (Crowley, 2012). Management also has a greater incentive in these settings to minimize the opacity of certain jobs, especially where potential output is high, to maximize surveillance of the process and ensure employees use their time efficiently (e.g., Sallaz, 2002). By contrast, administrative/office and professional environments tend to
allow employees a wider range of movement and autonomy (Fraser, 2001; Kunda, 1992). These employees may still be subject to a variety of job-related pressures to complete their tasks, especially coworker monitoring, but on average these employees likely work on projects where tasks are less clearly defined and the work itself may not have a definite start and end time.

Still, I would argue that in all settings employee-management relations may counteract (or reinforce) the effects of job opacity (and other job-related factors) on the opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities. Indeed, it is important to stress that the effect of job- and organization-related factors on individual experience is not absolute as organizations are loosely coupled (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), and employees interpret and react to the ways in which the organization attempts to shape reality (Leiter, 1986). For example, in some workplaces managers may make autonomy and freedom from surveillance “a reward for being a good worker” to secure employees’ continued cooperation (Schwalbe, 1985: 530). Andrew, a general manager of a fast-food restaurant, reports that he keeps employees “hustling” on a regular basis, but “I’m a little more lenient with some people. My people that are, you know, my opener who comes in with me early as crap in the morning. Helps me get the open knocked out by ten like we’re supposed to. So I’m like why don’t you go ahead and take the trash out and disappear for a bit. And I don’t care, you know what I mean?” In this case, an employee who builds trust with his or her management may still have leeway to engage in non-work-related behaviors despite having a deskilled, highly regimented, and easily monitored job.
THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH ON NON-WORK-RELATED ACTIVITIES

In the literature on non-work-related activities, researchers from business schools, management, and even sociology have spent much of their efforts discussing how individual/psychological factors influence an employee’s propensity to engage in these behaviors on the job. This chapter shows, however, that employee engagement in non-work-related activities has just as much if not more to do with job- and organizationally-created availability of the opportunity to engage in such behaviors. In the current chapter I have extended Paulsen’s (2014; 2015) discussion of organizationally created downtime to develop a theoretically and empirically informed typology outlining the psychological, interpersonal, organizational and job-related variation in employee non-work-related activity. I have argued that though there may be personality differences (e.g., a propensity to follow rules) that influence non-work-related behavior, my interview data show that the opportunity to engage in non-work-related activity is heavily influenced by interpersonal relations between management and employees and among coworkers, as well as job and organizational characteristics like opacity, interdependence, predictability, potential output, and the presence of formal policies and surveillance mechanisms. In its simplest form, individual behavior is a function of personality interacting with/responding to the work environment. Though employees may seek out ways to create downtime on the job, it is ultimately job and organizational characteristics that create the conditions for and that help facilitate the opportunities employees have to participate in non-work-related activities on the job (see Figure 1 below for a summary of the factors influencing non-work-related activity).

My review of the literature and analysis of my interview data allow me to make some assertions regarding when employees have more or fewer opportunities for non-work-related
activity than others and when conflict between managers and employees over non-work-related activity might arise. Where opacity is high (whether organizationally created or actively cultivated) and interdependence and potential output are low, employees will have more opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities. In each instance, an employee experiences more freedom of movement as few others know what tasks are required and/or an employee has fewer tasks to complete. Organizations with less stringent time-use policies and fewer surveillance mechanisms also provide more opportunities for free time at work. A lack of explicit policies against non-work-related activity may lead to the creation of “gray” areas where employees feel they can engage in these behaviors without fear of punishment, and more opportunities exist to engage in these behaviors if an organization does not track each employee’s movements closely. Yet, whether employees exploit these opportunities may depend on their sense of work obligation (Paulsen, 2015), the frequency of unanticipated events that occur in a particular position (i.e., job predictability), and on the interpersonal relationships between management and employees and among coworkers. Interpersonal relationships are especially important in deciding whether non-work-related activities occur and whether conflict arises because of managerial supervision and peer surveillance (Barker, 1993; Graham, 1993).

When thinking about these influencing factors at the occupational level, the evidence points to low-skill, low-pay industrial and service occupations as providing fewer opportunities, all else equal, for employees to engage in non-work-related activities on the job. These occupations tend to be more tightly controlled because management places a greater emphasis on short-term profit generation (Crowley, 2012; Edwards and Scullion, 1982). Indeed, the employees and managers I interviewed from industrial and service work
seemed to confirm that job opacity tends to be low, interdependence, unpredictability, and potential output are often high, and the organizations tend to have formal time-use policies and rely on a high degree of technological surveillance. At the same time, whether employees get along with each other and with management can heavily influence available opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities. In particular, managers may have more or less understanding regarding employee non-work-related activity based on past experiences with their own management, whether they were once part of the workgroup they now oversee, or the degree to which the managers themselves are actively monitored or responsible for organizational outcomes. Ultimately, my interviews suggest that a manager’s leniency toward employee non-work-related activity may counteract the effects of job-related characteristics (e.g., low job opacity) that negatively influence employees’ opportunities to participate in non-work-related behaviors.

By contrast, professional and administrative/office settings often give employees a wider range of movement and a high degree of autonomy to complete tasks (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Kunda, 1992). These latter workers often require space to be creative, making coercive control antithetical to productivity. The employees and managers I interviewed from these settings generally confirmed having few, if any, policies restricting their behavior and that surveillance was minimal. Practically, this often meant that brief episodes of non-work-related activities like chatting with coworkers, daydreaming, or surfing the Web were a part of the daily flow of the organization. Job-related factors influencing non-work-related activities tended to be more variable for these employees than those in industrial and service settings, but, generally speaking, job opacity tended to be higher and interdependence, unpredictability, and potential output tended to be lower. Yet, office and
professional workers are not exempt from pressures to limit non-work-related activities. Many of these employees may still have unpredictable schedules or have jobs with high potential output. Most importantly, many of these employees spoke about working on teams where employees actively policed each other’s behavior (Barker, 1993; Crowely et al., 2013), suggesting that some office and professional employees may have jobs with very low opacity and ultimately few opportunities to avoid work.

Though I have outlined a variety of factors influencing employee non-work-related behavior, future researchers should attempt to understand what else might influence variation in non-work-related activities and how different influencing factors overlap and interact with each other to create more or fewer opportunities for these activities to take place. At the same time, researchers should continue to examine the variables highlighted here. Some of these concepts, such as interdependence, predictability, and the presence or absence of rules and surveillance may lend themselves to empirical investigation through survey techniques. As such, future survey researchers should do more than ask about the frequency in which employees engage in non-work-related activities, but inquire also about the organizational and job-related characteristics that may influence respondent behavior at work.

Other factors discussed here, especially the effect of interpersonal relationships, may be better examined through qualitative research, especially workplace observations. At present, no contemporary researchers have used observational data explicitly to examine employee non-work-related activity on the job. Yet, ethnographic research is especially useful for understanding employee-management relations (Tope et al., 2005), and ethnographies have long been utilized by sociologists of work for this purpose (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Paules, 1991; Sallaz, 2002). Unlike surveys or interviews, field observations
allow researchers to see social processes in action and understand how norms and values develop within a group setting (Esterberg, 2002; Snow et al., 1986; Tope et al., 2005; Watson, 2011). In addition, given that some workplace activities may be “against the rules” (e.g., non-work-related activities), employees may be less inclined to reveal certain behaviors in interviews or on surveys. Similarly, managers may be less inclined to report how strict they are regarding non-work-related activities in interviews, revealing through observations any strategies they may enact to extend or withhold leniency at particular times in the work cycle. Thus, covert observations allow researchers the opportunity to view these processes or behaviors in action, without employees or managers feeling as if they are reporting disparaging information about themselves.

In sum, if the study of non-work-related activities is to move forward beyond making unsupported claims about the consequences of non-work-related behaviors for management and organizations, then sociologists must be more willing to enter the arena. For too long the narrative around non-work-related behavior has been controlled by research that presents a one-sided picture of “bad” employees conflicting with management as they engage in non-work-related activities without regard for organizational consequences. The sociological perspective is uniquely situated to counter these arguments and provide insight into how and why employee non-work-related activities vary within organizations and across occupations. Most importantly, sociological research can show how non-work-related activities often are built into the structure and processes of organizations and are explicitly or tacitly condoned by management. In doing so, sociologists will help move the literature away from blaming employees for non-work-related activity and toward an understanding of how work and non-work coexist and vary within and across organizations.
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FIGURE 1: FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE NON-WORK-RELATED ACTIVITY ON THE JOB
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In response to neoliberal assumptions and arguments in current management literature regarding the frequency and consequences of non-work-related activities for employers (Snider, 2002; Stevens and Lavin, 2007), and the sociological literature’s emphasis on overwork (e.g., Fraser, 2001) and proclivity for categorizing non-work-related activities as workplace resistance (Paulsen, 2014; 2015), this dissertation offers sensible and important counterpoints that encourage debate and future research. By utilizing the insights from past sociological research on the effort bargain (e.g., Baldamus, 1961; Edwards, 1986), workplace control (e.g., Barker, 1993; Kunda, 1992), informal norms (e.g., Blau, 1963; Homans, 1950; Roy, 1952), and “shop-floor” negotiations between management and employees (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Sykes, 1958), the analyses underscore the importance of the social context surrounding employees and managers for determining employees’ engagement in non-work-related activity. Using interview data with managers and employees across a variety of workplaces, the analyses address unexamined or under-examined aspects of the debates regarding non-work-related activities.

Chapter 2 challenges the idea in both the management and sociological literatures that managers seek to eliminate employee non-work-related activity (Coker, 2011; Ketchen et al., 2008). Too often researchers focus on “management control versus worker resistance” (Karlsson, 2012: 17), and what employees do to take back control of their labor from their employer (and by proxy, management). As such, gaps remain in our understanding of when or under what circumstances managers’ opinions and actions might vary. This is problematic because “the social meanings given to a form of behavior [at work] will depend in part on managerial definitions,” and what managers actually do and think will affect worker behavior
(Edwards and Scullion, 1982: 2; see also, Ackroyd, 2012; Richards, 2008). Thus, chapter 2 provides much needed insight into an understudied population (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010) and highlights the usefulness of investigating how managers think and feel about these behaviors and what may cause variation in managerial experience.

Specifically, we now have a better understanding of some of the key factors that may influence managers’ strictness or leniency towards non-work-related behaviors. For example, managers’ actions regarding employee non-work-related behavior hinge in part on past experiences with their own management, their power/position in the organization’s hierarchy, and whether they can co-opt some employees to keep an eye on other employees in their absence. Moreover, the managers who report being strict about non-work-related activities tend to be found in service and production workplaces where corporate payroll pressures and cost-saving expectations often lead to exerting a high level of control over their employees. By contrast, the few managers who actively describe encouraging their workers to engage in non-work-related activities come from administrative/office and professional environments where workers tend to enjoy a wider range of movement and autonomy in general (Crowley, 2012; Fraser, 2001; Kunda, 1992). Between these two poles, managers from all types of workplaces express ambivalence (and indifference) towards non-work-related activities as long as employees complete their tasks. Many of these managers believe non-work-related activities were inevitable – they engage in “satisficing” behavior, accepting suboptimal employee efficiency in exchange for maintaining at least a bottom-line level of productivity. As such, non-work-related activities are something to “manage” and monitor but not necessarily something that requires action on a day-to-day basis.
These differing managerial responses to non-work-related activity have consequences for employees, how we interpret employee non-work-related behavior, and the current state of the literature on non-work-related behavior. Manager behavior affects employee behavior, so more research is necessary to understand how employees’ non-work-related behavior is influenced by their managers. One might imagine that, when facing a strict manager who attempts to control access to non-work-related activity, employees may resist (in the classical sociological sense) and attempt to take back some of their time. Indeed, the more tightly management controls employee labor time, the less opportunity employees have to engage in these activities, unless they knowingly and purposefully violate managerial directives. By contrast, managers who appear to be ambivalent about non-work-related activities create a gray area in which employees can use discretion to move in and out of work- and non-work-related activities. In these situations employees likely feel that to some extent they have permission to engage in non-work-related activities and do not see their behavior as opposed to management’s interests.

The question then becomes to what extent employees engage in non-work-related activities when the opportunity presents itself. Management and business scholars believe that employees engage in a problematic level of non-work-related activity, but most of the managers in this study would likely disagree, saying they monitor employees effectively to ensure the goals of the organization are met. Yet, given the impossibility of total managerial control, the gray areas managers create as a result of their ambivalence, and the autonomy many employees have (especially in professional and office/administrative jobs), employee discretion is inevitable, and employees must play a large role in the regulation of non-work-related activity on a day-to-day basis.
Chapter 3 highlights the role employees play in this regard and challenges the assertion often made in the time theft literature that employees engage in non-work-related activities with little regard for potential organizational consequences (e.g., Lim and Teo, 2005). It also challenges the practicality of classifying employee non-work-related activity as resistance. Specifically, employees reveal the details that go into their decisions to engage in non-work-related activities and under what circumstances they limit the type, frequency, and length of their non-work-related behavior. For example, employees criticize and refrain from certain types of non-work-related activities (e.g., viewing pornography, smoking, and sleeping) because they feel these activities are unprofessional. However, the “organizational timing” of their non-work-related activities becomes the most important factor in determining whether to engage in non-work-related activities. If the organization is “busy” or “in need” (e.g., deadlines, influxes of customers), employees avoid engaging in non-work-related behaviors.

Most often employees time their non-work-related activities to coincide with downtime or lulls in organizational activity, so their absence is least detrimental or not felt. Indeed, many employees state that they lack tasks to perform on a regular basis and use these opportunities to engage in non-work. As such, it is important to emphasize that non-work-related activity goes beyond employee behavior. We know from chapter 2 that non-work-related activities are affected and facilitated by management, but the employees’ interviews suggest that opportunities for non-work-related activity are also externally and organizationally created and imposed on employees. This is something that receives little attention in the literature, as both sociologists and management/business scholars often take for granted that employees always have work to do.
To some degree, employees likely time their non-work-related activities to coincide with organizational lulls to avoid risk of punishment, but the notion that employees care about their work and their organization should not be discounted. After all, research shows that employees generally want to do good work and that they often receive fulfillment from a job well done (Hodson, 1995). At the same time, these employees highlight the importance of coworkers in shaping when and how often employees engage in non-work-related behavior. Employees state adamantly that they would refrain from engaging in non-work-related activities when their participation could potentially burden their coworkers (i.e., the coworkers would have to pick up their slack).

Yet there is a darker side to coworker relations. Many employees report that they do not want to be the one “known for” not being at their desk, and limit their informal break time as a result. They worry about what their coworkers think of them and criticize employees who they see as being derelict in their work tasks. In this way, the findings suggest the presence of informal norms regarding the acceptability of non-work-related activity and “concertive control,” as employees describe policing anyone who violated shared rules and expectations (Barker, 1993). Concern regarding coworker surveillance is especially apparent in professional/office settings where non-work-related activity is often a normal part of the workday. As such, apprehension about engaging in non-work-related activity seems similar to apprehension some employees feel about engaging in more formalized non-work, such as using paid time off and parental leave policies (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs et al., 2004). Researchers should thus be reminded that even when the opportunity exists to engage in non-work-related activity, exploiting the opportunity is a separate matter.
Under what conditions, then, do some employees have more or less opportunity to engage in non-work-related activities than others? Researchers have not provided any systematic explanation for how and why employee participation in non-work-related activities varies. Business and management scholars have focused on the individual, and they have provided some understanding of the psychological antecedents of non-work-related activity. Sociologists have focused on the individual or a group of individuals and how they behave in one particular organizational context. As such, one goal of this research has been to collect data across a variety of organizational and occupational contexts to understand better how social context matters.

Making use of the entirety of my interviews with both managers and employees, chapter 4 builds off of and extends Paulsen’s (2014; 2015) work by outlining a typology of the psychological, interpersonal, organizational, and job-related factors that influence an employee’s engagement in non-work-related activities. The organizational and job-related factors in particular – including the presence or absence of formal rules, surveillance mechanisms, job opacity, predictability, interdependence, and potential input – have previously been under-examined but have significant ramifications for a literature dominated by management/business scholars who often task management with “fixing the problem” of employee non-work-related behavior.

Ultimately, we must amend the strong emphasis on manager-employee conflict in both the management and sociological literature on non-work-related activities to account for a variety of situations where employees’ and managers’ interests are aligned, or at least not at odds. Employees certainly find ways to engage in non-work-related activities, but this is often done with considerable care and only sometimes goes against management’s wishes.
Organizations also create and perpetuate opportunities to engage in non-work-related activities, and this has consequences for employee-manager relations and employee well-being. Indeed, this study encourages future researchers to shift their focus from the individual engaged in non-work-related activities to the ways in which organizations make these behaviors possible. It asks researchers to take seriously the notion that employees may not seek out non-work-related activity but have these activities thrust upon them, and provides ample avenues for future research into how these factors counteract and reinforce each other.

LIMITS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Many factors limit the generalizability of the analyses in this dissertation, and I have already discussed them at length. However, it cannot be overstated that though every attempt was made to recruit a diverse sample, the interviewees in these studies do not systematically represent the larger body of employees, managers, and workplaces across the United States. These data represent the self-reported perceptions and opinions of only one member within a given organization, and it is possible that the inclusion of other employees’ and managers’ accounts could render different conclusions. Thus, the data only suggest patterns of what may occur in the larger population, and cannot reveal the extent of variation in possible experiences.

Interview data are also limited by the possibility of bias, misinformation, and low informational yield (Alvesson, 2003; Tope et al., 2005). As Alvesson (2003: 14) writes, “It is important not to simplify and idealize the interview situation, assuming that the interviewee…is a competent and moral truth teller…and producing the data needed to reveal his or her ‘interior’ (i.e., experiences, feelings, values) or the ‘facts’ of the organization.” In other words, researchers who conduct interviews must understand that respondents are
providing a subjective account of a given situation, not necessarily a full account. Given that interviews are limited in their ability to portray the “vibrant interconnectivity of individuals, cultures, processes, and organizational arrangements that constitute workplaces and work lives” (Tope et al., 2005: 489), it is possible that the data presented here miss a great deal of nuance regarding the dynamics of management-employee interactions surrounding non-work-related activities within each organization. I recognize that the interpretations I have offered are just one of many possible ways to organize and understand the data, but I have made every effort to approach the data reflexively and think about multiple interpretations of the interviewees’ quotes. At the same time, future research is needed to corroborate these interpretations and provide a more complex picture than the one these respondents reported from their unitary vantage points.

In particular, there is an urgent need for more studies of non-work-related activity that use observational methods on the “ground floor” of workplaces. As I have shown, surveys and interviews tap into the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of individual managers and employees, but the practical day-to-day experiences and processes of negotiation and conflict between employees and management are best studied through observational methods. Although interviewees “are capable of describing to some degree the nature of social relations at work,” observational methods allow researchers to understand more fully what “workers actually do on the job,” how employees interact with others, and the cultural language or meanings that develop in a particular organizational context (Tope et al., 2005: 483-484). Ethnographic research is especially useful for understanding employee-management relations (Tope et al., 2005), and ethnographies have long been utilized by sociologists of work for this purpose. For example, Burawoy’s (1979) study of factory life
shows how management’s leniency toward employees’ games of “making out” served to increase employee effort and ensure organizational outcomes. Similarly, Sallaz’s (2002) ethnographic work in a casino highlights the interactions between managerial surveillance and employee autonomy as dealers attempt to generate tips from customers.

Participant observation may be especially useful because it allows researchers to develop trust with research subjects (Tope et al., 2005). Interviewers often only have one opportunity to garner insights from their respondents, and subjects may be less open and accommodating as a result. By contrast, participant observation allows researchers to develop “insider” status and the opportunity to ask coworkers and supervisors about their non-work-related activity “in the moment” without garnering suspicion. Thus, observations are especially ideal for cross-checking the claims employees and managers make in one-on-one interviews or surveys. For example, do managers who claim not to care about or encourage non-work-related behavior actually do so in practice? How accurate are employees’ perceptions of employers’ policies and managerial supervision? Are employees overtly/subtly or actively/passively policing their coworkers’ non-work-related activity? Are employees accurate when describing the amount of time and frequency with which they participate in non-work-related activities? Previous researchers have relied almost exclusively on employee self-reports of non-work-related activity (e.g., Askew, 2012; Bock and Ho, 2009), but observations may provide a more objective or accurate picture of the time employees spend away from work tasks and whether these behaviors have consequences for organizational production.

There is also an urgent need for more research investigating the thoughts, opinions, and actions of managers as “little attention is paid to the day-to-day managerial role” (Bolton...
Future researchers should pay particular attention to how managers view and deal with non-work-related activity on-the-job. Again considering that “the social meanings given to a form of behavior [at work] will depend in part on managerial definitions,” and what managers actually do and think will affect worker behavior (Edwards and Scullion, 1982: 2), it behooves future researchers to understand how managers actually deal with employees who engage in non-work-related activity and how managers vary in whether they think it affects their employees’ ability and their own ability to get the job done. This research has shown, in a preliminary fashion, that managerial attitudes towards non-work-related activities may differ for a variety of reasons. Individual-level factors include managers’ past personal experiences with abusive management, their level of power to minimize or remove workers who they feel are abusing their use of time, and whether they can rely on employees to police themselves. System-level factors include the type of occupation (e.g., professional work versus service work) and control strategies present in the workplace.

More research could unearth new explanations for managerial behavior. Indeed, I have outlined a number of organizational and job-related factors (e.g., opacity, unpredictability, potential output, and interdependence) that influence employee non-work-related activity. Yet these factors may affect managerial behavior, as well. For example, if a manager oversees employees with jobs characterized by a low potential output, then the managers may be less inclined to care if employees engage in occasional non-work-related activities. By contrast, highly unpredictable work may make managers more inclined to keep a watchful eye on employees to make sure they are available at all times to handle any situation that might occur. Other influential factors might include the number of subordinates
an individual manager has to oversee. It may be, for example, that managers with a large number of subordinates know that close supervision of all of their employees is burdensome or impossible, and they may come to expect moments of employee non-work-related activity.

Although I interviewed some highly-ranked managers (e.g., a vice-president of a non-profit, an owner of a restaurant), more interviews with managers from different levels of hierarchy may reveal that owners/employers, senior managers, and low-level supervisors may think differently about non-work-related activities. On one hand, owners/employers may better understand the overall organizational costs of non-work-related activities, and thus they may desire to eliminate these activities completely. On the other hand, managers removed from the point of production may not understand the potential effort-bargain negotiations necessary to keep the organization running smoothly on a daily basis (Baldamus, 1961; Sykes, 1958), while production supervisors may understand quite well the usefulness and positive consequences of employee non-work-related activity.

Further investigation into managerial ambivalence is warranted, as it is unclear whether this approach to non-work-related behavior leads to positive and/or negative consequences for employees. On one hand, this attitude likely gives employees more leeway to order their day as they see fit. On the other hand, though the managers in this study were fond of saying non-work-related activities did not matter “as long as the work was done,” this mantra may leave employees feeling uneasy. Without explicit rules to use as a guide, employees may not know how to act or realize how much freedom they may have to move in and out of work (e.g., Perrow, 1986). For example, recently Netflix’s CEO announced that employees have access to “unlimited” parental leave and that he “hopes” people take a lot of vacation (Addady, 2015). Yet, this policy has been rightly criticized as being too vague and
will likely have the opposite of its intended effect – i.e., people will take less vacation because there is no specific guideline for how much they should take (Che, 2015). The lack of explicit rules may also open the door for managers to show bias and favoritism to some employees as well, and workers may grow to resent managers who they feel do not mete out punishment for perceived bad behavior.

Finally, do managerial attitudes towards non-work-related activities stay constant or are they fluid? For example, a manager’s leniency toward employee non-work-related activity may change as deadlines or end-of-the-year performance reviews approach. The rise and fall of the economy or general business performance of the organization may also create pressure on managers to alter their managerial style and in turn drive workers harder. To put it another way, researchers must understand how managers’ (and employees’) thoughts and actions regarding non-work-related activities change as the economic environment changes. Thus, the figure from chapter 4 could also include a bubble outlining the macro-economic factors that might cascade added pressure down through the organization and affect employee-manager relationships.

The consequences of this variation for employee well-being should also be explored. We know from past research that access to non-work-related activity has positive consequences for employee health (e.g., Kirkcaldy et al., 2002; Lisper and Eriksson, 1980; Mayo, 1924; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Tucker, 2003), and that employees enjoy these momentary breaks from work (e.g., Chinoy, 1992; Pfeffer, 1979). Thus, if employees continue to feel squeezed for time and overworked (Fraser, 2001; Jacobs et al., 2004; Kalleberg, 2009; Kunda, 1992), future researchers may want to focus their attention on those employees with lowest potential access to non-work-related opportunities (i.e., low opacity,
and high interdependence, potential output, and predictability) to see what interventions may be needed to improve the work environment. Given the potential for employee self-policing and concertoive control (Barker, 1993), researchers should also be concerned with situations in which employees have access to opportunities for non-work-related activity but do not act on them. If some managers truly believe that non-work-related activities are valuable for ensuring employee productivity in the long run, then they must be at the forefront in helping employees understand that engaging in non-work-related activities will not have negative consequences. Yet they must go beyond mere encouragement (as in the case of Netflix’s CEO) to ensure employees avail themselves of opportunities to engage in non-work-related activity. This may include organizational policy changes and rules designed to protect and enforce a certain level of non-work-related activity.

This might seem like an overly optimistic prescription in a society dominated by neoliberal ideologies that emphasize shareholder profits, increased production, and the limitation of employee waste (Crowley and Hodson, 2014). Yet, this study shows that “what is rational for stakeholders may well be irrational for the organization, its employees, and even society” (Crowley and Hodson, 2014: 103). After all, research shows that the relationship between hours worked and productivity may plateau (Pencavel, 2014), suggesting that maximizing productivity does not have to mean longer and more intense work hours. Moreover, Moen et al. (2016) show how organizational initiatives that improve employees’ control over their time (i.e., when and where they complete their work) can reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction. This research challenges the entrenched assumption that worktime belongs solely to employers and suggests that, at least for professional and office workers, organizations and employees alike benefit from a more
flexible approach to non-work-related activities. Thus, employers and managers should concentrate on improving the work environment (Crowley, 2013; Eddy et al., 2010) and on understanding how non-work-related activity can benefit employees and the organization. Any future research that investigates the opinions, thoughts, and feelings of the actors involved or the practical, day-to-day experience of non-work-related activity will continue to reveal nuances in employee-manager relations and be a welcome addition to the literature.
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