

9-11-2020

How work constrains leisure: New ideas and directions for interdisciplinary research

Laruen Kuykendall
George Mason University

Ze Zhu
University of Nebraska at Omaha, zezhu@unomaha.edu

Lydia Craig
George Mason University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/psychfacpub>

 Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Recommended Citation

Kuykendall, L.*, Zhu, Z., Craig, L. (2020). How work constrains leisure: New ideas and directions for interdisciplinary research. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51(5), 635-642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2020.1807841>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Psychology at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

How work constrains leisure: New ideas and directions for interdisciplinary research

Lauren Kuykendall, Ze Zhu, and Lydia Craig
Department of Psychology, George Mason University

To cite this article: Lauren Kuykendall, Ze Zhu & Lydia Craig (2020) How work constrains leisure: New ideas and directions for interdisciplinary research, *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51:5, 635-642, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2020.1807841>

Abstract

In this commentary, we note the lack of emphasis on work-related factors in the leisure constraints literature. We highlight three work-related factors that we think warrant investigation as leisure constraints: (1) labor practices related to work scheduling, (2) organizational norms, and (3) work supervisors. We discuss relevant organizational psychology literatures and note that future research focusing on work-related factors could broaden knowledge about leisure constraints and illuminate new paths forward for improving employees' leisure experiences. We emphasize that addressing these work-related constraints likely requires moving beyond individual-directed strategies and focusing on contextual factors (e.g., organizational policies and practices) that could be targeted to improve employees' leisure experiences.

KEYWORDS

Leisure constraints; work schedules; ideal worker norms; supervisor support

A major theme in leisure studies has been understanding the constraints that deter interest and participation in beneficial leisure activities. This large body of literature has led to important insights about the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural factors that constrain leisure (Godbey et al., 2010). Viewing this literature as organizational psychologists, we are surprised that work-related factors do not play a more prominent role in the empirical research on leisure constraints, with the exception of a few studies that have focused on work commitment, work hours, or work exhaustion as leisure constraints (Lenneis & Pfister, 2017; Lewis, 2003; Liechty & Genoe, 2013; Little, 2002; Young et al., 2003), and more recently, studies that have focused on how workaholism and work overload from smartphone use interfere with employees' leisure experiences (Meier et al., 2020; Son & Chen, 2018). Focusing on work-related constraints to leisure is particularly timely given that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many employees to work from home, creating a situation where it may be more difficult to establish and maintain boundaries between work and leisure.

In what follows, we emphasize three work-related factors that we think are likely important leisure constraints for many workers in the U.S. but—to our knowledge— have not been the focus of research in leisure studies: (1) labor practices, particularly related to work scheduling; (2) organizational norms, specifically ideal worker norms; and (3) work supervisors. We suggest that research focusing on work-related leisure constraints is an important omitted area of research in leisure studies and a great opportunity for collaborative research among leisure researchers and organizational psychologists. Throughout, we comment on whether and how these factors are particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across these three topics, we note that work-related leisure constraints likely cannot be overcome by focusing solely on individual-directed approaches to mitigate the effects of leisure barriers (i.e., negotiation of leisure constraints; Jackson et al., 1993). That is, to remove important work-related constraints to leisure, it will likely be necessary to move beyond individual negotiation strategies, which have been heavily emphasized in the leisure constraints literature, and to

consider how local and federal governments, organizations, and organizational actors (e.g., supervisors) could be motivated to care about the way they constrain employees' leisure participation. Leisure researchers have the opportunity to play a pivotal role in making an empirical case for these entities to care about employees' leisure experiences. We suggest that, to do so, it is necessary to look beyond individual negotiation strategies to focus on contextual factors (e.g., labor policies, organizational policies and practices) that could be targeted to mitigate work-related leisure barriers and subsequently improve the quality of leisure and employee well-being more generally.

Labor practices as leisure constraints

We suggest that labor practices that impact the scheduling and predictability of work hours are an important leisure constraint, particularly for low-wage workers. Companies looking to cut employment costs often do so by varying the timing and number of hours an employee works based on business demand, often with very little notice (Bell, 2017; Lambert, 2008; Williams et al., 2013). One specific example is the increasingly common use of just-in-time (JIT) scheduling in the service sector. This practice often involves using software to match workers' hours with customer demand, giving companies the ability to utilize the ideal number of workers at any given time. However, this practice typically leads to unpredictability about the timing and number of work hours for employees, as companies using JIT scheduling often communicate schedules with very little advance notice, send workers (who often have long commutes) home upon arrival, or ask workers to stay after their scheduled shift is over or to come in on a scheduled day off (Cauthen, 2011; *cf.* Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005). Just-in-time scheduling is often experienced as "part time work, but full time availability" (Bruce, 2016). Among other detrimental consequences caused by such practices (e.g., financial insecurity, difficulties arranging childcare on short notice), we expect that increases in the prevalence of these scheduling practices likely constrain leisure involvement among low-wage workers, as they are often unable to plan leisure activities and vacations or cultivate leisure interests that require predictable scheduling or coordination with others.

A recent study estimated that 41% of early career workers in the United States in hourly jobs experience work schedule unpredictability (Lambert et al., 2014). While the prevalence of such practices is already quite high, we anticipate that these practices could become even more widespread than they currently are due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As these practices are motivated by the goal of cutting labor costs, companies—particularly retail companies—that have suffered severe economic repercussions of COVID-19 may rely more on JIT scheduling to keep costs low. Further, as the economic repercussions of COVID-19 lead to high levels of unemployment and job insecurity, employees may be more willing to remain in jobs that implement unpredictable scheduling practices, possibly leading employers to be less concerned that such practices will lead to employee turnover.

Surprisingly, while research has documented the detrimental effects of these scheduling practices on numerous outcomes such as childcare, transportation, and financial instability (Cauthen, 2011), no research to our knowledge has emphasized how such practices impact leisure experiences. Because of its emphasis on structural factors that deter leisure involvement, the leisure constraints framework is very well-suited to understanding the impact of such policies on engagement in and enjoyment of employees' leisure experiences. Future research in this area should focus on examining how scheduling unpredictability impacts employees' leisure experiences and determining whether the detrimental effects on leisure subsequently impair health and well-being outcomes. Such research documenting the psychological consequences of these practices on employees' lives could be used to influence labor policies and to put pressure on corporations to reduce reliance on these practices. Recent examples of cities passing legislation to give employees greater scheduling predictability (DePellis, 2015) and companies revising policies to provide greater flexibility (Chernin, 2014; DePellis, 2016) provides hope that such efforts may be effective in mitigating these leisure constraints for workers.

Ideal worker norms as leisure constraints

In contrast to lower-wage workers, higher-wage, professional workers typically experience greater levels of control over their schedules. However, higher-wage workers often experience other work-related factors—including organizational expectations to be an “ideal worker”—that likely constrain their leisure experiences. An ideal worker is one who is “totally committed to, and always available for, his or her work” (Reid, 2015, p. 997). In today’s professional work settings, where it is increasingly possible to work 24/7, a key manifestation of being an ideal worker is the willingness to work long hours, often on nights and weekends (Moen et al., 2013). Working long hours—a situation that is common in many professional occupations such as management, law, engineering, and finance (Boushey & Ansel, 2016)—seemingly requires employees to reduce involvement in other activities. What other activities do employees forgo to create time for the work hours necessary to conform to ideal worker norms? The answer is likely not family responsibilities, as increasing norms of intensive parenting have caused time parents spend tending to their children to increase even as they also increase time spent in paid labor (Correll et al., 2014). It stands to reason that the time that is sacrificed for long work hours may come from leisure activities, particularly from personal or solitary leisure activities that individuals engage in apart from family time.

To the extent that ideal worker norms constrain leisure for many working adults—a point that has been acknowledged in leisure studies (Lewis, 2003)—understanding how to change ideal worker norms represents an important research opportunity moving forward. Work-family researchers have argued that changing ideal worker norms requires “challeng[ing] the accepted wisdom that businesses work best when staffed by the ever-present, ever-available worker” (Correll et al., 2014, p. 9). Initial research addressing this daunting goal highlights how work redesign interventions that change time norms can promote organizational success. For instance, several studies have reported on one such approach to change time norms called the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE), which allows employees flexibility to work “whenever and wherever they want as long as their work gets done” (Correll et al., 2014, p. 8). By emphasizing

results over face time, ROWE challenges the notion that employees must work long hours to be high performers. In a quasi-experimental study evaluating the effects of ROWE at Best Buy (Kelly et al., 2011), introducing a ROWE work redesign reduced work-family conflict and negative spillover of stress from work to family and improved employees' sense that they had enough time to pursue personal and family activities (work-family fit) and that their work schedules worked for their families (work-schedule fit). Subsequent analyses on this same population revealed that employees in the ROWE redesign spent more time exercising (Moen et al., 2013)—initial evidence showing how work redesigns targeting ideal worker norms can increase engagement in beneficial leisure activities.

While these initial results are promising and numerous companies have implemented ROWE, much more research is needed in this area, as many companies are resistant to implementing ROWE and other types of work redesigns that could change ideal worker norms. For instance, despite compelling evidence from the ROWE program at Best Buy, the ROWE program was discontinued, with the CEO noting the importance of “having employees in the office as much as possible to collaborate and connect on ways to improve our business” (Perlow & Kelly, 2014, p. 118). Given that ideal worker norms among working professionals are likely a key leisure constraint for working professionals, we believe that leisure studies researchers should have an interest in understanding how to change ideal worker norms and should consider expanding the scope of what they study to include partnering with organizational psychologists and sociologists who are researching: (1) the detrimental individual, organizational, and societal consequences of ideal worker norms and overwork among professional workers (Cha, 2010; Padavic et al., 2020; Wynn, 2018) and (2) work design approaches that have the potential to change ideal worker norms without reducing productivity (Correll et al., 2014; Perlow & Kelly, 2014).

These topics are particularly important in light of COVID-19. When employees are working primarily in their offices, they can more easily use boundary management strategies to protect time for nonwork roles and activities (Allen et al., 2014). However, the need for many employees to work from home during

COVID-19 has eliminated such boundaries between work and home for many employees, possibly making it harder to use boundary management strategies to resist ideal worker norms and subsequently causing employees to sacrifice their leisure time.

Supervisors as leisure constraints

While research in leisure studies has focused extensively on how spouses can constrain leisure (Godbey et al., 2010), we are unaware of any research based on leisure constraints theory that documents how one's work supervisor can constrain leisure. Several years ago, when attending a well-being conference, we heard a scientist from the Centers for Disease Control note that she thought that employees' direct supervisors may have a stronger effect than their spouse on their health and well-being (Chang, 2017). While we are unaware of whether any empirical research has examined this issue, her comment piqued our interest about how supervisors impact employees' leisure experiences. This topic is now an emerging area in organizational psychology, as researchers have called for a greater understanding of how supervisors impact their employees' leisure experiences (Sonnentag et al., 2017).

One way supervisors likely impact employees' leisure experiences is through the transmission of ideal worker norms. As employees look to their supervisors to understand work-related norms, supervisors who model long work hours and constant availability likely transmit ideal worker norms to their employees, often causing employees to sacrifice leisure to conform to ideal worker norms (Padavic et al., 2020). Even when employees do have time for leisure, the desire or pressure to conform to ideal worker norms may diminish the quality of that leisure, as employees may be distracted by or preoccupied with work, preventing them from being fully absorbed in leisure activities.

The pressures employees feel to conform to ideal worker norms may be even more detrimental to leisure during COVID-19, as many working parents who previously had children in school or daycare have suddenly faced the need to simultaneously juggle childcare and work while working at home. As this is an

unprecedented situation, supervisors—particularly those who have less experience managing remote workers— may not adapt well to supporting their employees' unique work-nonwork balance needs and may intentionally or unintentionally convey unrealistic expectations that result in employees sacrificing leisure to keep up with high work demands. Thus, it is essential— in general, but particularly during COVID-19—for supervisors to be respectful of their employees' leisure time, encourage the importance of leisure, and refrain from behaviors that make it difficult for their employees to have high-quality leisure that protects their well-being.

Accordingly, we believe that leisure studies researchers should expand their focus on interpersonal leisure constraints beyond the traditional focus on spouses and leisure interaction partners and partner with organizational psychologists to understand: (1) how supervisors constrain leisure, (2) the behaviors supervisors could engage in to be more supportive of leisure without sacrificing productivity, and (3) the motivational barriers that prevent supervisors from engaging in these supportive behaviors.

Conclusion

In sum, we think work-related factors are important factors deterring involvement in— and enjoyment of—leisure. We think these factors have been neglected in the leisure constraints literature. Focusing on work-related factors, including but not limited to the three factors that we have discussed in this commentary, could broaden knowledge about leisure constraints experienced by working adults and could make an important impact by illuminating paths forward for improving employees' leisure experience. Other work-related factors that may be relevant examine as possible leisure constraints include whether an employee is salaried or paid hourly (DeVoe & Pfeffer, 2007), whether employees work billable hours (Evans et al., 2004; Young & Melin, 2019), and what industries employees work in.

We note that the impact of the three work-related factors we have emphasized may be more salient in some cultures. For instance, it is possible that the proposed effects of supervisors may be stronger for East Asians who value

collectivism (i.e., placing greater importance on the goals and well-being of the group; Hofstede, 1980) and high power distance (i.e., accepting inequity and power differences, and showing high respect for rank and authority; Hofstede, 1980) than North Americans who value individualism (i.e., placing greater importance on attaining personal goals; Hofstede, 1980) and low power distance (i.e., place emphasis on power distribution; Hofstede, 1980). Future research on work-related leisure constraints should pay attention to possible cultural differences.

We also note that, while we have focused primarily on work-related leisure constraints, we also believe that work-related factors can facilitate positive leisure experiences. We note that work-leisure facilitation is also a topic ripe for interdisciplinary collaborations, as recent insights about work-leisure facilitation in the leisure sciences (e.g., Liang, 2018) are consistent with influential theoretical work in our field that seeks to explain how work roles positively impact nonwork roles (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Wayne et al., 2007)—perspectives that have recently been applied to understand employees' leisure experiences (Knecht et al., 2016).

We hope that highlighting these issues will inspire some leisure studies researchers to focus on these important and timely topics and perhaps even to collaborate with organizations psychologists and organizational behavior researchers who are interested in understanding how to enhance employees' leisure experiences and subsequently their overall well-being. This goal appears to be well-aligned with the emphasis in the leisure constraints literature that removing constraints requires moving beyond individual strategies to “facilitation on the part of society, community, institution, or other agencies” (Godbey et al., 2010, p. 118). We look forward to seeing interdisciplinary work that advances knowledge on these important topics.

References

- Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2014). Work–family boundary dynamics. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 99–121. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091330>

Bell, J. D. (2017, October). *Is 'on-call' scheduling on the way out?* *Society for Human Resource Management*. <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/1117/pages/is-on-call-scheduling-on-the-way-out.aspx>

Boushey, H., Ansel, H. (2016). *Overworked America: The economic causes and consequences of long work hours*. <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/overworked-america/>

Bruce, S. (2016, December). Just-in-time scheduling: Good news and bad news. *HR Daily Advisor*. <https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2016/12/19/just-time-scheduling-good-news-bad-news/>

Cauthen, N. K. (2011). *Scheduling hourly workers: How last minute "just-In-time" scheduling practices are bad for workers, families and business*. Demos.

Cha, Y. (2010). Reinforcing separate spheres: The effect of spousal overwork on men's and women's employment in dual-earner households. *American Sociological Review*, 75(2), 303–329. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410365307>

Chang, C. (2017). *Opportunities in worker well-being*. Leading to Well-Being Conference.

Chernin, S. (2014). Starbucks to change scheduling as some employees struggle. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/starbucks-change-scheduling-some-employees-struggle-n181111>

Correll, S. J., Kelly, E. L., O'Connor, L. T., & Williams, J. C. (2014). Redesigning, redefining work. *Work and Occupations*, 41(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888413515250>

DePellis, L. (2015). Why it's hard to legislate good corporate behavior. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/09/25/why-its-difficult-to-legislate-good-corporate-behavior/>

DePellis, L. (2016). Walmart is rolling out big changes to worker schedules this year. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/02/17/walmart-is-rolling-out-big-changes-to-worker-schedules-this-year/>

DeVoe, S. E., & Pfeffer, J. (2007). Hourly payment and volunteering: The effect of organizational practices on decisions about time use. *Academy of Management Journal*,

50(4), 783–798. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.26279171>

Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *The Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 178–199. <https://doi.org/10.2307/259269>

Evans, J. A., Kunda, G., & Barley, S. R. (2004). Beach time, bridge time, and billable hours: The temporal structure of technical contracting. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 49(1), 1–38.

Godbey, G., Crawford, D. W., & Shen, X. S. (2010). Assessing hierarchical leisure constraints theory after two decades. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 42(1), 111–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2010.11950197>

Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(1), 72–92. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2006.19379625>

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. SAGE.

Jackson, E. L., Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1993). Negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 15(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490409309513182>

Kelly, E. L., Moen, P., & Tranby, E. (2011). Changing workplaces to reduce work-family conflict: Schedule control in a white-collar organization. *American Sociological Review*, 76(2), 265–290.

Knecht, M., Wiese, B. S., & Freund, A. M. (2016). Going beyond work and family: A longitudinal study on the role of leisure in the work-life interplay. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37(7), 1061–1077. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2098>

Lambert, S. J. (2008). Passing the buck: Labor flexibility practices that transfer risk onto hourly workers. *Human Relations*, 61(9), 1203–1227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094910>

Lambert, S. J., Fugiel, P. J., Henly, J. R. (2014). *Schedule unpredictability among early career workers in the US labor market: A national snapshot*. Employment Instability, Family Well-being, and Social Policy Network, University of Chicago. https://www.ssa.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/lambert.fugiel.henly_executive_summary.b_0.pdf

Lenneis, V., & Pfister, G. (2017). Too tired for exercise? The work and leisure of female cleaners in Denmark. *Leisure Studies*, 36(4), 530–541.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2016.1216579>

Lewis, S. (2003). The integration of paid work and the rest of life. *Leisure Studies*, 22(4), 343–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360310001594131>

Liang, Y. W. (2018). Conceptualization and measurement of work–leisure facilitation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 49(2), 109–132.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2018.1489194>

Liechty, T., & Genoe, M. R. (2013). Older men's perceptions of leisure and aging. *Leisure Sciences*, 35(5), 438–454.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2013.831287>

Little, D. E. (2002). Women and adventure recreation: Reconstructing leisure constraints and adventure experiences to negotiate continuing participation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(2), 157–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2002.11949967>

Meier, E., Aziz, S., Wuensch, K., Dolbier, C. (2020). Work hard, play hard ... or maybe not: A look at the relationships between workaholism, work-leisure conflict, and work stress. *Journal of Leisure Research*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2020.1778589>

Moen, P., Lam, J., Ammons, S., & Kelly, E. L. (2013). Time work by overworked professionals: Strategies in response to the stress of higher status. *Work and Occupations*, 40(2), 79–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888413481482>

Padavic, I., Ely, R. J., & Reid, E. M. (2020). Explaining the persistence of gender inequality: The work–family narrative as a social defense against the 24/7 work culture. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 65(1), 61–111.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839219832310>

Perlow, L. A., & Kelly, E. L. (2014). Toward a model of work redesign for better work and better life. *Work and Occupations*, 41(1), 111–134.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888413516473>

Reid, E. (2015). Embracing, passing, revealing, and the ideal worker image: How people navigate expected and experienced professional identities. *Organization Science*, 26(4), 997–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2015.0975>

Son, J. S., & Chen, C. C. (2018). Does using a smartphone for work purposes “ruin” your leisure? Examining the role of smartphone use in work–leisure conflict and life satisfaction. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 49(3–5), 236–257.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2018.1534074>

Sonnentag, S., Venz, L., & Casper, A. (2017). Advances in recovery research: What have we learned? What should be done next? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000079>

Stodolska, M., & Yi-Kook, J. (2005). Ethnicity, immigration, and constraints. In E. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Constraints to leisure* (pp. 35–51). Venture Publishing Inc.

Wayne, J. H., Grzywacz, J. G., Carlson, D. S., & Kacmar, K. M. (2007). Work–family facilitation: A theoretical explanation and model of primary antecedents and consequences. *Human Resource Management Review*, 17(1), 63–76.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmmr.2007.01.002>

Williams, J. C., Blair-Loy, M., & Berdahl, J. L. (2013). Cultural schemas, social class, and the flexibility stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 209–234.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12012>

Wynn, A. T. (2018). Misery has company: The shared emotional consequences of everwork among women and men. *Sociological Forum*, 33(3), 712–734. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12440> Young, C., & Melin, J. (2019). Time is a good network. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 26, 23–27.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2018.03.009>

Young, S. J., Ross, C. M., & Barcelona, R. J. (2003). Perceived constraints by college students to participation in campus recreational sports programs. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 27(2), 47–62. <https://doi.org/10.1123/rsj.27.2.47>