

**Social expectations and absenteeism: Two studies on norms and legitimacy surrounding
absence from work**

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Social expectations and absenteeism: Two studies on norms and legitimacy surrounding
absence from work

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Absenteeism is a topic with a long and rich history of research in the field of organizational behavior. At the same time, to a greater degree than most other topics in the field, it is a concept that is familiar to the general public at large. The goal of this thesis is to add to the large body of absence research while capitalizing on the topic's presence in the public domain. Through two separate studies, the thesis focuses on social expectations and norms surrounding absence from work. Relying on elements of attribution and accountability theories, Study 1 uses an experimental approach to uncover norms surrounding attendance. Results indicate that reasons for absence and context in which absence is occurring influence judgments and reactions to absence from work. Study 2 presents a content analysis of how absence from work has been portrayed in the *New York Times* over the last 150 years. The goal of this second study is to uncover regular social representations of absence in the press and explore the source and manifestations of underlying assumptions regarding the behavior. Results indicate that the reporting is varied, but that themes relating to gender, social context, outcomes, reasons for absence, and outcomes of absence are consistently found in the press. The dual-methodological approach of the thesis demonstrates the multi-level, collective nature of absenteeism, illuminates links between absence and gender and context, and

treats absence from work as a behavior involving all workers, with important causes and effects.

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DEDICATION

To my wife Nancy, my children Melissa and Matthew, and my parents May and Gerard.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

Of the topics that figure prominently in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management, absenteeism has the distinction of having one of the oldest and richest research histories, while also being a behavior that practically all individuals have engaged in or observed. While there have been over twenty-five meta-analyses on absenteeism over the last 20 years (Johns, in press), every school-aged child is familiar with the concept. Overall, absenteeism is a pillar of organizational behavior and human resource management research and is also part of our everyday vocabulary and part of the public discourse. From the manager's perspective, absenteeism is a topic of special importance due to its perceived negative effects on efficiency and costs to organizations (Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995).

Despite the widespread awareness of the concept and managers' desires to reduce it, absenteeism is still a poorly understood topic in many ways. Although commonly presented and perceived as a workplace problem to be solved (Johns & Nicholson, 1982), researchers over the last twenty years have endeavored to expose the complexity and diversity of absence behavior. In fact, absenteeism should be viewed as more of an outcome than a behavior (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993), with an almost endless list of possible causes. Illness, transportation trouble, job frustrations, work-related stress, nonwork-related stress, the chance to engage in leisure activities, childcare duties, eldercare duties, other domestic responsibilities, and meetings during work hours are just a few of the reasons why someone might miss work. What we are faced with is a veritable "bouillabaisse" (Atkin & Goodman, 1984, p.61) of behaviors and circumstances

that have all been captured under the heading of a single concept called absenteeism. Furthermore, there has been an increasing acknowledgment that absenteeism is not only an individual behavior, but a social phenomenon that changes meaning depending on the content and context of its occurrence (Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000; Nicholson, 1993). Finally, in spite of the supposed negative consequences of absenteeism in terms of costs and disruption, there has been surprisingly little research positioning absenteeism as an independent variable (Goodman & Atkin, 1984; Johns 1997)

The goal of this thesis is to add to our understanding of absenteeism by examining questions not commonly considered in traditional absence research. Specifically, this thesis explores the meaning of absenteeism by emphasizing the social and normative forces that shape perceptions of absence behavior, influence the behavior itself, and inform management absence control policies. The thesis will also focus on issues of context and other factors beyond the individual and/or organizations that are important in understanding absence from work. Finally, this thesis aims to take a critical look at some widely held underlying assumptions concerning absence that surround the behavior, including those involving the consequences of absenteeism. To accomplish these goals, two very different methodologies will be employed in two separate studies. The first study (henceforth referred to as Study 1) will employ an experimental design using true-to-life vignettes in order to identify widely held absence norms. The vignettes will focus on single instances of absence with manipulations performed on reason for absence, the gender of the absentee, and the context in which the absence is occurring. Study 1 will also treat absence as an independent variable by assessing emotional and behavioral

reactions to absenteeism, and emphasize white-collar absence. Both of these perspectives are rare in absence research (Johns, 1997; Johns & Nicholson, 1982).

The second study (Study 2) will consist of a content analysis of newspaper articles featuring absenteeism that have appeared in the *New York Times* over the last 150 years. As previously underlined, absenteeism is an issue that is part of the wider public consciousness. This fact is underscored by the extensive coverage that absenteeism has generated in the popular press over the years. As a simple example, a search of the *New York Times* historical database dating back to 1851 on the term *absenteeism* results in over 4,000 articles. An identical search on perhaps organizational behavior's most studied construct, *job satisfaction*, results in only 301 articles. While not every mention of absenteeism in the *New York Times* relates to absence from work, the sheer number of articles listed is an indication of the concept's important place within the public domain. The fact that absenteeism has figured prominently in news reports offers a unique opportunity for absence researchers. A systematic review of the media's treatment of absenteeism at different times, in different contexts, and across gender lines should provide important insight into how absence is perceived in the public domain and offer clues to how absence policies are developed in organizations. Overall, Study 1 will attempt to demonstrate how social norms shape perceptions of absence and influence emotional and behavioral reactions to absenteeism, while Study 2 will attempt to illuminate sources and manifestations of these social norms. From a theoretical perspective, both studies will rely on elements of attribution theory. Study 1 will rely strongly on judgments of responsibility and accountability to assess how others view the

absenteeism of a coworker, while the accounts of absenteeism in the press will expose the cause-and-effect links about absence that commonly appear in the public domain.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to expand our understanding of absenteeism as a complex phenomenon. Given the perceived negative consequences of absenteeism for organizations, managers have traditionally been preoccupied with questions of prediction and control regarding this behavior. The general framing of absenteeism as an organizational problem to be solved by managers (Johns & Nicholson, 1982) and the common links between absenteeism and disciplinary action (Edwards & Whitston, 1993; Simpson & Martocchio, 1997) underscore this point. While understandable, this emphasis on prediction and control is problematic. From a theoretical perspective, it is unreasonable to expect research in organizational behavior to have strong predictive power when focal concepts are not well understood (Brief & Dukerich, 1991). Managers often have difficulty determining what interventions aimed at curbing absence are appropriate, resulting in disappointing results or unintended consequences (Johns, in press). Managers tend to "get what they ask for" (Johns, in press) in terms of their absence policies. If policy makers take a limited view of the behavior and if policies are fueled by simplistic portrayals of the behavior in the public domain, policy ineffectiveness would not be surprising. Only through studies seeking to explain and understand absence can valid models of absence prediction and control eventually be developed.

The organization of the thesis will be as follows. Chapter 2 will focus on the theoretical orientation for the thesis and explain the common theoretical threads that link both studies. Social expectations concerning absence, levels of analysis, and attribution

theory will be featured. Chapter 2 will also discuss the dual-methodological approach in this thesis. Chapter 3 will explain what substantive issues relating to absenteeism both studies will address. Specifically, reason for absence, gender, context, and treating absenteeism as an independent variable will be discussed. Chapter 4 will consist of Study 1, while Chapter 5 will present Study 2. Finally, Chapter 6 will provide a general discussion of the findings of both studies, discuss their common points and differences, and offer final conclusions and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

2. UNDERSTANDING ABSENCE: GENERAL THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY

Famous philosophical riddle: *"If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"*

Similar question rewritten for absence: *"If a person is absent from work and no one notices or cares, was the person really absent?"*

The fundamental question at the heart of this thesis is: When does absenteeism matter? Determining when absenteeism "matters" can be gauged by how others react to it, as focused on in Study 1, or by observing when and how it appears in the press, as per Study 2. Answering this fundamental question involves considering elements such as why absence occurred, when or in what context it occurred, and the identity of the absentee. Unfortunately, traditional absence research has not usually considered such ideas. While Chapter 3 will outline substantive issues, the current chapter will explain the overall theoretical foundation of this thesis and explain the appropriateness of the dual-methodology approach.

2.1 Social expectations surrounding absence from work

Absenteeism can be defined as "an individual's lack of physical presence at a given location and time when there is a social expectation for him or her to be there" (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993, p.263). In breaking down this definition, two separate elements can be identified: 1) a lack of presence, and 2) a social expectation to attend. Historically, most studies on absenteeism focus on the first element. According to Johns

(2003), the most common research practice for studying absenteeism has traditionally consisted of measuring attitudes or other concepts and linking them to individual absence records that have been aggregated over time. Such designs position absence as a dependent variable and attempt to explain variance through relationships with a number of different variables. Focusing on the lack of presence aspect of absenteeism is tempting given the ease with which it can be observed and the availability of organizational records (Nicholson, 1977). Unfortunately, the findings from the variance research designs employing organizational records have often been weak (Johns, in press; Martocchio & Harrison, 1993). The low base rate of absence behavior, the often low reliability of absence data, and the large number of contingencies surrounding absenteeism make it difficult for correlational records-based studies to uncover significant relationships (Atkin & Goodman, 1984; Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995). Even in areas which have produced consistent findings, most notably the fact that women are generally more absent than men (Côté & Haccoun, 1991), traditional correlational studies have not done a strong job of explaining why. Research emphasizing the lack of presence aspect often invoke a number of simplifying assumptions, as elaborated on by Johns and Nicholson (1982), including the conceptualization of absenteeism as an individual level phenomenon that is related to workplace problems. Furthermore, the within-person aggregation of absenteeism data that is typical in the more traditional stream of research inevitably treats all absence behavior as being equivalent and suppresses the reasons and circumstances surrounding individual absence episodes (Atkin & Goodman, 1984).

Increasingly, absence researchers (Atkin & Goodman, 1984; Fichman, 1984; Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 1997; Johns

& Nicholson, 1982; Nicholson, 1977) have acknowledged that the second part of Martocchio and Harrison's (1993) definition, the social expectation aspect, is crucial to studying and understanding absenteeism. Such an approach, however, requires focusing on a different set of elements such as context, norms and attributions, and an emphasis on single instances of absence.

Appropriate theoretical lenses through which to view absence in this manner include Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum theory of absence, and Nicholson and Johns's (1985) absence culture theory. While Nicholson's continuum theory will be expanded upon in Study 1, the main point of the theory is that not all absenteeism is created equal, and that the propensity to be absent and the consequences of absence will be strongly influenced by contextual factors and normative pressures. Specifically, group norms and contextual factors will constrain the absence behavior of individuals by creating various levels of risk surrounding the decision of an individual to miss work (Nicholson & Martocchio; 1995). The normative emphasis on absenteeism has led to an important and productive stream of theorizing and research over the last 20 years. At the centre of this work has been Nicholson and Johns's (1985) concept of absence cultures. An absence culture represents "a set of shared understandings about absence legitimacy and the established customs and practice of employee absence and control" (Johns & Nicholson, 1982, p. 136). As underlined by Harrison, Johns, and Martocchio (2000), absence cultures involve awareness of the attendance behavior of others, self-awareness of one's own absenteeism, and some level of agreement about a proper level of absence. Through absence cultures, absenteeism ceases to be an exclusively individual behavior, but must

also be viewed as a collective behavior (Nicholson, 1993; Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995).

Empirically, this collective conceptualization of absence behavior has received support, primarily relating to workgroup norms and supervisor attitudes concerning absenteeism (Gellatly & Luchak, 1998; Markham & McKee, 1995; Xie & Johns, 2000). However, absence culture theory as developed by Nicholson and Johns (1985) does not limit the normative reach to proximal entities such as workgroups and immediate supervisors, but extends it to societal dimensions such as generalized beliefs about absenteeism and widely held assumptions concerning the nature of employment. An understanding of these widely held norms is important, as absence cultures will shape self-perceptions of absence, the response of managers and coworkers to absences by others, and the design of managerial controls systems that define legitimate absence (Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995). From a human resource perspective, Nicholson and Martocchio (1995) suggest that absence cultures create causal loops between perceptions of absenteeism and absence control systems. However, while disciplinary crackdowns on absenteeism often target days lost or the fuzzy category of voluntary absence, research has demonstrated that employees have the ability to manage their absenteeism and shift their absences to forms which are legitimized by prevailing norms (Miners, Moore, Champoux, & Martocchio, 1994; Nicholson, 1976). Furthermore, at the workgroup level, Xie and Johns (2000) found that strong absence cultures can actually encourage absenteeism in cohesive groups due to normative agreement. Overall, understanding and potentially influencing normative cues may be one of the few ways that absenteeism can be understood, predicted, and controlled (Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995).

In a discussion on the future of absence behavior, Harrison, Johns, and Martocchio (2000) note that the information technology age and distributed work arrangements are loosening workgroup and organizational norms concerning absence. Given these weaker normative pressures within the organization, these authors speculate as to whether or not absence behavior will be influenced primarily by individual factors in the future. An alternative to the greater influence of individual factors is a shift in normative pressure away from proximal groups and organizations and toward widely held social norms.

In Study 1, the emphasis on generalized absence behavior as perceived by a large sample of managers and professionals from various organizations, with particular attention paid to issues of context and group identity, is a window into widely held beliefs about absenteeism.

In Study 2, as social norms and values can be discerned from the popular press (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Hall, Crichter, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978), the treatment of absenteeism in newspapers should provide insight into social expectations relating to the behavior across various contexts.

Overall, the scope of this program of research, through both studies, is to illuminate social expectations concerning absence behavior that extend beyond the boundaries of the organization and involve the circumstances surrounding absenteeism. Answering the question “When does absence matter?” ultimately involves understanding norms in operation and contextual factors.

2.2 Level of analysis issues

The preceding discussion of social norms, contextual factors, and the conceptualization of absenteeism as both an individual and a collective phenomenon emphasizes the multi-level reality of absence behavior. The dual methodology approach in this thesis can also be viewed as an acknowledgment of the multi-level nature of absenteeism. For the purpose of this thesis, Doise (1986) provides a model concerning levels of analysis that seems particularly appropriate, and one that has been identified as relevant to organizational issues (Silvester & Chapman, 1997). Doise (1986) suggests that four levels of analysis exist within social science research, and that a consideration of each is required in order to comprehend social phenomena. The model is presented in Figure 2.1.

The first level is the *intrapersonal level*, which focuses on how individuals organize their perceptions and how they evaluate their environment and their behavior. At this level, the focus is not on the interaction between the individual and the environment, but simply on how individuals organize experience. The second level of analysis in Doise's (1986) work is the *interpersonal level*, where the focus shifts to how individuals behave, perceive, and make judgments in given situations and when interacting with other individuals or in small groups. The third level of analysis is the *intergroup level*, where the focus is on group memberships and social position. This level emphasizes social categorizations and social identities, and highlights intergroup differences and tensions. As will be explained, gender will be conceptualized as an intergroup concept in the context of the current research. Finally, the fourth level in Doise's (1986) conceptualization is the *ideological level*. Doise (1986) notes that every

society develops its own system of beliefs, representations, values, and norms that serve to maintain order and legitimate behaviors and viewpoints. This thesis will explore the existence of beliefs and norms concerning absenteeism at the societal level. As previously noted, absence cultures can operate beyond the traditional research focus of workgroups and exist for wider collectives (Johns, in press).

Doise (1986) suggests that each level tells a part of the story and that, rather than focusing on the division between levels, we need to understand how all four influence a topic. The arrows in Figure 2.1 indicate that the influence of levels of analysis on values, beliefs, and behavior can travel in both directions from one level to the others. For example, societal values and institutions residing at the ideological level can influence how individuals organize and conceptualize very individual experiences. Intergroup relations within a society along gender, racial, or social class lines can influence societal norms and values at the ideological level. Intrapersonal level phenomena can clearly influence interpersonal relations, and vice versa. These, in turn, can also have an impact on/be influenced by intergroup relations within society, and so on.

Overall, understanding common attitudes or behaviors requires a consideration of each of the levels in Doise's (1986) model. In terms of absenteeism, the research to date has focused almost exclusively on the two lowest levels of Doise's model. While this thesis will also speak to the intrapersonal and interpersonal realities of absenteeism, its most important contribution is the focus on the rarely considered intergroup and ideological levels. Each study will treat the various levels in the following ways:

In Study 1, the intrapersonal level of Doise's model will be acknowledged by assessing individuals' personal attitudes toward absenteeism in general, and their

judgments and reactions to absenteeism. Study 1 will also have a strong interpersonal component as the vignettes will ask individuals to evaluate the absenteeism of a coworker. As such, absenteeism is positioned as something that involves the judgments and reactions of others, and not just the absentee; in this way, the relationship between coworkers/team members will be at the fore. In terms of the intergroup and ideological levels, Study 1 suggests that intrapersonal perceptions and interpersonal judgments do not occur in a social vacuum but are informed by intergroup categories and societal-level norms. Specifically from an intergroup perspective, gender will be presented as a group identity that is apt to encourage stereotypical thinking concerning absenteeism. Another group identity that will be focused on in Study 1 are white-collar workers. While not addressing differences between white-collar and blue-collar workers, Study 1 will focus on managers and professional employees who have, to date, been underrepresented in absence research. Historically, absence has been conceptualized as a blue-collar worker problem, and white-collar absence has been missing from theoretical and empirical work (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). As Johns and Nicholson (1982) note, however, this may be due more to the greater availability of absence records for blue-collar workers as compared to managers. Overall, white-collar absence is an area that has been excluded from research for reasons that have nothing to do with theory and, as such, deserves to be studied. The vignettes in Study 1 will focus exclusively on white-collar absence in an attempt to address this lacuna. Finally, in terms of the ideological/societal level, Study 1 is ultimately seeking to assess commonly held views on absenteeism and determining widely held social expectations surrounding absence from work, as opposed to focusing on individual differences. As will be explained, the methodology in Study 1 focuses on

how reactions to absence crystallize around specific circumstances and is aimed at uncovering evidence of an ideological-level absence culture.

In Study 2, the focus is primarily on the intergroup and ideological levels of Doise's (1986) model. From an intergroup perspective, Study 2 will also focus on the differences between how absence by men and women are treated in the press. Furthermore, other social categories, such as various demographic groups and differences in the reporting on different occupational groups, will also be emphasized in Study 2. In terms of the ideological level, given the public nature and widespread awareness of absenteeism, Study 2 will provide insight into how absenteeism is viewed in North American society through coverage in the press. Given the large number of news articles featuring absence from work that have appeared over the years, the press should provide insight into the knowledge, beliefs, values, and social norms surrounding absenteeism at the societal level. Furthermore, given the international scope of the *New York Times*, Study 2 will also explore how absenteeism is represented across nations and cultures to assess the existence of different norms and societal influences on absence from work. Finally, Study 2 will also focus on contextual factors operating in society and how these can influence the occurrence of and the reporting on absenteeism.

Overall, by focusing on social expectations surrounding absence, this thesis requires considering absenteeism through different lenses involving different levels of analysis as per Doise (1986). The result will be a clearer and more complete understanding of the behavior. In addition to levels of analysis issues, the emphasis on absence norms and expectations can also be linked to other theoretical areas that will be central to this thesis: attributions.

2.3 Attributions and absence

Attribution theory has been identified as an important lens through which to study absenteeism (Johns & Nicholson, 1982; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998, Judge & Martocchio, 1996; Nicholson & Payne, 1987). Attribution theory is the study of perceived causation relating to our own behaviors or the behavior of others (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Early attribution researchers (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1972) suggested that individuals naturally seek to understand the *why* of events, states and outcomes out of a desire to gain a sense of control over their environment. The metaphor associated with attribution theory during the initial wave of research was that of individuals as applied scientists (Kelley, 1972) or lay psychologists who attempt to link cause and effect in a systematic way, but who often err due to time pressure, poor information, insufficient samples, and so on. A key tenet of traditional attribution theory is that not every event or outcome initiates an attributional search. Unexpected events are especially likely to trigger a search for explanations (Anderson, 1991). Given the fact that absenteeism is viewed as a discrete, unexpected event that is difficult to predict (Avery & Hotz, 1984), absence from work appears to be a prime candidate for the initiation of attribution processes.

Two distinct processes have been identified within attribution theory: The attribution process, which concerns the antecedents of attributions, and the attributional process, which focuses on the consequences of attributions (Kelley & Michela, 1980). From an absenteeism standpoint, both are relevant. According to Kelley and Michela (1980), antecedents to attributions include norms and beliefs that shape expectations about an actor and about appropriate behavior in a given situation. In this vein,

Anderson, Krull, and Weiner (1996) underline that individuals will use knowledge structures, including stereotypes, to provide quick explanations for behavior. As such, beliefs and widely held norms are important within both attribution and absenteeism theory. In terms of attributional processes, or the consequences of attributions, assessments of causality have been found to lead to emotional reactions and behavioral intentions (Weiner, 1985).

Although not regularly treated as an independent variable, absenteeism has been identified as a trigger of disciplinary action, anger in others, perceptions of deviance, and other negative reactions (Conlon & Stone, 1992; Edwards & Whitson, 1993; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 1997). Not surprisingly, research has demonstrated that individuals tend to underreport their absenteeism (Johns, 1994; Johns & Xie, 1998; Markham & McKee, 1995) and engage in other self-serving behaviors such as obscuring the reason for their absence (Hackett & Bycio, 1996) in order to deflect the negative reactions of others. Self-serving behaviors have a long association with attribution theory (Martinko, Douglas, & Harvey, 2006). Returning to our two-part definition of absenteeism, i.e. lack of presence and social expectations, it seems reasonable to suggest that people are motivated to self-serve in relation to their absence and can do so in two ways: 1) underreporting their absence episodes or 2) stating that their absences were legitimate. While underreporting can happen on a survey, the second form of self-serving behavior is more likely to actually happen in the workplace, where managers are aware of real absence episodes and employees need to justify their actual behavior. In fact, Harrison and Martocchio (1998) identify individuals' motivated justifications/manipulation of attributions aimed at coworkers and managers as short-term

consequences of absenteeism geared toward attenuating sanction and conflict. In all, a picture emerges in which attributions can be employed for self-serving purposes relating to absenteeism. Although the foci of this thesis are the judgments of others and the social norms surrounding absenteeism, the influence of self-serving behaviors and self-attributions involve similar factors such as explanations, justifications, and the motivation to minimize punishment and sanction (Martinko et al., 2006).

In Study 1, the manipulations performed on vignettes will focus on the attribution process, and will attempt to determine how different factors lead to different attribution-type perceptions. As will be developed in the theory section of Study 1, a subset of attribution theory focusing on judgments of responsibility and the related field of accountability theory will serve as the specific theoretical lens through which the attribution process will be studied. In terms of the attributional process, Study 1 will also reference judgments of responsibility and accountability theory to explore the consequences of absenteeism. As noted, Study 1 will focus on the perceptions and reactions of others to an absence episode of a coworker. Such an approach represents an appropriate method for testing Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum focusing on single episodes of absence, and should provide insight into macro-level absence cultures that constrain absence behavior. As such, in Study 1, both cause and effect will be focused on; causes of absence and other circumstances will be manipulated, and the effect of an individual's absence will be measured. For observers, attributions based on norms and expectations will be the driving force behind emotions and intentions to help or punish.

In Study 2, although approaching the problem from a different direction, the review of absenteeism's treatment in the press can also be framed from an attribution

perspective. The newspaper stories on absence can be conceptualized as a series of causal chains related to the behavior. Unlike Study 1, in which the cause and effect links will be studied and measured through manipulations and questionnaires, the articles in the press represent an opportunity to study cause-and-effect links in an unobtrusive way. Critics of traditional attribution studies in psychology (Antaki, 1988) argue that experimental vignettes and questionnaire items provide little insight into actual explanations of behavior or norms as they are generated by the researcher and are infused with his or her own point of view. The accounts of absenteeism in the popular press and the news stories they are embedded in represent a natural source of judgments and attributions relating to absenteeism. As will be developed in Study 2, newspapers, through their representations of social phenomena, are important sources for individual knowledge structures and commonly held stereotypes, which, as noted by Anderson, Krull, and Weiner (1996), can influence our expectations about appropriate behavior in given situations and for specific actors. Overall, the causal loops between perceptions of absenteeism and absence control systems that Nicholson and Martocchio (1995) suggest are created by broad absence cultures should be discernable through the press.

The different treatment of attribution theory in Study 1 and Study 2 highlights both the novelty and strength of combining two different methodologies in a single program of research. To end this chapter, the challenges and appropriateness of using two different methodologies in this thesis will be explained.

2.4 Combining different methodologies in a single program of research

The focus on the social representation and perceptions of absenteeism in this thesis is an acknowledgement of the complexity and variety that surrounds absence

behavior, and that understanding this behavior requires considering elements at multiple levels of analysis. As management researchers, it is important to embrace the complexity of our concepts and study the different aspects of a phenomenon. As noted by Johns (2001a, 2003), absence researchers over the last 15 years have done a good job of seeking out new and more complex research questions involving absence. This thesis aims to add to this trend. At the same time, acknowledging complexity does not negate the possibility of empirical research nor does it require overly complex research designs. The research designs employed in this thesis, although attempting to highlight complexity, are not exotic.

Experimental research and content analysis both have distinguished traditions in organizational behavior research. Still, as noted by Johns (2003) and Martocchio and Harrison (1993), these methods are rare within absence research. In their methodological review, Martocchio and Harrison (1993) note that vignettes or judgment tasks have been used in only 1% of absenteeism studies. Consistent with the framing of absenteeism as a disciplinary problem, the studies employing this methodology (e.g., Martocchio & Judge, 1995; Simpson & Martocchio, 1997) have often dealt with arbitration issues. As for studies focusing on written or media accounts of absenteeism, these are rarer still. Taylor and Burrige's (1982) study featuring doctors' notes from the British Postal Office (1891 to 1981), and Tansey and Hyman's (1992) study on World War Two anti-absence advertising campaigns are among the very few examples. Using these two methods is a pathway to gaining a deeper understanding of absenteeism. Apart from their novelty, Johns (2003) also notes that it is very rare that the same research program employs

multiple methods. As such, this thesis is taking a new and novel approach to absence research.

Beyond the novelty of the approach, however, these two methodologies are interesting to combine as they are from different scientific schools of thought. While both exist within the field of social psychology, as do many of the theories employed in the thesis, experimental methods and content analysis are not commonly combined in a single program of research. The common link between the approaches, however, is that language is a central feature of both, albeit in different ways. Experimental social psychology relies on language as a tool for conducting research: Vignettes, questionnaires, and experimenter instructions all involve the use of language (Edwards & Potter, 1993). While language is a tool for the experimental researcher, content analysts view language as an active, non-neutral entity which not only communicates but also provides insight into thoughts, relationships, values, and ideology (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In essence, content analysts view language as an object of study while the experimental researcher views language as a tool for conducting controlled experiments or surveys. While some proponents of textual approaches to social science (Antaki, 1988) emphasize the shortcomings of traditional experimental and survey methods, other researchers (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) suggest that text analysis and experimental research both offer insight into human behavior, and can be used to complement each other and provide a more complete and in-depth treatment of a topic of interest. It is in this way that this thesis hopes to contribute to absenteeism research by demonstrating a level of convergence or exploring differences

between the perceptions of business professionals in Study 1 and descriptions in the popular press in Study 2.

Although the traditional records-based research on absence has had a rich history and has advanced our understanding of absenteeism in many ways, Nicholson (1993) has asserted that we cannot learn much more about absenteeism from cross-sectional records-based correlational designs, and that approaches that capitalize on triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data are needed in order to advance our understanding of absenteeism. Martocchio and Harrison (1993) have also called for absence researchers to forgo correlational designs and develop process models of absence behavior in which the authors "tell a little story" (Mohr, 1982, p. 44). The vignettes in Study 1 and newspaper articles in Study 2 are indeed telling little stories about absence, and capitalizing on both quantitative and qualitative data. Through these two different studies, I hope that the stories that emerge will enhance our understanding of absence from work.

While the methodologies are very different, the greater part of this chapter has been devoted to explaining how the studies share some similar theoretical foundations. Additionally, both studies share some substantive points of interest. Before presenting the two studies in their own chapters, the next chapter will highlight the common topics of interest that appear in both studies.

CHAPTER THREE

3. UNDERSTANDING ABSENCE: BURNING QUESTIONS, UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS, AND UNEXPLORED TERRITORY

As noted in the previous chapters, research on absenteeism has a long and distinguished history in organizational science. As with many areas of scientific research, however, progress in the field has often been incremental and built upon previous studies. While this is normal and useful, this reality invariably restricts the focus of studies to a narrower and narrower perspective, and questions or viewpoints that were not part of the earliest studies tend to become an afterthought. In many ways, the seminal article by Johns and Nicholson in 1982 that appeared in *Research in Organizational Behavior* entitled "The meanings of absence: New strategies for theory and research" and Goodman and Atkin's 1984 collection of articles in their book *Absenteeism* emphasized the restrictive focus of absence research that had crystallized around certain underlying assumptions (e.g., all absence is bad, most absence is caused by negative job attitudes, absenteeism is a blue-collar worker problem, managers can solve absence problems, and so on). These works, along with reviews by Martocchio and Harrison (1993) and commentaries such as the one by Nicholson (1993) lament the restrictive focus and methodologies found in traditional absence research, and call for new questions, a critical look at key underlying assumptions, and the use of different methodologies. As previously underlined, the last 15 years have seen absence researchers heed this call (Johns, 2001a), particularly in light of the collective reality of absenteeism. Furthermore, the many meta-analyses (Johns, in press) have also underscored the need to look at new questions.

This thesis aims to add to the growing body of research on absenteeism that looks to go beyond the simple “lack of presence” aspect of absence and records-based studies. For this study, the goal is to put absence under the microscope while altering the levels of magnification: From a fine-grained look at individual absence episodes to the broadest view possible of the influences on and the consequences of absenteeism. Specifically, the two studies in this thesis will focus on four topics concerning absenteeism that have rarely been considered in traditional absence research. From a substantive perspective, the exploration of these topic areas represent the major contribution of this thesis to research on absenteeism. The four substantive areas are: 1) A focus on the various reasons why an employee misses work, 2) the issue of gender and absence, 3) the topic of context and absenteeism, and 4) the conceptualization of absenteeism as an independent variable.

3.1 Reasons for absence: Absenteeism as a varied concept

Several researchers (Atkin & Goodman, 1984; Johns, 1997; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998) have endeavored to highlight the variety that exists in the causes of absenteeism. As previously underlined, Atkin and Goodman (1984) describe absenteeism as a mix of behaviors and circumstances that only happen to share a common characteristic that the person is not present. They suggest that absenteeism can be classified into types and that different types can have different underlying causes. Johns (1997) expanded on this notion of different types by identifying different conceptual models of absence that exist in the academic literature. Several of these models deserve mention in the context of the studies in this thesis. First, withdrawal models focus on negative organizational factors and associated job attitudes that motivate individuals to

stay away. This is surely the most historically popular conceptualization of absenteeism in business research, and there have been several meta-analyses focusing on absence and job attitudes over the last 20 years (Johns, in press). Second, deviance models suggest that individuals are absent due to some undesirable personality trait or deficiency in their personal value system. Third, medical models suggest that individuals are mainly absent due to illness or factors such as obesity, depression, pain, and smoking. Fourth, conflict models focus on labor relations and view absence as a currency in labor negotiations that can be used as a tactic or represent a cause of disagreement between workers and managers. Fifth, stress models suggest that stress is related to absence. However, the direction of the relationship between absence and stress is somewhat unclear as being away can positively relieve tension or negatively cause disruption and more anxiety. Sixth, demographic models point to age, tenure, and gender as causes of absenteeism. Although research in this area has yielded some consistent findings, there is little theory to explain results. In addition to the models described, Johns (1997) also points out that the mechanisms for explaining absence can also vary. Process models tend to focus on multivariate tests of many variables, but often with little explanatory insight. Decision and economic models suggest that absenteeism is the result of a rational decision process that is volitional and motivated, and often based on an internal subjective utility function. Finally, social and cultural norms are identified as potential causes or inhibitors of absenteeism, with a strong emphasis on workgroup norms and a direct link to absence cultures. Harrison and Martocchio (1998) also focus on different causes of absence, but using time as an underlying framework. They identify acute mental or physical stress and utility maximization as short-term sources of absence. They suggest that job attitudes,

organizational policies, social influences, external economic conditions, and job characteristics represent mid-term sources of absence, while personality, values, demographics, and chronic health problems are identified as long-term sources of variance in absence.

Although they are rare, the studies that have attempted to code and consider multiple causes of, or reasons for, absence within the same study have not relied on aggregation of records or the gross categorizations often found in more traditional designs. Instead, such studies have asked about reasons directly, either in relation to individual absence episodes, past behaviors, or through the use of hypothetical scenarios. Examples of such studies include Edwards and Whitston (1993), Hackett, Bycio, and Guion (1989), Haccoun and Desgent (1993), Harvey and Nicholson (1999), Johns and Xie (1998), Judge and Martocchio (1996), Martocchio and Judge (1995), and Nicholson and Payne (1987). The Nicholson and Payne (1987), Haccoun and Desgent (1993), and Harvey and Nicholson (1999) studies asked respondents directly about the reasons they had been absent or reasons for which they would likely be absent. Although illness was near or at the top of the lists, a host of non-work related reasons were also commonly cited, such as personal meetings, domestic problems, childcare issues, transportation problems, and social events. Other reasons included feelings of fatigue, depression, and problems with coworkers. In all, the picture painted is one in which absence is primarily due to non work-related reasons. In the Hackett, Bycio, and Guion (1989) study, a diary approach was used to track the reasons for individual episodes of absence. This episodic approach indicated that absence was linked to fatigue and a general feeling of doldrums, poor standing in the workplace, and home responsibilities. Edwards and Whitston (1993)

found that instances of absence were very rare but reported that reasons frequently cited included family and domestic duties, work frustrations, and the chance to engage in leisure activities.

In all, these studies and the reviews by Harrison and Martocchio (1998) and Johns (1997) paint a picture of absence as a diverse concept. Table 3.1 presents a list of reasons for being absent identified in the studies and reviews. While the list is not exhaustive, it reflects the diversity that exists and represents a starting point for empirical study.

In Study 1, reason for absence will be one of the elements manipulated in the vignettes. The prediction is that reason for absence will influence judgments, emotional reactions, and behavioral intentions by coworkers following a colleague's absenteeism. The theoretical justifications for this and specific predictions will be explained in the next chapter.

In Study 2, the treatment of absenteeism in the press will be assessed based on reason for absence. Specifically, the prevalence of the academic absence models identified by Johns (1997) will be assessed, as will trends in reported reasons over time, and the change in causal links (i.e. causes of absence and consequences of absence) based on reason for absence.

One reason for absence that is expected to be an important consideration for understanding is absenteeism due to domestic duties. Traditionally, domestic responsibilities have involved differing roles along gender lines. In both Study 1 and Study 2, the goal will be to shed light on one of absence research's most consistent, yet least well explained finding: Elevated absence from work by women.

3.2 Gender and Absenteeism

From a “lack of presence” perspective, the fact that women are absent more than men is a common finding in absence research (Johns, 2003). Numerous individual studies have demonstrated the relationship (with rare exceptions such as Harvey & Nicholson, 1999), and the link has been verified meta-analytically (Côté & Haccoun, 1991). National labor statistics from the United States and Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006) consistently indicate that women are more absent than men. For example, data from Statistics Canada (2005) show that women averaged 9.9 days lost per year from 1997 to 2004 compared to 7.5 for men. Furthermore, large-sample European studies (Kivimäki, Vahtera, Thomson, Griffiths, Cox, & Pentti, 1997; Mastekaasa, 2000; Mastekaasa & Olson, 1998; Nauta, 2006; Vistnes, 1997) demonstrate that the phenomenon is cross-national. For instance, Norwegian women have more than twice as many absence spells as men (Mastekaasa & Olsen, 1998).

It might be reasoned that women are absent more than men due to their generally less interesting jobs and poorer working conditions. Although there is some evidence for this (e.g., Messing, Tissot, Saurel-Cubizolles, Kaminski, & Bourguine, 1998), most research suggests otherwise. For example, Johns (1978) found that women factory workers exhibited higher absence than men even controlling for differences in job design and job satisfaction. Similar results have been found for call center employees, controlling for job design (Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2002), and among civil servants, controlling for job grade (Feeney, North, Head, Canner, & Marmot, 1998). Furthermore, studies by Alexanderson, Leijon, Åkerlind, Rydh, and Bjurulf (1994), Mastekaasa and Olsen (1998), Scott and McClellan (1990), and Kivimäki, Sutinen, Elovainio, Vahtera,

Räsänen et al. (2001) have found that women's absence is higher than men's even when they perform apparently identical jobs.

Women's more fragile health has also been pointed to as a reason for their higher absenteeism. Although women have a lower mortality rate than men, their morbidity rate, defined as generalized poor health, is higher than that of men (Rodin & Ickovics, 1990). Women tend to suffer from more physical symptoms, insomnia, migraines, and depression, and they make more doctors' visits than men (Culbertson, 1997; Lipton, Steward, & Von Korff, 1994; Nelson & Burke, 2002; Rodin & Ickovics, 1990). In particular, depression and migraine have been associated with absenteeism and probably thus account for some of the variance in the attendance gap (Johns, 1997). However, studies that have modeled men's and women's absence separately have not particularly implicated health differences (Hendrix, Spenser, & Gibson, 1994; Leigh, 1983; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1995). Also, it is extremely difficult to isolate sickness absence from other absence, and many studies that ostensibly measure sickness absence find that it has motivational correlates (Johns, 1997). Finally, differences in morbidity rates between men and women are shrinking, and working women are actually healthier than women who do not work (Nelson & Burke, 2002; Rodin & Ickovics, 1990). While it is feasible that health dynamics account for some of the attendance gender gap, the data and theory on this point raise a certain amount of confusion and do not point to clear cut explanation for the differences between men and women's absenteeism.

A particularly widely held idea used to explain women's higher rate of absence is that they bear the brunt of family and child care responsibilities. The assumption is that the role conflict provoked by the double burden of child care and work will increase

stress and lead to increased absence (Bratberg, Dahl, & Risa, 2002; Mastekaasa, 2000; Nelson & Burke, 2002; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1995). While this argument has intuitive appeal, empirical findings do not consistently support the notion that greater family responsibilities lead to higher absenteeism for women. Data from Statistics Canada (2005) indicate that, while a gap existed in the past, there was virtually no difference in absenteeism between men and women for child care reasons in the most recent survey results. Scott and McClellan (1990), VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1995), and Erickson, Nichols, and Ritter (2000) did not find an interaction between number of children and gender in predicting absence. Furthermore, Bratberg et al. (2002), in a direct test of the double burden hypothesis, found that women with more children actually had less absence, replicating the findings of Zaccaro, Craig, and Quinn (1991). Mastekaasa (2000), Barnett and Hyde (2001), Rodin and Ickovics (1990), and Bratberg et al. (2002) suggest that multiple roles have positive outcomes for women. These outcomes could lead to reduced absenteeism. Barnett and Hyde (2001) review numerous studies demonstrating that women with multiple roles exhibit less stress, less depression, better health, and stronger relationships, and suggest that the combination of childcare and work offers several benefits to women, such as buffering stressors of one milieu from those of others, providing greater social support, and facilitating personal growth in different ways. In all, the empirical evidence that child care and family stress particularly provoke elevated absence in women is weak.

It must also be emphasized that many of the studies highlighted above that demonstrate women's higher absenteeism are often based on large national databases and measure illness absence and absence spells in very broad ways. Few studies have taken a

fine-grained approach to studying the issue or have taken a multi-level perspective. An exception is the study by Fried, Melamed and Ben-David (2002) who found that women had greater absenteeism due to noise than men across 21 organizations when they were working in complex jobs. Such direct consideration of women's absence in specific work environments is rare. Still, considering the body of existing research in general, we are confronted with studies that suggest that women are absent more than men but provide limited explanation as to why. There is, however, an additional reason that needs to be considered: Perhaps women are more absent because it is more socially acceptable for them to be (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). As such, the explanation for women's lower attendance may concern the second element of Martocchio and Harrison's (1993) definition of absenteeism, social expectations for attendance.

3.2.1 Gender as a Social Category Subject to Stereotypes

As previously noted, absence culture theory as developed by Nicholson and Johns (1985) does not limit the normative reach to proximal entities such as workgroups, and the theory has been extended to other social groups. Absence cultures can thus exist for collectives such as members of an occupation, citizens of a country, or along gender lines. In order for women's absenteeism to be studied at the "cultural" level, gender must be conceptualized as a social category rather than as an individual characteristic. Gender researchers are increasingly focusing on gender as a category to explain differences in how men and women are perceived and treated. While many studies in organizational behavior treat gender as an individual difference rather than a group identity, gender researchers such as Deaux (1984) and Nelson and Burke (2002) assert that gender should be considered primarily as a social category. Deaux (1984) places a strong emphasis on

categorization and notes that gender is subject to normative beliefs and leads to expectations beyond any individual-level trait of the person. To the extent that gender is treated as a group category as opposed to an individual trait, expectations for behavior, including absenteeism, are likely to be influenced by widely held gender stereotypes. As such, the treatment of gender in this thesis is consistent with the intergroup level of Doise's (1986) levels of analysis model.

Apart from the obvious physical differences, the concept of gender can be considered a socially constructed state (Nelson & Burke, 2002) and a reflection of the very different work and nonwork contexts faced by men and women (Johns, 2006; Messing et al., 1998). Several authors (Durkin, 1987; Nelson & Burke, 2002; Sheridan, 2004) explain how gender roles are created through socialization from a very early age and are regularly reinforced within popular culture. As asserted by Deaux and Lafrance (1998), gender stereotypes cover a wide range of beliefs concerning physical characteristics, personality traits, role-related behaviors, occupational preferences, specific competencies, and emotional dispositions. The general stereotypes are that men are technically competent, competitive, aggressive, rational, and more committed to their careers, while women are emotional, nurturing, passive, relationship oriented, less committed to work, and less motivated for success (Durkin, 1987; Nelson & Burke, 2002). Stereotypes are very resistant to change and often operate on an unconscious level (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Deaux & Major, 1987). Halpern (2005) recently commented that, although women have become much more present in the workplace over the last twenty-five years, most of the same stereotypes surrounding women in terms of child care duties, emotions, and so on have not evolved. Jost and Banaji (1994) suggest that

this phenomenon can be conceived as system-justification, which refers to “the psychological process whereby an individual perceives, understands, and explains an existing situation or arrangement with the result that the situation or arrangement is maintained” (p.10). Since women have traditional roles and are subject to longstanding stereotypes, expectations and explanations will tend to reinforce these views. Barnett and Hyde (2001) note that this traditional view of women has guided most theory and research on gender issues, which tends to emphasize sex segregation, gender asymmetry, and traditional family roles. The power of stereotypes and system-justification is underscored by the growing body of research demonstrating that many differences between genders are actually quite small (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Durkin, 1987; Hyde, 2005; Maccoby & Jacklin;1974). The important point is that, regardless of whether the differences are real or not, the stereotypes and expectations are real and this is what will ultimately shape social reality and attributions surrounding gender issues (Deaux, 1984; Deaux & LaFrance, 1998).

What are the implications of commonly held gender stereotypes on expectations surrounding absenteeism by women? The general stereotypes and beliefs about women such as their lower commitment to work, their double-burden of work/child care, their higher level of stress, and their more fragile health can result in an absence culture whereby women have a greater degree of freedom surrounding absence and that absence may be more expected for women as compared to men. This is consistent with Jost and Banaji’s (1994) notion of system justification and Deaux’s (1984) suggestion that gender stereotypes drive expectations of behavior. Based on the current “system,” women will be held to different rules in terms of illness, child care duties, and stress. In fact, Harrison,

Johns, and Martocchio (2000) have suggested that absence culture norms surrounding child responsibilities may apply only for women and not for men.

Overall, potential norms and expectations surrounding women's absenteeism provide a plausible explanation for the general finding that women are absent more than men. The stereotypes in operation may be driving the differences. Expectations can strongly influence behavior, and gender stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies (Geis, 1992). The existence of an absence culture for women can reconcile the fact that individual studies focusing on gender and absence have not found consistent support for predictions concerning women and sickness absence, or women's absence and child care duties, and so on. *Actual health problems* or family situations in relation to *actual absence by women* may not be the proper level of analysis to study this issue. Beliefs and stereotypes concerning women as a social category may be more important. As such, regardless of individual situations, absenteeism by women may be higher than that of men in the aggregate due to differing social expectations concerning attendance. Overall, generally held stereotypes about women may create an absence culture in which absenteeism by women is more expected, and lead to actual higher absenteeism.

In Study 1, gender of the absentee will be one of the elements manipulated in the vignettes. The hypotheses will suggest that women should be held less responsible than men for their absence, especially for absence related to childcare. The data will also assess if men and women differ in terms of their overall attitude toward absenteeism.

In Study 2, the differences in the reporting on men's vs. women's absence will be a primary focus. How women's absence is reported, trends over time, reasons and consequences of women's absence will all be carefully considered.

For both studies, the goals are to shed light on the consistent findings that women are more absent from work than men, and to find evidence of a unique absence culture for women.

3.3 Contextual factors and absenteeism

Context, both within and outside an organization, is an issue that organizational scientists have acknowledged as being important when studying organizational phenomena (Cappelli & Sherer, 1991; Johns, 1991; Johns, 2001b; Johns, 2006; Mowday & Sutton, 1993). From the perspective of Doise's (1986) levels of analysis model, the societal level is most directly linked to contextual factors such as socio-economic conditions, national culture, major institutions in society, and so on. However, context can also operate at the intergroup level as it can set the stage for intergroup relations, and context can also be present in interpersonal relations as conditions and situational constraints can alter contacts between individuals.

Johns (2006) defines context as "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (p.4). These situational factors often involve variables at a higher level of analysis (Cappelli & Sherer, 1991; Mowday & Sutton, 1993) consistent with the Doise model. Cappelli and Sherer (1991) focus on the environment external to the firm and note that socio-economic factors must be accounted for when studying organizational behavior. Efforts in absence research have, in fact, been made in this direction. Using unemployment rates from 1976 to 1983 from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and absence data from 350 companies, Markham (1985) found a significant negative relationship between absenteeism and unemployment at the national level, and

concluded that absenteeism is generally found to be lower in tough economic times. Alternatively, Kivimaki et al. (1997) found that tough economic times in Finland led to increased absenteeism caused by stress. The case studies by Edwards and Whitston (1993) also emphasize how competitive pressures from outside the firms can drive crackdowns on absenteeism, even if the organizational data shows that absenteeism is not really a growing problem. Furthermore, Edwards and Whitston (1993) underline that in times of war or social upheaval, a “moral panic” (p. 6) surrounding absenteeism emerges. An excellent example of this is provided by Tansey and Hyman (1992) who demonstrated the prevalent use of anti-absenteeism advertising during World War II that relied heavily on fear appeals. Major societal events can also be the cause of absence from work, as demonstrated by Kushnir, Fried and Malkinson (2003) in their study on absenteeism in Israel following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and Byron and Peterson’s (2002) study featuring absence trends following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Context within the organization is important to consider as well. As noted by Johns (2001b), internal context can influence behaviors and perceptions in an organization to the point where identical behaviors can elicit very different reactions in different contexts. It seems reasonable to suggest that, under certain circumstances in an organization, absenteeism is likely to be frowned upon more than at other times. For example, during a particularly busy period or when others depend on an individual in order to complete their own work, absenteeism should be viewed much more negatively than during calm times of the year. Again, the social expectation element of absenteeism becomes much more important than a simple lack of presence. Unfortunately, when

traditional absenteeism researchers aggregate absence episodes over time, they not only obscure the reason for absence, but also obscure the contextual factors at play during each absence episode.

In Study 1, internal context will be manipulated by altering the circumstances surrounding a coworker's absenteeism. The hypotheses will predict that reactions of coworkers to a colleague's absence will differ based on what is occurring at work during that time. Again, Study 1 will take a fine-grained approach to absenteeism that is not always available through studies employing organizational records concerning absence.

In Study 2, the content analysis of newspaper articles concerning absence from work spanning 150 years will provide a unique opportunity to study context and absence. Specifically, the content analysis will allow for the reporting on absence to be assessed over time, across different eras, in times of peace and in times of war, and during different macro-economic time frames. The content analysis will allow practices and norms surrounding absence to be compared across nations. Furthermore, events in society causing absence from work will also be noted. Finally, consistent with the notion that the causal arrow can point in both directions, the content analysis will attempt to identify situations in which absence from work has shaped social context through important consequences at the community, national, or even international levels.

The suggestion that absence from work can have important consequences on stakeholders at different levels of analysis leads into another important contribution of this thesis to absence research: The treatment of absence as an independent variable.

3.4 Absence as an independent variable

Several absence researchers, including Goodman and Atkin (1984), Johns (1997), and Johns and Nicholson (1982), have emphasized that absenteeism is generally treated as a dependent variable in academic research. At the same time, the reason that absenteeism appears to be important to managers is in its position of independent variable leading to negative organizational outcomes. While the negative impact of absenteeism is a key assumption underlying most academic research, it is one that has been largely untested in terms of productivity, accidents, grievances, and attitudes (Goodman & Atkin, 1984). Harrison and Martocchio (1998) assert that the links between absence and poor performance are well established, but studies on this often create more questions than answers. For example, while the Bycio (1992) meta-analysis links absence to poor performance, the relationship seems more in line with poor performance leading to absence than the opposite. A study by Tharenou (1993a), however, indicated that absence led to poorer performance. Still, many studies that focus on the absence-performance link use performance appraisals to measure performance as opposed to organizational indicators. In all, Goodman and Atkin (1984) note that the absence-consequence relationship is very complicated and that absence could be potentially beneficial in certain ways, including as a means of relieving stress for individuals, and providing the organization with a more flexible and knowledgeable workforce due to workers covering for each other. The advent as concepts such as presenteeism (i.e. showing up for work when sick and/or related productivity decrements [Johns, 2007]) are also putting into question the underlying assumption that absence has negative consequences as numerous studies have indicated that presenteeism is actually costlier than absenteeism (Johns,

2007). Overall, there is a vital need for absence researchers to conduct more studies positioning absenteeism as an independent variable.

From a practical standpoint, the purported negative outcomes of absenteeism have led to concrete actions such as absence control policies, disciplinary action, monitoring systems, and management interventions. As noted by Johns (in press), such practices have often proved to be ineffective when poorly planned or implemented and have led to unintended consequences for organizations. It is incumbent on absence researchers to seriously consider the true effects of absenteeism in order to propose effective absence control policies to managers. If the perceived negative outcomes on organizations is a faulty underlying assumption, this needs to be exposed. The source of such a widely held assumption must also be explored. Finally, the consequences of absence are most often conceptualized at the organizational level (i.e. absence is purported to have negative consequences for organizations in terms of costs, disruptions, efficiency, and so on). Consequences at different levels of analysis, such as consequences for individuals or society also deserve attention. Overall, these are some of the issues that this thesis hopes to address through both studies.

In Study 1, an absence event will be positioned as an independent variable leading to judgments, emotional reactions, and behavioral intentions by coworkers. Harrison and Martocchio (1998) suggest that negative affect and intentions to punish on the part of coworkers and supervisors represent short-term outcomes for absence; however there is little research on this point. Study 1 will predict that outcomes for absentees in terms of how others react will be strongly dependent on the circumstances surrounding the event. Again, the fundamental question is “when does absence matter?”

Understanding this can help in creating more effective absence control policies.

Furthermore, as previously noted, Harrison and Martocchio (1998) list an absentee's management of attributions and justifications as another short term outcome of absenteeism. The results of Study 1 will also shed light on how individuals can be motivated to manipulate attributions surrounding their absence and possibly deflect sanctions.

In Study 2, the focus will be on the reported consequences of absence in the press. Through the stories featuring absenteeism in the news, I will assess if the same imbalance exists in the press between the focus on causes and consequences of absenteeism that exists in academic research. In terms of the significance of consequences, Study 2 will look at how convincing claims surrounding consequences of absence appear to be, and explore the possibility that the press might be a source of the widely held underlying assumption that absence from work is harmful. Furthermore, while Study 1 will focus primarily on the consequences of absence for individuals, Study 2 will examine reported consequences across stakeholders. In addition to individual absenteeism and organizations, stakeholders might also include coworkers, clients, the community, a city, a nation, and beyond.

Overall, the two studies that comprise this thesis will advance absence research in both theoretical and substantive directions. The longitudinal/historical design of Study 2 and the focus on worker groups beyond blue-collar workers are additional strong point of the thesis. The following chapter will present Study 1 of the thesis: Accountability and judgments of responsibility following absence from work.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. STUDY ONE: ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUDGMENTS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOLLOWING ABSENCE FROM WORK

Consider the following scenario: You show up for work to your office one Tuesday morning, and find out that one of your employees will not be coming in because of the flu. No problem, you think, nothing big was planned for today and you plan to be out of the office most of the day anyway. Now consider this: What would your reaction be if on that day there was a very important meeting with your external auditors or a key supplier at which your employee had to be present? What if you found out that the reason your employee would not be coming in was because he or she had an argument with a coworker the previous day? What if, instead of the flu, the reason for absence was stress? Would it make a difference if the worker was a woman or a man? When an employee is absent from work, managers and coworkers are likely to care very much about such factors and these, in turn, will likely inform the consequences that an employee will face when they come back to work.

As previously noted, traditional absence research has rarely considered such a fine-grained approach to absenteeism, preferring instead a more aggregate approach in which absence records are counted then linked to job attitudes, demographic factors, workgroup norms, or organizational characteristics (Johns, 2003). The practice of aggregating absence records over a certain time frame inevitably treats all absence episodes as equivalent and rarely identifies the reason for absence or, rarer still, what was going on in the workplace during the particular absence episode (Atkin & Goodman, 1984). Research has also traditionally positioned absenteeism as an important issue for

managers due to negative effects on efficiency and costs to organizations. It is not uncommon to read reports on absenteeism in the popular press or practitioner journals indicating the cost of absenteeism for business to be in the millions, or even billions, of dollars. However, focusing on the billions lost due to absenteeism or datasets aggregating absence data of hundreds or thousands of workers over months or years may obscure the true nature of absenteeism, i.e. the fact that it is an infrequent, discrete, low base rate occurrence. As a rare event, it may be more appropriate to consider absenteeism on an episode-by-episode basis rather than through aggregated records (Johns & Nicholson, 1982; Nicholson, 1977). While absenteeism may have high costs in the aggregate, it is not clear that each single episode represents a cost. Furthermore, other outcomes of absenteeism such as disruption to workflows, disciplinary action by supervisors, and irritation of coworkers (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998) are likely to be highly sensitive to the particular circumstances surrounding an absence event.

The model of absenteeism developed and tested in Study 1 focuses on individual absence episodes by positioning absence as an independent variable leading to judgments, emotional reactions, and behavioral intentions of others. Through Nicholson's (1977) absence continuum theory, and theories of responsibility and accountability (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994; Weiner, 1995a; Weiner, 1995b), this study uses experimentally manipulated vignettes to assess how reason for absence, context surrounding an absence episode, and gender of the absentee affect reactions to absenteeism and potential outcomes for absentees. Another offshoot of the use of absence records in traditional research has been an overemphasis on workers for whom these types of records are maintained, such as blue collar workers and nurses

(Johns & Nicholson, 1982). The present study also addresses this by focusing on white collar professionals.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, researchers (Atkin & Goodman, 1984; Fichman, 1984; Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 1997; Johns & Nicholson, 1982; Nicholson, 1977) increasingly acknowledge that the second part of Martocchio and Harrison's (1993) definition of absenteeism, the social expectation aspect, is crucial to studying and understanding absenteeism. Such an approach, however, requires focusing on a different set of elements such as context, norms and attributions, and, consistent with the focus of the current study, an emphasis on single instances of absence. An early conceptualization of absenteeism in this light was provided by Nicholson (1977).

Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum theory suggests that individual absence episodes can be situated on a continuum from unavoidable (A) to avoidable (B). Unlike the voluntary/involuntary categorization commonly used in absence research, the A-B continuum theory suggests that absence episodes that appear almost identical on the surface may be perceived to fall on different points of the continuum depending on context, timing, and the norms in operation. The model is displayed in Figure 4.1.

Episode-by-episode approaches in absence research suggest that almost all absence can be conceptualized as a decision making process (Hackett & Bycio, 1996; Judge & Martocchio, 1996; Nicholson, 1977; Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995) that involves how a potential absence episode will be perceived in terms of appropriateness. Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum theory refers to the consideration of how a particular absence episode will be judged as one's susceptibility to be absent. If a potential reason

for missing work can be cogently perceived as being closer to the A end of the continuum than to the B end, an individual will be more susceptible to actually be absent. In this respect, determining the sources of an individual's susceptibility to be absent becomes central to understanding the behavior. For Nicholson (1977) and Nicholson and Martocchio (1995), contextual factors and social expectations are primary factors that will determine an individual's susceptibility to be absent in a given circumstance. A decision to be absent or not will be strongly influenced by the perceptions of others (e.g. supervisors and coworkers) and by widely held norms about what constitutes legitimate absence. Such norms can be conceptualized as a high-level absence culture.

4.1 Absenteeism, Responsibility, and Accountability

4.1.1 Judgments of responsibility following absence

Although Nicholson's A-B continuum is central to the theoretical foundation of this study, the continuum itself is difficult to operationalize. Complementary theories and surrogate measures must be employed for empirical testing. Attribution theory, with its emphasis on norms, expectations, and reactions of others, seems particularly appropriate, and is a theoretical lens that has been identified as important by absence researchers (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 1997; Johns & Nicholson, 1982; Judge & Martocchio, 1996; Nicholson & Payne, 1987). As explained in Chapter 2, attribution theory is the study of perceived causation relating to our own behaviors or the behavior of others (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Early attribution researchers (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1972) suggested that individuals naturally sought to understand the *why* of events, states and outcomes. Again, the metaphor associated with attribution theory during the initial wave of research was that of individuals as applied scientists (Kelley, 1972) who attempt

to link cause and effect in a systematic way, but who often err due to time pressure, poor information, insufficient samples, and so on. The overall belief is that humans have a strong desire to understand causal linkages in order to gain a sense of control of their environment (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1972). A popular school of thought in attribution theory has focused on cognitive dimensions of locus of causality, stability, and controllability (Weiner, 1985) to explain how individuals organize their experiences. Such an approach is consistent with Doise's (1986) intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of psychological phenomena. While the dimensional approach to attribution theory has received strong empirical support, not all dimensions seem pertinent to the study of absenteeism. Responses by others to unexpected absence should go beyond rationality and cognition, and involve emotion and action (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). As such, attribution dimensions that emphasize judgments and emotion more than perception and cognition would be particularly relevant to absenteeism.

Over the last ten years, Weiner (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2001) has forged ahead with a subset of attribution theory focusing primarily on the controllability dimension that positions judgments of responsibility as the focal concept. The strength of this stream of research comes from its acknowledgement that identical outcomes can elicit different reactions from others depending on context and circumstances. Of note, the metaphor employed is different than the one used in traditional attribution theory, and is one that fits better with absenteeism's link to disciplinary action. Rather than the traditional attribution metaphor of conceptualizing individuals as lay psychologists in a rational pursuit of cause and effect linkages, Weiner (1993, 1995b, 2001) uses the metaphor of *life as a courtroom* to illustrate judgments of responsibility. In this courtroom, we are

judged for our actions by our peers, and can be found innocent, guilty, or receive a suspended sentence (Weiner, 1995b). As such, the theory shifts the qualitative tone of the attributional process from cooler cognition to hotter emotion.

From an outcome perspective, the key dependent variable in Weiner's model is responsibility. Responsibility in this model refers to a judgment made by an observer following a negative outcome as opposed to responsibility indicating duties emanating from an individual's position at work. The concept of responsibility employed in the model is akin to the notion of being "held responsible" for an outcome. As such, responsibility is consistent with the definition offered by Schlenker et al. (1994) who view responsibility as "a core concept for understanding how people evaluate, sanction, and try to control each other's conduct"(p.632), and who view it as a component of holding people accountable. Using Weiner's courtroom analogy, responsibility concerns blameworthiness and being found "guilty" by observers. Observers ask the question: Should this individual be held responsible for this negative outcome? The outcome of interest in the model that will lead to a judgment of responsibility is an absence episode. Overall, judgments of responsibility are event-based evaluative judgments that are posited to have consequences for those being judged.

Research on Weiner's responsibility model has focused on such controversial issues as the AIDS virus (Steins & Weiner, 1999; Weiner 1993), notably Magic Johnson's contraction of AIDS (Graham, Weiner, Giuliano, & Williams, 1993), drunkenness (Weiner, 1980), poverty (Farwell & Weiner, 2000), and the O.J. Simpson murder trial (Graham, Weiner, & Zucker, 1997). In each case, the focus is on a negative outcome and an assessment by an observer of how responsible an actor is for his or her plight. As

noted, the key attribution dimension in this more focused research is controllability, which is purported to connote volition. Such judgments have a direct impact on feelings of anger or sympathy, which in turn influence behavioral intentions of punishing or helping.

It is important to emphasize, however, that responsibility is not viewed as identical to the controllability dimension in attribution theory. First, as noted by Weiner (1995b), controllability refers to characteristics of a cause, while responsibility refers to a judgment of a person. As such, the targets of such perceptions are different. Second, Weiner (1995b) emphasizes that even in cases where a negative outcome has occurred and it is perceived as controllable by the focal actor, judgments of responsibility (i.e. blameworthiness) will be withheld if mitigating circumstances are present. According to Weiner (1995b):

There may be mitigating circumstances that negate moral responsibility. To mitigate means to soften or alleviate; hence, mitigating circumstances soften, alleviate, or totally eliminate responsibility judgments about a person (p.16).

Again, the relevance to absence behavior is not difficult to discern. If one considers the action of calling in absent from work as a decision, as suggested by Hackett and Bycio (1996), Judge and Martocchio (1996), and Nicholson (1977), then most absence must be considered controllable. Mitigating circumstances thus become crucial to whether an absence episode will be viewed as legitimate or not and whether an absentee should be held responsible or not. In all, the model developed by Weiner and his colleagues can be presented as in Figure 4.2.

The mediating influence of emotion is consistent with theories suggesting that emotions follow a cognitive appraisal process (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999). Such

theories state that an initial affective reaction brought on by a generally positive or negative occurrence is cognitively appraised and interpreted, which leads to more focused emotions. In the case of absenteeism, it is posited that absence of a coworker leads to a generally negative reaction. This negative reaction prompts a cognitive appraisal, specifically a judgment of responsibility, which leads to feelings of anger or sympathy. As noted by Weiner (1995a), emotions are more proximal to action than cognitions as emotions and actions are hot, while cognitions are somewhat cold. While research in organizational behavior has historically favored rational models over emotional models, there is a growing acknowledgment that emotions related to events occurring in the workplace must be captured in organizational behavior theory and research (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Ashkanasy, Häertel, et al. 2002; Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow, & Grandey, 2002). Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective events theory focusing on organizational behavior is similar in many respects to Weiner's judgments of responsibility theory. Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) theory suggests that events are proximal causes of affective reactions, and that affective experiences have a direct influence on behaviors. If we position a coworker's or subordinate's absence as an event leading to affect, the theory makes predictions that are consistent with the model being developed here. Weiner's (1995a) theory of responsibility, however, provides guidance for empirically testing the model, while the emphasis on responsibility provides a direct link to Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum's notion of legitimate absence.

Overall, Weiner's (1995a) model of *judgment of responsibility => affective reactions => behavioral intention* has been supported in numerous studies and has been confirmed meta-analytically (Rudolf, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004). In terms of

absenteeism, it is posited that judging one responsible for an absence episode represents a surrogate for judging that an absence episode falls on the B side of Nicholson's A-B continuum. These judgments of responsibility or of B-type absenteeism will lead to irritation and desire to punish, while perceptions of A-type absence, i.e. not judging another responsible, will lead to sympathy and helping intentions.

While Weiner's judgment of responsibility theory has been widely studied in the field of social psychology, I am unaware of any studies in management in which it has been featured. For the reasons described above, absenteeism should be an event that initiates a judgment of responsibility evaluation. At the same time, as the primary focus in this study concerns the reactions of coworkers to the absence of a colleague, it is essential to establish if Weiner's model holds for this organizational behavior concept to ensure the appropriateness of the dependent variables for the subsequent analyses. As such, the first three hypotheses represent an attempt to replicate Weiner's judgment of responsibility theory in relation to a single absence episode:

Hypothesis 1. Judgments of responsibility by an observer following an instance of absence by another will be positively related to feelings of anger and intentions to punish the absentee.

Hypothesis 2. Judgments of responsibility by an observer following an instance of absence by another will be negatively related to feelings of sympathy and intentions to help the absentee.

Hypothesis 3. Behavioral intentions following judgments of responsibility will be mediated by affective reactions.

It is important to note that Weiner's judgment of responsibility model describes an attributional process, i.e. the consequences of a judgment. The theory is quite silent on how such judgments are developed. Similarly, there is little insight into what might be viewed as a legitimate mitigating circumstance, although this is purported to play a fundamental role in the judgment of responsibility. Questions along these lines in the extant research have mainly focused on characteristics of the perceiver, rather than context or norms. Overall, Weiner's theory is firmly rooted in the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of Doise's (1986) levels of analysis typology. In order to better understand the antecedents to judgments of responsibility and ascend to higher levels of analysis linked to absence cultures, Weiner's theory of responsibility is insufficient. To fully explain the process, and include absence cultures and social expectations, accountability theory as developed by Schlenker, et al. (1994), Frink and Klimoski (1998, 2004) and Tetlock (1985, 1992) is required to complement Weiner's model.

4.1.2 Predicting Judgments of Responsibility: Accountability

In contrast to Weiner's (1995a) model, theories of accountability put a strong emphasis on the antecedents of judgments of responsibility. These antecedents focus primarily on the issue of social expectations, which is of course an important element in the definition of absenteeism provided by Martocchio and Harrison (1993). Accountability is the perceived need to justify or defend an action to some audience which has the potential to reward or punish (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). It is a mechanism

of social control that involves fulfilling obligations, duties, and expectations (Schlenker et al., 1994). Because of the notion of obligation involved, accountability is an important complement to Weiner's responsibility model as a lens through which to consider absenteeism. Consistent with Schlenker et al.'s (1994) conceptualization, *responsibility is a component of holding people accountable*. The element that bridges responsibility and accountability is the fact that accountability involves an obligation towards others. Individuals can make judgments about people with AIDS or people living in poverty, but the focal actors in such scenarios are either anonymous or not answerable to the person making the judgment. In work settings, however, there are formal duties and implicit or explicit norms of accountability and responsibility that regulate conduct (Tetlock, 1983). As such, a judgment of responsibility becomes a judgment of accountability when observers will be affected by the negative outcome associated with another individual. It is in this sense that Schlenker et al. (1994) consider responsibility as an accountability concept. Furthermore, in accountability theory, context is an important consideration (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). The link to context underscores how the notion of accountability must be viewed as embedded within a social system, which is defined by a common set of shared expectations of behavior (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). From an absence perspective, the notion of shared expectations for behavior is similar to Nicholson and Johns's (1985) concept of absence cultures.

In terms of linking absence cultures, accountability, and Weiner's (1995a) notion of judgments of responsibility, Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model of responsibility appears particularly appropriate. In common with traditional attribution research, Schlenker et al. (1994) invoke the work of Heider (1958) to explain how people are held

accountable. According to Heider (1958), the first element of being held responsible for an outcome depends on *imputation*, i.e. whether or not the outcome is clearly associated with the actor and if it was foreseeable and intentional. This is clearly similar to Weiner's notion of responsibility but, as underlined by Schlenker et al. (1994), is incomplete because it does not include context. Second, Heider (1958) emphasizes the notion of *answerability*, which involves rules and norms that would lead to punishment or rewards, as a factor in being held responsible for an outcome. This element concerns what people ought to do and involves obligation. Both elements are relevant for absenteeism. While the link between absenteeism and volition was underlined in the previous discussion of Weiner's (1995a) work, the second element, answerability, is also very important and represents the link between responsibility and accountability. Specifically, there is a fairly obvious requirement in most jobs to be present and, all else being equal, we would think that people ought to attend when it is expected. However, Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model explains how judgments of responsibility are not always clear-cut due to mitigating circumstances or contradictory social expectations. In other words, accountability theory provides clues to understanding legitimate mitigating circumstances surrounding judgments of responsibility, and can illuminate where individual absence episodes will fall on Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum. Overall, while the primary dependent variable in this study concerns judgments of responsibility, such judgments imply accountability given the work context that such perceptions are occurring in.

The triangle model posits that observers will base judgments of responsibility on three elements: The nature of the outcome or event, the rules or prescriptions in effect, and the identity of the actor linked to the outcome. Identity in this model is not limited to

individual identity but involves group identities and memberships. Gender can be considered a group identity in this model characterized by stereotypes and socially constructed roles. Schlenker et al. (1994) emphasize that it is the linkages between elements that are important when assessing responsibility rather than the elements on their own. As such, actors will be viewed as responsible and held accountable for an outcome to the extent that 1) there are clear rules surrounding the event, 2) that the rules clearly apply to the actor, and 3) that the actor is strongly associated with the event. Accountability is particularly relevant to judgments by others due to the fact that accountability theory emphasizes that an audience exists to whom the actor is answerable. The model is displayed in Figure 4.3.

Empirically, the model has been supported with each link combining additively to predict judgments of responsibility (Schlenker et al., 1994). Specifically, Schlenker et al., (1994) used experimentally manipulated vignettes in order to assess judgments of responsibility based on the elements of the triangle model. In the study, the event in question was a hospital worker treating a gunshot wound. Identity was manipulated by stating that the focal actor was either a nurse or an X-ray technician, while prescription was manipulated by stating whether or not a doctor had provided clear instructions on how to treat the patient. Results showed that each linkage, i.e. identity-event, event-prescription, and identity-prescription, combined additively to predict perceptions of responsibility.

Furthermore, in a second study, Schlenker et al. (1994) found that when judging accountability surrounding a negative event, individuals were more interested in the proposed linkages than in the actual negative consequences that the event subsequently

caused. In terms of absenteeism, this would once again highlight the greater salience of social expectations over the mere lack of presence. Although being physically absent might represent an inconvenience for coworkers regardless of reasons and circumstance, the social expectations surrounding an absence episode will lead to judgments of responsibility, emotions and behavioral intentions. From this theoretical perspective, it would not be the fact that a person is absent that would lead to punishment, but the norms, expectations, and identity of the actor that would be important. As such, accountability and responsibility must be viewed as phenomenological concepts, i.e. states of mind, as opposed to objective and clear cut rules (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). For judgments concerning absenteeism, the social expectations informed by absence cultures will be a determining factor in how responsible/accountable an absentee is held.

Schlenker et al.'s (1994) model and Weiner's (1995a, 2001) model can be combined to predict reactions to an absence episode as displayed in Figure 4.4. The model suggests that linkages between an absence event, the prescriptions in operation and the identity of the absentee will lead to judgments of responsibility which, in turn, will lead to emotional reactions by interested observers and consequences for the absentee.

The key question becomes: What elements will influence the linkages in the responsibility triangle that will lead to a judgment of responsibility? Four factors are posited as relevant to the linkages. The first (the general characteristics of observers) is primarily an individual-level factor operating at Doise's (1986) intrapersonal level, while the other three (the reason for being absent, the gender of the absentee, and contextual issues) are particularly relevant to absence cultures and social expectations operating at the intergroup and ideological levels (Doise, 1986).

4.2 Predicting Judgments of responsibility following absence

4.2.1 Salient characteristics of observers

Although the primary goal of this study and the thesis in general is to understand social expectations concerning absence based primarily on widely held norms, it would be wrong to ignore individual factors that might influence judgments of responsibility. At the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of analysis (Doise, 1986), attitudes and personality characteristics may influence observers' judgments of responsibility and accountability. Studies relating to judgments of responsibility, attributions, and discipline have acknowledged that characteristics of the perceiver can influence judgments and perceptions. For example, in a study on judgments of responsibility and poverty, Farwell and Weiner (2000) sought to explore whether individuals with conservative political views held the poor to be more responsible for their plight than individuals with liberal political views. In terms of workplace judgments, Simpson and Martocchio (1997) examined the effect of supervisors' fairness orientation on discipline decisions surrounding arbitration cases involving absenteeism. They found that a judge's fairness orientation interacted with the target's absence history and due process to influence arbitration decisions. Martocchio and Judge (1994) explored the legitimacy of absence for different reasons, and, through cluster analysis of responses, identified different profiles of respondents.

For the current study, specific individual factors that may influence judgments of responsibility following absence must be considered. Intrapersonal elements that may influence such judgments include an attitude, i.e. absence legitimacy (Addae & Johns,

2000), a value, i.e. work ethic (Miller, Woehr, & Hudspeeth, 2002) and a personality factor, i.e. conscientiousness.

4.2.1.1 Absence legitimacy. Addae (2003) and Addae and Johns (2000) have developed a construct and a related scale to tap into individuals' general perception of absence legitimacy that is particularly useful for the current study. Absence legitimacy can be defined as “the extent to which employees perceive absenteeism as an acceptable work behavior” (Addae, 2003 p. 19) and represents an overall evaluation of absence from work. Addae (2003) found that absence legitimacy was related to values such as work centrality and personality traits such as locus of control. In the context of the current study, one would suspect that an individual who views absenteeism as more acceptable and legitimate would have a more lenient attitude toward absence in general and be less apt to hold others responsible when they miss work.

4.2.1.2 Work ethic. Work ethic is one of the oldest constructs in management thinking, dating back to religious intellectuals of the 17th century and to the writings of Max Weber in the early 20th century (Miller et al., 2002). Despite its long history, however, work ethic has suffered from conceptual confusion over the years. In a study on the meaning of work ethic, Miller et al. (2002) noted that early writings on the topic made strong links to religiosity but that, in reality, the construct is not the exclusive domain of any one religious group. Furthermore, although measurement tools developed over the last century treat work ethic as a one-dimensional construct, Miller et al. (2002) argue convincingly that work ethic consists of multiple dimensions. Overall, Miller et al. (2002) suggest that work ethic refers to attitudes and beliefs about work and

work-related activity in general that contain a motivational component with behavioral consequences. Specific dimensions include beliefs relating to centrality of work, hard work, the importance of leisure, morality/ethics, self-reliance, wasted time, and delay of gratification. In absenteeism research, Judge and Martocchio (1996) found that individuals with low protestant work ethic (PWE) made more external attributions for absence in hypothetical scenarios. However, as noted by Miller et al. (2002), measures of PWE contain several dimensions and have little to do with Protestantism. Among Miller et al.'s (2002) more focused dimensions, centrality of work, expressing the importance of work in one's life and a belief in work for work's sake, and hard work, relating to beliefs about the value of hard work, seem particularly relevant. In fact, Addae (2003) found that work centrality had a strong inverse relationship to absence legitimacy. Consistent with the prediction concerning absence legitimacy, individuals who endorse high work ethic should be more apt to hold an absentee responsible for his or her absence.

4.2.1.3 Conscientiousness. Harrison and Martocchio (1998) suggest that personality traits may be a predictor of absenteeism over the long term and that more research linking absence and personality is sorely needed. Johns (1997) notes that some absence research suggests that absence behavior is a manifestation of a deviant personality and that absence proneness is sometimes linked to personality traits related to integrity. Over the past fifteen years, the big-five taxonomy of personality traits (McCrae & John, 1992) has become prominent in organizational behavior research. The big-five traits consist of extraversion,

conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.

Harrison and Martocchio (1998) highlight the big-five as a potential area of interest in developing hypotheses concerning personality and absence behavior.

More recently, Johns (2002) reviewed research that indicates a negative correlation between absence and conscientiousness.

At the same time, predictions can also be made concerning how individuals with different traits may react to the absence of others. In particular, it is likely that individuals who are highly conscientious would hold absentees responsible for their absence. Conscientiousness individuals tend to be achievement oriented and dependable (McCrae & John, 1992; Hough & Schneider, 1996) and it seems reasonable to suggest that they would take a negative view of those who are not considered dependable or who might interfere with their achievement goals. Furthermore, Miller et al. (2002) found that the hard work dimension of work ethic is positively and significantly related to conscientiousness. As such, it is expected that highly conscientious individuals will be harsher in their judgments against coworkers' absences.

From the standpoint of Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model of responsibility, an individual observer's personal characteristics should influence the event-prescription linkage in the triangle model. Individuals with a more lenient attitude toward absenteeism are likely to have a different event-prescription linkage than those who tend to view absence as unacceptable. Overall, the following hypotheses predict that individuals who generally perceive absence to be a legitimate workplace behavior will tend to withhold judgments of responsibility following an absence episode, while those with a high work

ethic and high conscientiousness should have harsher judgments of responsibility following a coworker's absence episode.

Hypothesis 4a: Observers' generalized view of absence legitimacy will be negatively related to judgments of responsibility, anger, and intentions to punish following another's absence, and positively related to sympathy and intentions to help.

Hypothesis 4b: Observers' work ethic, pertaining specifically to centrality of work and the value of hard work, will be positively related to judgments of responsibility, anger, and intentions to punish following another's absence, and negatively related to sympathy and intentions to help.

Hypothesis 4c: Observers' level of conscientiousness will be positively related to judgments of responsibility, anger, and intentions to punish following another's absence, and negatively related to sympathy and intentions to help.

It is important to emphasize that the primary focus of this study is on absence cultures, absence norms, and shared expectations surrounding absenteeism. Furthermore, it is expected that the factors posited to be linked to macro-level absence cultures (i.e. reason for absence, gender, and context) will have greater influences on judgments of responsibility than the individual characteristics of observers. This prediction is consistent with the findings of Conlon and Stone (1992) who found that absence schema

were shared among managers with diverse backgrounds and experience. However, consistent with the multilevel conceptualization of absenteeism developed in this study, it is absolutely essential to consider what influence individual characteristics of observers will have on perceptions of where absence episodes fall on the A-B continuum. Furthermore, given that absence legitimacy and work ethic dimensions are relatively new constructs, the study is an opportunity to clarify their meaning and study their interrelationships, which represents a side benefit of this study. Still, the manipulations within the vignettes will involve phenomena at higher levels in Doise's (1986) levels model.

4.2.2 The reason for the absence.

As explained in the previous chapter, absenteeism is a multi-faceted concept that is caused by a host of factors. Traditional absence research, usually relying on organizational records of absence, do not usually touch upon the reason why someone missed a particular day. In terms of an absence episode, the current study predicts that the reason behind the absence can influence the rules and prescriptions in effect in Schlenker et al.'s (1994) model, and thus can have an impact on judgments of responsibility. As previously noted, Weiner (1995b) suggests that judgments of responsibility will be withheld when mitigating circumstances are to blame for a negative occurrence. Most of the reasons for being absent listed in Chapter 3 such as stress, childcare issues, and personal meetings can be viewed as mitigating circumstances leading to absence, and their perceived legitimacy will weigh heavily on whether or not an absentee should be held responsible for his or her lack of presence. Within the Schlenker et al. (1994) model, the reason for absence should influence the event-prescription linkage. Although

the prescriptions and rules inside the organization may place emphasis on attendance, outside forces can lead to prescriptions to be absent. As noted by Schlenker et al. (1994), the presence of dual social expectations (e.g., to be at work and to care for a sick child) can attenuate judgments of responsibility. To the extent that illness, childcare, or other reasons are viewed as more or less legitimate and lead to different social expectations of what an individual should be doing, judgments of responsibility will vary from case to case. As previously noted, the social expectations surrounding absence through widely shared absence cultures should inform the perceived legitimacy of different reasons for being absent.

Accountability theory and the suggested model can also serve as bridges to self-serving behavior surrounding absenteeism. Given the threat of punishment that surrounds absenteeism (Edwards & Whitston, 1993; Simpson & Martocchio, 1997), it seems reasonable to posit that most people will try to strategically deflect responsibility if possible. The disciplinary links to absenteeism make it likely that individuals will report reasons for absenteeism that are viewed as legitimate. In this vein, Tetlock (1983, 1985, 1992) has suggested and demonstrated that, when clear expectations or norms exist, individuals will attempt to appear to be conforming to them through their behavior. This will be done in order to protect one's self-image and social image. As will be explained below, this is particularly relevant to illness absence.

Based on the review by Johns (1997) and existing empirical research, predictions relating to responsibility and accountability can be developed around reasons of illness, inequity perceptions at work, stress, and childcare. Although predictions could also be made regarding other reasons for being absent, Study 1 limits its focus to these four

reasons. As will be described, each reason has been the subject of theoretical work and empirical study, although many unanswered questions remain. Furthermore, the completely randomized between-subject methodology employed in Study 1 limits the number of reasons that can reasonably be tested.

4.2.2.1 Illness. For absenteeism, illness is a readily accepted and a rarely questioned reason to miss work (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). Johns and Xie (1998), in a cross- cultural study comparing absence behavior in Canada and China, found that illness absence was viewed as more legitimate than absence due to 13 other reasons. Two other studies, one focusing on attributions (Judge & Martocchio, 1996), the other directly on absence legitimacy (Edwards & Whitston, 1993) also found that illness was perceived as the most acceptable reason to be absent. Furthermore, empirical evidence exists that illness may be an excuse when absence is due to other factors. To the extent that it is viewed as acceptable, the illness reason becomes an attribution individuals will hope others will make about their absence. The illness excuse thus becomes very convenient for suggesting that an absence episode is legitimate (Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995) and for deflecting judgments of responsibility and accountability. Hackett and Bycio (1996), using a diary method to track the absence of nurses, found that actual absenteeism was linked to fatigue and feelings of doldrums. The qualitative data obtained via interview after the nurses had returned, however, showed that they attributed their absences to illness in an apparent attempt to engage in self-serving behavior. In this vein, Johns (1997) notes that medical models of absence are not purely physical but also involve psychological aspects and the manipulation of attributions.

Although illness absence has typically been categorized as involuntary absence and almost ignored by managers and researchers, the need to consider the psychological aspect of illness absence has been advocated by several researchers (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 1997; Johns & Nicholson, 1982; Martocchio, Harrison, & Berkson, 2000; Nicholson, 1977; Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995, Tharenou, 1993b). Nicholson and Martocchio (1995) refer to illness absence as the "black hole" (p.605) of absence research as there is little research or theory in this area, and it is simply viewed as uncontrollable. As they note, however, illness absence is based on information asymmetry in which the word of the person who is ill must be taken as true. This is especially true in the case of white-collar workers who are monitored less closely. Furthermore, even when doctors' notes are provided, they will still be based on reported symptoms from the patient (Nicholson, 1976). Overall, the relative neglect of illness absence in the field of absenteeism research must be remedied.

Given the empirical evidence that illness absence is viewed as legitimate, it is likely that individuals who are absent due to illness will not be held responsible for their absence, will elicit sympathy rather than anger, and will receive help rather than punishment. However, strong findings along these lines, combined with the information asymmetry surrounding illness absence in favor of the employee, would only reinforce the need to scrutinize illness absence and not simply accept it as unavoidable. As underlined by Nicholson and Payne (1987), individuals may report absence as being due to illness since it is perceived as closer to the A side of the A-B continuum, while it may in fact be B-type absenteeism.

4.2.2.2 Inequity perceptions at work. Johns (1997) suggests that employees can use absence to redress inequity perceptions they may be experiencing at work, and there is much evidence that individuals do indeed go absent due to perceived inequity (Johns, in press). Under this economic/conflict/withdrawal model, employees will reduce their attendance to balance the perceived inequity in regards to rewards or other outcomes received. While framed as a rational, economic strategy, this type of absence can also be viewed as workplace conflict or employee withdrawal. From a conflict standpoint, refusing to work due to perceived inequity is a tactic that could be used in labor negotiations, while feelings of inequity also represent a negative affective response toward work (Cropanzano, Weiss, Suckow, & Grandey, 2002).

The absence due to perceived inequity represents an interesting paradox concerning judgments of responsibility. While using absence to redress perceived inequity may be viewed as justifiable from the absentee's point of view, it is highly debatable whether or not such absence will be perceived to be legitimate by observers. There are several reasons to suspect that absence due to inequity will not be viewed as a legitimate mitigating circumstance to miss work by observers in this study. First, absence due to inequity is likely to be subject to differing actor-observer attributions. The research that suggests that quietly balancing the books by missing work is legitimate has been conducted from the absentee's point of view (Johns, 1997) and could reasonably be considered as a self-justifying excuse. Attribution theory has consistently demonstrated that attributions made by actors and observers often differ significantly and that observers tend to attribute the behaviors of others to personal factors rather than to situational factors (Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Kelley & Michela, 1980). As such, while an

absentee may view absence due to inequity as being caused by outside forces beyond the absentee's control, observers will likely attribute absenteeism for this reason to personal characteristics of the absentee, such as deviance or withdrawal, and consider it to be controllable absence. Second, the focus on white-collar absenteeism in the current study should further negate the judgment that absence due to inequity is a legitimate mitigating circumstance to miss work. Blue-collar workers likely have a more confrontational stance vis-à-vis management as compared to white-collar workers, and it is reasonable to expect that a macro-level absence culture legitimizing conflict and inequity-based absenteeism may operate in blue-collar work settings. It is highly questionable whether or not such an absence culture would be in operation for professional workers and managers. Finally, as will be explored in Study 2, the portrayal of absence due to inequity and labor conflict has often been negative in the popular press (Patton, 2005). Such media coverage informs the societal-level absence culture that absence for such reasons is illegitimate.

Overall, from the A-B continuum perspective, such absence should be perceived by observers to be on the B side of the continuum. Consequently, employees who miss work for this reason should be judged as responsible for their absence and held accountable. Responsibility/accountability should be deemed high as such absenteeism will be perceived to be controllable by the worker and the societal-level absence culture indicates that this type of absenteeism is not legitimate. While absentees may perceive this form of absenteeism to be rational and fair, observers are likely to perceive it as a sign of deviance, withdrawal, or conflict. Overall, such absence will be viewed as voluntary and controllable, and it is unlikely that perceived inequity or dissatisfaction will be considered a legitimate mitigating circumstance by observers. As such, if

observers discover that a white-collar worker is absent in an attempt to redress perceptions of inequity, the absentee will be held responsible for his or her absence, the observer will feel anger toward the absentee and intend to punish the absentee.

4.2.2.3 Stress related absence. Stress absence can be conceptualized as either an illness issue or a withdrawal issue. As such, it is difficult to determine what norms and expectations relate to stress absenteeism or if there is a societal-level absence culture in operation. As noted by Johns (1997), there is even confusion over the positive or negative effects of stress related absence. Over the last few decades, stress and related conditions such as depression and burnout have become much more recognized as legitimate problems in our society and are increasingly framed as a cause of illness (Danna & Griffin, 1999). In academic research on stress, stress and burnout are also often linked to workplace problems such as role overload, and low job satisfaction which is occasionally used as a surrogate for stress related strain (see Kahn and Boysiére [1992] for a review). Furthermore, stress, like absenteeism, is one of the few organizational behavior topics that is regularly featured in the popular press. In terms of norms and beliefs surrounding stress, Lewig and Dollard (2001) conducted a review of the portrayal of stress in Australian newspapers and found that stress is generally portrayed as a workplace problem, and that managers perceive stress to be somewhat of a sham. Overall, stress is alternatively presented as a medical problem, a deviance issue, or an organizational and work problem. Consequently, the absence culture surrounding stress is somewhat unclear and it is difficult to predict judgments of responsibility surrounding this form of absence or where it will fall on the A-B continuum. To the extent that norms and beliefs surrounding the legitimacy of stress are still unclear, judgments of responsibility in

relation to stress absence will provide insight into the legitimacy of this reason. If judgments of responsibility are weak, then the argument can be put forth that stress in becoming increasingly viewed as a medical condition. If judgments of responsibility are high, then perhaps stress absence is viewed as a sign of withdrawal, personal weakness, or as a tactic.

4.2.2.4 Childcare responsibilities. As previously noted, there has been an increasing acknowledgement over the last two decades that absenteeism is not only a workplace issue, but a behavior that is initiated by outside forces. One of the primary reasons for absenteeism is to attend to domestic duties. Among these duties, childcare responsibilities have emerged as a legitimate reason to miss work. Studies by Edwards and Whitston (1993), Martocchio and Judge (1994), and Judge and Martocchio (1996) found that kinship responsibilities were perceived to be a very legitimate reason to miss work. From a judgment of responsibility perspective, childcare duties appear to be a valid mitigating circumstance for being absent. The combination of woman's traditional role of caregiver with the fact that the *family man* is becoming a valued social identity in our society (Erickson, Nichols, & Ritter, 2000), should result in an absence culture at the societal level in which absence due to child care needs becomes legitimate. From a judgment of responsibility standpoint, childcare responsibilities will create a conflicting event-prescription situation (Schlenker et. al, 1994) that will lessen the obligation to attend work. As such, the prediction is that absence due to childcare responsibilities will lead observers to withhold judgments of responsibility, will lead to feeling of sympathy rather than anger, and the tendency to offer help for people in this predicament.

Overall, the following hypotheses concerning reasons for absence and the reactions of coworkers are offered:

Hypothesis 5a: Reason for absence will significantly affect the extent to which an absentee is held responsible for an absence episode, will influence feelings of anger and sympathy of coworkers toward an absentee, and coworkers' intentions to help or punish absentees.

Hypothesis 5b: Illness will be the reason for which absentees are least held responsible while inequity perceptions will be the reason for which absentees are most held responsible. Childcare reasons will be subject to moderate judgments of responsibilities. Emotional reactions and behavioral intentions will be consistent with judgments of responsibility.

4.2.3 Gender of the Absentee

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the finding that women are generally more absent from work than men is a consistent finding in absence research, but has not been well explained. Commonly offered explanations such as women's more fragile health, less interesting jobs, and double-burden of work and childcare duties have not been supported in studies. The previous chapter suggested that the differences in absence between men and women may be due to different social expectations concerning attendance along gender lines. The conceptualization focuses on the social categorization of gender and is consistent with the intergroup dimension of Doise's (1986) levels model. In order to gather

evidence for this claim, gender of the absentee will be manipulated in the vignettes concerning absence from work.

From a responsibility/accountability perspective, gender should have a strong impact on the identity component of Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model. Consistent with Schlenker et al.'s (1994) conceptualization of identity and the work of Deaux (1984) and Durkin (1987), gender should represent a salient identity in the triangle model. Specifically, gender should strongly influence the identity-event link and the identity-prescription link relating to judgments of responsibility concerning absence from work. For the identity-event link, women may be less associated with technical/managerial work than men due to long-held stereotypes, especially in management positions. Although progress on this front has been made, media reports and academic research indicate that women are still underrepresented in management positions and technical jobs (Lemons & Parzinger, 2001; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). As such, they should be less identified with such positions and behaviors enacted within these positions, and should have a weaker identity-event link than men. Furthermore, in terms of the identity-prescription link, women will be held to different rules for many reasons such as illness, childcare duties, stress, and withdrawal. First, due to perceived fragile health, women will be judged less responsible for illness absence than men. Illness will be viewed as a legitimate mitigating circumstance for women, but the effect should be weaker for men. Second, due to the perceived emotional nature of women (Durkin, 1987; Nelson & Burke, 2002), women should be judged less responsible for stress absence than men. Third, women's widely perceived role as primary caregiver to children will legitimate absence for family reasons more than men. As noted, Harrison, Johns, and Martocchio

(2000) suggest that absence culture norms surrounding child responsibilities may apply only for women and not for men. Nicholson and Goodge (1976) also suggested this and warned that, for women, domestic responsibilities, much like illness absence, may represent a useful attribution for deflecting sanctions following an absence episode. Nelson and Burke (2002) stress that socially constructed gender roles can restrict men in their ability to fully enjoy and participate in family life. As such, while men are being encouraged to be more involved in childcare, it may not be as legitimate a reason to be absent as compared to women. Finally, it is widely acknowledged that women suffer from pay inequity and still encounter glass-ceiling effects in the workplace (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Wilde, 2000). Given the increasing recognition of this and public efforts to redress this situation, there may be greater acceptance and perceived legitimacy of women engaging in absence behavior to balance the unfairness they face in the workplace. As such, due to the perceptions that women suffer from pay inequity and discrimination in the workplace, absence due to perceived inequity should be supported as legitimate for women and not for men.

In all, women, as a group, should be held less accountable/responsible than men for absence due to social expectations informed by widely held gender stereotypes. For women, their group identity may allow them to attenuate the judgments of responsibility of others in terms of absenteeism. As such, absence episodes for women should generally fall closer to the A side of Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum as compared to men for most reasons for absence. Overall, it is expected that reactions to absence for women will elicit less anger and punishment intentions as compared to men.

Hypothesis 6: Gender of the absentee will significantly affect the extent to which an absentee is held responsible for an absence episode, will influence feelings of

anger and sympathy of coworkers toward an absentee, and coworkers' intentions to help or punish absentees. Specifically, women should be held less responsible for absence than men.

One note of caution. The preceding discussion and hypotheses may be interpreted by some as indicating that women derive benefit from gender stereotypes surrounding absence and that women will not be as severely sanctioned as men. While this may be the case, it is important to underline that these stereotypes may harm women upstream in terms of hiring and promotions. Women have decried the so-called myths surrounding women's absence and view their promulgation as discriminatory (Patton, 2005).

Overall, although gender is certainly not the whole story, it is an important category that cannot be ignored when considering perceptions, cognitions, and evaluations (Deaux, 1984; Durkin, 1987).

4.2.4 Context and responsibility

The previous chapter explained the importance of considering context when studying organizational phenomena. In Study 1, the focus is on internal context. As previously noted, context can be defined as "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (Johns, 2006 p.4), and internal context can influence behaviors and perceptions in an organization to the point where identical behaviors can elicit very different reactions in different contexts (Johns, 2001b). At certain times of the year or when circumstances demand attendance, absence should be especially frowned upon. Again, the social expectation element of absenteeism becomes much more important than a simple lack of presence. While traditional absenteeism researchers

aggregate absence episodes over time, obscuring both reason for absence and context surrounding an episode, these contextual factors can be critical when assessing responsibility and accountability concerning absenteeism.

Again, using Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model, context should influence the event-prescription linkage. In certain contexts, such as when work is busy and absenteeism would be particularly harmful, one would expect that prescription towards absenteeism to be much clearer and the social expectations to attend to be much stronger. When work demands are high and key employees must be present to facilitate the work of others, absenteeism should be perceived very negatively and lead to anger. When the context demands attendance due to high job demands, individuals should be expected to show up even if they are sick, should be expected to make alternative arrangements in terms of childcare, and stress absence and withdrawal/inequity absence should be deemed unacceptable.

This conceptualization of context is strongly linked to the interpersonal level of Doise's (1986) levels model. Frink and Klimoski (1998) suggest that there is a strong interpersonal component to accountability, and that accountability is often based on personal relationships and reciprocal obligations. As previously noted, absenteeism in the workplace is often associated with costly and annoying workflow disruptions (Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000; Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995). Furthermore, Harrison and Martocchio (1998) suggest that coworker and manager anger due to disrupted work are immediate, short-term outcomes of absenteeism. When work demands are high and key employees must be present to facilitate the work of others, absenteeism should be perceived very negatively. In such a work context, workers will be held responsible for

their absenteeism to a greater degree. Within Weiner's *courtroom of life* (1995a), peers will judge coworkers most harshly when their absenteeism does the most damage, just as a jury will judge a defendant more harshly when criminal behavior leads to loss of life. As such, the following hypothesis posits a strong main effect of context on judgments of responsibility:

Hypothesis 7: Context will be significantly related to judgments of responsibility following an absence episode. Judgments of responsibility and, anger will be higher when work demands are pressing rather than moderate. Sympathy will be lower when work demands are pressing rather than moderate.

Furthermore, the expectation is that internal context will constrain absence so much that relationships between the dependant variables and reasons for absence and gender will be significantly reduced or nullified. As such, hypotheses 5 and 6 are expected to hold in the moderate work demands condition only. Consequently, the following hypotheses are offered:

Hypothesis 8a: There will be an interaction between context and reason for absence. Strong work demands should lead to strong judgments of responsibility and emotional reactions regardless of the reason for absence.

Hypothesis 8b: There will be an interaction between context and gender. Strong work demands should lead to strong judgments of responsibility and emotional reactions regardless of the gender of the absentee.

Hypotheses 7 and 8 are consistent with Nicholson's A-B continuum theory which emphasizes the importance of context on absenteeism. According to Nicholson (1977),

social context is what makes absenteeism meaningful, with the interdependence of others who may be affected representing a major factor. Acknowledging the importance of context highlights the importance of social expectations surrounding absence in addition to a simple lack of presence, and underlines the inadequacy of simple categorizations such as voluntary or involuntary absence. Depending on the context in which absence is occurring, reason for absence, categorizations of voluntary versus involuntary absence, and gender of the absentee should be more or less salient. This is consistent with Johns's (2001b) suggestion that context can operate as a moderator that alters the relationships between variables.

At the same time, pressing work demands may alter reactions regarding behavioral intentions. Martocchio and Judge (1995) found that absentees whose presence was crucial to the work of others were not severely disciplined for absence, and speculated that critical employees may benefit from more slack in terms of their behavior due to their important positions. However, Martocchio and Judge (1995) point to research by Klass and Wheeler (1990) that indicates that employee criticality can have a strong positive impact on disciplinary decisions. Hypothesis 7 predicts that pressing work demands will lead to greater accountability and responsibility vis-à-vis absence. While this should lead to anger consistent with Weiner's (1995a) judgment of responsibility model, behavioral intentions are likely to be different. When the work context is non-urgent, the prediction is that anger will be positively related to intentions to punish and negatively related to intentions to help. When workflow disruptions are costly, however, it is predicted that anger will be followed by both an intention to punish, and an intention to begrudgingly help complete the absentee's work. Overall, when work demands are

high, intentions to help should remain constant and the relationship between anger and helping should disappear. Such findings would be consistent with Martocchio and Judge's (1995) study. As such, the following hypothesis is posited:

Hypothesis 9: In terms of behavioral intentions, context will be significantly related to intention to punish only.

4.2.5 Other variables

In terms of other variables, gender and supervisory role will also be measured, but no specific hypotheses will be offered. In terms of gender of the respondent, no significant relationship is expected with the dependent variables. Although one may suspect that gender of the observer may interact with gender of the actor in the scenario, the social normative aspect suggests otherwise. As previously noted, gender in this thesis is considered to be a socially constructed concept subject to stereotypes and norms at the societal level. From an intergroup perspective, both men and women should perceive gender stereotypes through the same lens. This assertion is supported by a significant body of research indicating that men and women subscribe to similar gender stereotypes (see Jost & Banaji [1994]). Nosek, Banaji, and Greenwald's (2002) study on gender stereotypes relating to math also demonstrated that both men and women associate men more with math than women. In fact, they found this stereotype endorsed even by women who majored in math and science. It is believed that the social norms relating to gender and absence identified through the scenarios in Study 1 will be shared by both men and women. While this may not be the case if the scenarios were asking the judges to place themselves in the situations, the perceptions of others should be subject to the same normative beliefs regardless of the gender of the observer. Relating to judgments of

responsibility, a similar phenomenon was discovered in the previously mentioned study by Farwell and Weiner (2000), who sought to explore whether liberals withheld judgments of responsibility in the face of an actor's poverty more than conservatives. The finding was that the model held equally for liberals and conservatives but that there were stereotypes at play as both liberals and conservatives expected liberals to be more generous and conservatives to be harsher. The authors highlighted media representations as feeding the stereotypical views among these political groups. In terms of the current study, similar results are expected in that both genders will subscribe to the same stereotypes regardless of personal self-identity. At the same time, analyses will be undertaken to verify the effects of gender of the observer on the predicted relationships. If observer gender has an influence of judgments of responsibility, it will be included in the analysis and discussion. In terms of job title, the envisioned sample will consist exclusively of white-collar workers and the expectation is that views regarding absenteeism should be fairly consistent. Post hoc analyses will assess any influence of supervisory duties on the results.

4.3 The Complete Model

In summary, the model developed highlights the importance of reasons causing absence, the gender of the focal actor in the vignettes, context, and the attitude of the observer on judgments of responsibility and accountability that, in turn, will lead to affective reactions and will impact the decision to punish or not. The full model is displayed in Figure 4.5.

4.4 Methodology

In order to test the hypotheses, experimentally manipulated vignettes and questionnaires were used. The experimental manipulations consisted of a three-factor design with completely randomized assignment to conditions. Reason for absence, gender of the absentee, and context of the absence episode were manipulated in the vignettes. The questionnaire measured judgment of responsibility, anger, sympathy, intent to punish, intent to help, as well as general absence legitimacy, work ethic and conscientiousness.

As previously noted, vignettes or judgment tasks are rare in absence research and have been used in only 1% of absenteeism studies (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993). However, they are ideal for studying single absence episodes and uncovering normative influences. Nicholson (1977) underlines that it will be judges who will determine where a particular absence episode falls on the A-B continuum, and that such judgments will be made on a case-by-case basis based on norms. Furthermore, vignettes are ideal for examining aspects of absence that are not available in company records. As previously underlined, organizational records are often vague on issues such as reason for absence and offer no information about the context surrounding absenteeism. The finer-grained approach developed in this study requires a more detailed description of an episode. Even for absences for which reasons are coded, such as illness absence, vignettes allow for a more detailed approach and the incorporation of different variables. Vignettes can also provide insight into areas for which traditional methods are of limited use, such as the identification of potentially self-serving excuses for absence. As noted by Tharenou (1993b), if illness excuses are actually attributions for absence for other reasons, it is

difficult for researchers to find this out short of having researchers follow around people who have called in sick in “sunglasses and trench coats” (p. 377). Vignettes allow researchers to determine what reasons for absence are socially acceptable and the likelihood that reasons such as illness are a valuable excuse in order to escape sanctions.

Still, vignette studies are often criticized on external validity grounds, specifically in regards to ecological validity. Within the organizational sciences, several researchers including Gorman, Clover, and Doherty (1978) and Murphy, Herr, Lockhart, and Maguire (1986) suggest that simplified vignettes are unable to capture all the cues available to managers in real work settings. These criticisms, however, often involve the validity of using paper people in the context of interpersonal exchanges such as performance appraisals or job selection procedures for which vignettes are indeed suboptimal. In real life settings relating to performance appraisal, managers will have intimate knowledge of the employee being appraised, while in selection cases the interviewer will be bombarded by stimuli coming from the interviewee. As such, vignettes do seem inadequate in studying such interpersonal phenomena. The vignettes in the current study, however, do not focus on relationships but emphasize normative issues and absence cultures. While simplification of reality through vignettes certainly occurs, Finch (1987) highlights that vignettes are appropriate for examining normative issues in areas where it is difficult to gain access. Furthermore, vignettes allow researchers to introduce variety and context into studies (Finch, 1987). In all, vignettes allow researchers to introduce the complexity of norms and context into studies, but in a manageable way. Vignette studies in organizational behavior that have focused on norms include Olson, Dell’omo, and Jarley’s (1992) study on arbitration criteria, Larwood,

Rand, and Der Hovanesian's (1979) study of sex role stereotypes on performance, Greenhaus and Powell's (2003) study on family versus work pressure and absenteeism, and Martocchio and Judge's (1994, 1995) studies on legitimacy of different reasons for absence.

At the same time, the reservations surrounding ecological validity and vignettes cannot be ignored. As such, care was taken to create scenarios that are realistic and tap into concepts that are likely activated in real work settings. Specifically, the vignettes were written in a way that emphasized norms and widely-held absence cultures rather than interpersonal relations. Specifically, the vignettes described absence in the context of cross-departmental work arrangements to satisfy this external validity requirement.

There are many instances in real world work settings where individuals rely on others without the benefit of close, regular interpersonal contact. Distributed work, cross-functional teams, project management, and many day-to-day operations in medium or large size organizations involve people from different areas relying on each other's cooperation and attendance. As such, the vignettes employed in this study involve a situation in which an employee is being affected by the absence of a colleague in another area. On the one hand, this is a realistic issue that reflects normal business operations. On the other hand, judgments relating to close colleagues within the same department or manager-employee relations would likely be dominated by interpersonal relations and individual factors. For such questions, a vignette strategy would be inappropriate.

Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, the vignettes in Study 1 concern white-collar, professional employees, which is a group that has commonly been neglected in absenteeism research due to the unavailability of absence records for these employees.

Again, this represents another reason why the vignette approach is valuable as it allows white collar absenteeism to be studied.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the vignettes were experimentally manipulated and that each respondent only viewed a single version. Other studies using scenarios in relation to absenteeism have not followed this approach. Some, such as the studies by Addae (2003) and Edwards and Whitston (1993), have presented a series of completely different vignettes to respondents and requested judgments on each. While this approach is appropriate for the goals of these studies of uncovering generalized attitudes on absenteeism, it is impossible to isolate specific dimensions relating to reasons for absence, occupation, context, or gender as these are confounded between and within the vignettes. Other studies, such as those by Judge and Martocchio (1996), Martocchio and Judge (1994), and Simpson and Martocchio (1997) have presented a common vignette and manipulated a single aspect. However, these studies have requested that respondents make judgments on every manipulation in turn. While this approach facilitates analysis of within-subject responses, between-subject responses across manipulations are no longer independent from one another, but are confounded by respondent. Given Study 1's emphasis on norms, the individual within-person focus of these studies is not appropriate and the decision was made to only allow each respondent to assess a single vignette.

Overall, the experimental approach employed in this study is rare in absence research (Martocchio & Harrison, 1993). This fact, combined with the emphasis on context, gender, reason for absence, and white-collar absenteeism underscores Study 1's important contribution to absence research.

4.4.1 Sample

Johns (2001b) reminds us that participants represent another form of context in a study, as their identity can affect the chances of finding relationships between variables. For Study 1, care was taken to target a participant pool that would find the topic important, and would find the methodology relevant and familiar, while still providing a wide range of responses. As such, participants for the study were randomly selected from a list of over 6,000 managers and information technology professionals who are users of a major enterprise resource planning (ERP) software package and who attended the software provider's 2006 users' conference. Targeting participants at this conference virtually ensured that respondents were currently involved in a cross-functional implementation project or had been involved in such a project previously. Most conference attendees worked in the educational or governmental sectors. Two thousand individuals received a personalized e-mail invitation to participate in the study by completing an on-line web survey. As an incentive to participate, invitees were offered the chance to win an Apple iPod through a random draw. Eighty-seven e-mails were returned as invalid. Of the remaining 1,913 invitations 454 completed the web questionnaire for a response rate of 24%. While the response rate is modest, the e-mail format made it difficult to determine how many invitations reached their destination (compared with messages that may have been flagged as SPAM). Furthermore, the homogeneous nature of the targeted sample somewhat reduces the fears that those who responded were markedly different from the final sample.

The average age of respondents was 44 years, 35.7% were men vs. 64.3% women, 69% had children (93% of these had three children or less), and 62% were in supervisory

positions. Jobs of respondents were in the managerial or technical field, ranging from senior administrative positions to programmers; however, all were involved in informational technology implementation projects at some level.

4.4.2 Measurement

4.4.2.1 Vignettes. A total of 16 vignettes (4 reasons x 2 contexts x gender) were used. To enhance the ecological validity of the vignettes, they were quite detailed. Below is the vignette for the condition of male, illness absence, and moderate work demands:

Please imagine that you are a member of a project team planning the implementation of a new software program that will integrate various organizational functions into one system. The project has faced several roadblocks and has involved very long hours, especially over the last few months.

One of the key technical experts on the team is Tom Edwards. Although you are both part of the implementation team, you work in different departments and know each other only through the project. On a personal level, you only know that Tom is married and has two young children. Tom's contributions are vital to the team's success and you personally rely on Tom's work to be able to complete your own tasks.

In three weeks, the implementation team is scheduled to give a demonstration to the organization's top management. There is a lot of work to be done from now until then, but you are confident that the team will meet the deadline.

Early this morning, Tom left a voice message on his boss's phone line that he will not be coming to work today. You learn from one of his coworkers that he is absent due to a bad cold.

In the female version, the name Tom is replaced with Pamela. The reasons manipulated were absence due to cold, absence due to a closure at his/her son's school, absence due to the stress brought on by the project, and absence due to perceived inequity concerning the stipend received for working on the project. In the vignette displayed above, work context was described in the paragraph beginning with "In three weeks...." and portrays moderate work demands. In the high work demands context, this paragraph was rewritten as:

In three days, the implementation team is scheduled to give a demonstration to the organization's top management. There is a lot of work to be done from now until then and nobody is sure if the team will be able to meet the deadline.

4.4.2.2 Responsibility model. The items for judgments of responsibility, anger, sympathy, intent to punish, and intent to help are drawn from the extensive research on Weiner's (1995a) and Schlenker et al.'s (1994) responsibility theories. The items displayed below are from the male version. The name of the focal actor, Tom or Pamela, was mentioned in each question to reinforce the salience of gender.

Judgment of Responsibility. Judgments of responsibility were measured using three items from Schlenker et al.'s (1994) study that have been modified for absenteeism. An example is: "How much of an obligation does Tom have to attend in this situation?" All three items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* to *very much* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

Anger. Anger was measured using three items from a study testing Weiner's model through structural equation modeling by Reizenzein (1986). An example is: "How angry would you feel at Tom?" All three items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* to *very much* ($\alpha = .91$).

Sympathy. Sympathy was also measured by three items from Reizenzein (1986). Example: "How much sympathy would you feel for Tom?" All three items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* to *very much* ($\alpha = .84$).

Intention to punish. Intentions to punish was measured with two items developed for this study "Do you believe Tom deserves to be punished for his absence?" and "Would you hope for some form of disciplinary action against Tom for his absence?",

and an item from Weiner (1995a) “What kind of punishment should be given to Tom?”

All three items were measured on 7-point scales ($\alpha = .94$).

Intention to help. Intention to help was measured through two items from Reizenzein (1986) and one modified item from Weiner (1995a). The items are “How likely is it you would help Tom with his work?”, “How certain are you that you would help cover for Tom?”, and “How likely is it that you would help do Tom’s work?” All three items were measured on 7-point scales ranging from *not at all* to *very much* ($\alpha = .87$).

4.4.2.3 Characteristics of the respondent. Absence legitimacy, work ethic, and conscientiousness was measured using validated measurement scales.

Absence legitimacy. Absence legitimacy was measured using Addae’s (2003) 10-item acceptable legitimacy measure. Examples include “Absenteeism is simply a behavior employees cannot avoid” and “Absence from work is a legitimate work behavior.” All 10 items were measured on 5-point scales ($\alpha = .83$).

Work Ethic. As previously noted, work ethic was measured through two dimensions: hard work and centrality of work. Each dimension was measured through ten items from Miller and Woehr’s Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) (Miller et al. (2002). An example of items for hard work is “Hard work makes one a better person”, while “Even if I inherited a great deal of money, I would continue to work somewhere” is an example of a centrality of work item. All items were measured on a 5-point scales ($\alpha = .87$ for hard work, $\alpha = .85$ for centrality of work).

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness was measured with 9 items contained in the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) which is a widely used and reliable measure of the Big Five personality traits consisting of a series of statements

beginning with “I see myself as someone who....”. Examples for conscientiousness items include: “I see myself as someone who does a thorough job” and “I see myself as someone who is easily distracted (reverse coded)”. All 9 items were measured on 5-point scales ($\alpha=.81$).

In order to guard against priming effects of the individual characteristics on the responsibility model, the web survey was programmed to alternate the order of the sections so that for half the respondents the vignettes and dependent variable items would appear first and the individual characteristic items would appear second, while the other half of respondents would get the reverse order. A variable for order was created and entered as a control in the primary analyses, and no effect was detected in terms of the relationships between the focal variables.

Gender of respondent, parental status, age of respondent, and supervisory roles were measured through nominal (M/F, Yes/No) questions. Finally, each respondent was invited to add additional comments to the questionnaires if they had anything they would like to add concerning the vignettes. An example of the full questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Descriptive Statistics and bivariate correlations

Table 4.1 displays the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and bivariate correlations of all the variables in the study. Histograms were created, and skewness and kurtosis tests were performed, for all independent scale variables and no evidence of problems relating to normality were discovered.

In terms of correlations between variables, the associations between the independent variables and the associations between the five dependent variables were in the expected directions. For example, absence legitimacy was negatively associated with hard work ($r = -.22, p < .01$), centrality of work ($r = -.20, p < .01$), and conscientiousness ($r = -.23, p < .01$). Hard work, centrality of work, and conscientiousness were all positively correlated at $p < .01$. The five dependent variables were all strongly associated in the expected directions with a range of correlations in absolute values from .34 to .70, all at $p < .01$.

4.5.2 Hypothesis testing

4.5.2.1 The Weiner model. Hypotheses 1 to 3 sought to replicate Weiner's (1995a, 1995b) judgment of responsibility model in terms of absenteeism in order to determine the appropriateness of the dependent variables for the subsequent substantive analyses. The predictions were that judgments of responsibility following absenteeism would be positively related to feelings of anger and intentions to punish, and negatively related to feelings of sympathy and intentions to help. It was also predicted that, consistent with Weiner's theory, emotions would mediate the responsibility-behavioral intentions relationship. As noted by Mathieu and Taylor (2006), mediation analysis is warranted when strong theoretical predictions exist. While the correlations displayed in Table 4.1 indicate support for hypotheses 1 and 2, additional analyses were undertaken to confirm this and test for mediation. Structural equation modeling (SEM), using EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 1995), was used to test the model displayed in Figure 4.2. Mathieu and Taylor (2006) explain that SEM is the best choice for testing mediation models as both measurement properties and the nature of relationships can be assessed simultaneously.

They underline that prior to assessing mediation, proper measurement must be ensured and discriminant validity must be established. While the reliabilities for the five variables (responsibility, anger, sympathy, punishment, and helping) are high, some of the correlations are large enough to warrant verifying the discriminant validity. As such, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the 15 questionnaire items to verify the 5 factor measurement model. The five factor model yield a strong fit ($\chi^2 = 205.65$ $p < 0.001$ $df = 80$, CFI = .980, GFI = .937, RMSEA = .05). The standardized estimates for the measurement model are displayed in Table 4.2. In terms of the structural model to verify the responsibility – anger – punishment and responsibility – sympathy – helping links displayed in the Figure 4.2, the model proved to be a strong fit for the data ($\chi^2 = 270.23$ $p < 0.001$ $df = 86$, CFI = .969, GFI = .920, RMSEA = .06). The structural model with parameter estimates is displayed in Figure 4.6. Overall, the correlation matrix, reliability tests, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equations, are in full support of hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

4.5.2.2 Individual characteristics of the observers. Hypothesis 4 predicts that individual characteristics of observers (i.e., absence legitimacy attitude, work ethic, and conscientiousness) will be related to judgments of responsibility concerning absence, emotions, and behavioral intentions. Regression equations were constructed to test the predictions. As demonstrated in Table 4.3, absence legitimacy was the only variable related to each of the dependent variables. Consistent with Hypothesis 4a, absence legitimacy had negative relationships with judgments of responsibility ($\beta = -.831$, $p < .001$), anger ($\beta = -.819$, $p < .001$), and punishment ($\beta = -.814$, $p < .001$), and positive relationships with sympathy ($\beta = .474$, $p < .001$) and intentions to help ($\beta = .443$, $p < .001$).

No other significant relationships were found with the remaining individual characteristics, with the exception that having a strong work ethic in terms of centrality of work predicted intentions to help ($\beta = .434, p < .001$). Overall, hypothesis 4a concerning absence legitimacy was fully supported, hypothesis 4c concerning conscientiousness was not, and support for hypothesis 4b relating to work ethic was extremely limited.

As absence legitimacy was the only variable that was strongly and consistently associated with each dependent variable, it is the only variable that will be retained for the primary analyses. Specifically, when testing the experimental manipulations of reason for absence, gender, and context, absence legitimacy will be controlled for in the analyses.

4.5.2.3 Manipulated factors. As previously underlined, the crux of this study is the determination of what circumstantial or social group factors influence judgments of responsibility by coworkers following the absenteeism of a colleague. The individual characteristics of respondents were analyzed first for the purpose of identifying covariates for the analysis of covariance tests. Hypotheses 5 to 9 concerned predictions based on the vignettes with experimental manipulations on reason for absence, gender of absentee, and context.

Unlike highly controlled experiments in which an equal number of participants are assigned to different conditions, the programming of the web-based survey was designed to generate conditions randomly. Consequently, due to computer randomization and respondents submitting incomplete questionnaires, equal cell counts could not be ensured. Table 4.4 displays the cell sizes across the 16 experimental conditions. While 429 respondents provided complete data for analysis of hypotheses 5 to 9, cells were not

equal across conditions. While the number of respondents would have led to an optimal equal cell size of approximately 27, actual cell sizes ranged from 20 to 37. As per the recommendations by Keppel and Wickens (2004), analyses of the experiment in Study 1 were conducted through the general linear model (GLM) which is appropriate when cell sizes are not equal. In terms of specific choices brought forth by the unequal cell sizes, the Type III sum of squares were used in the SPSS analyses and procedures specific to unequal cell sizes were employed when required (Keppel & Wickens, 2004).

For the main analyses, MANCOVA (multiple analysis of covariance) was employed with reason for absence, gender of the absentee, and context entered as factors, absence legitimacy entered as a covariate in order to control for its effect, and responsibility, anger, sympathy, helping, and punishment entered as the dependent variables. Table 4.5 displays the main effects and interactions of each of the independent variables on the multivariate and univariate dependent variables. Due to the unequal cell sizes caused by the programming of the web survey and missing values, Pillai's criterion was retained for the multivariate analyses. The F statistic, which is robust when cell sizes are unequal (Keppel & Wickens, 2004), was used for the univariate analyses.

Hypothesis 5a predicted that reason for absence would influence judgments of responsibility, emotional reactions and behavioral intentions. As per Table 4.5, this hypothesis was strongly supported in the multivariate analysis (Pillai's = .571, $p < 0.001$) and each of the univariate analyses for the five dependent variables (Fs between 23.51 and 85.36, all $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 5b predicted that judgments of responsibility would be lowest for illness absence and highest for inequity perceptions, with childcare reasons in between. This pattern was predicted to be consistent for the other dependent variables.

For judgments of responsibility, hypothesis 5b was supported as demonstrated by the Games-Howell GH comparisons in Table 4.6 and by Figure 4.7. Games-Howell comparisons are similar to the better known Tukey and Bonferroni comparisons, but are optimal when cell sizes are unequal and heterogeneity assumptions are violated as was the case for two of the dependant variables (responsibility and punishment). Despite this, the results of the Games-Howell comparisons were identical to Bonferroni comparisons (not shown). While the pattern between illness absence and inequity absence was consistent for the other four dependent variables, there was no significant difference between illness absence and childcare absence in terms of anger, sympathy, punishment or helping. As such, hypothesis 5b was supported for judgments of responsibility and partially supported for the other dependent variables. In terms of the stress reason for absence, which was generally kept out of the hypotheses, the Games-Howell comparisons in Table 4.6 indicate that stress is not considered a medical condition in the same way as having a cold. Specifically, the comparisons indicate that respondents held absentees more responsible for absence, were angrier at absenteeism, and advocated punishment to a greater degree when the reason for absence was stress versus having a cold. There were, however, similar levels of sympathy and helping intentions vis-à-vis stress and illness. It appears that stress is viewed as real, but not necessarily a proper reason to miss work. In all comparisons, respondents did have a more positive reaction to stress absence than inequity absence.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that women would be judged less responsible for their absence, would elicit less anger and punishment, and would garner more sympathy and help. As per Table 4.5, this hypothesis was not supported. Post-hoc analyses were

conducted to see if gender of the respondent may have affected this result by entering gender of the respondent as a factor in the MANCOVA. As indicated in Table 4.7, gender of the respondent did not affect any of the dependent variables and did not interact with gender of the absentee. Furthermore, there was no interaction between gender of the absentee and reason for absence. In terms of gender of respondent and context, an interaction appeared suggesting that women advocate harsher punishment than men when context demands attendance. For the other dependent variables, no gender of respondent-context interactions were observed.

Hypotheses 7 to 9 concerned context. Hypothesis 7 predicted that context would strongly influence judgments of responsibility and emotional reactions. As per Table 4.5, this hypothesis was supported in the multivariate analysis (Pillai's = .122, $p < 0.001$) and each of the univariate analyses for the three dependent variables ($F = 25.39$, $p < 0.001$ for responsibility, $F = 36.43$, $p < 0.001$ for anger, and $F = 4.286$, $p < 0.05$ for sympathy). Hypothesis 8a and 8b predicted interactions between context and reason for absence and gender of absentee respectively. As demonstrated in Table 4.5, hypothesis 8b (gender-context interaction) was not supported. For hypothesis 8a (reason-context interaction), the multivariate test was significant (Pillai's = .83, $p < 0.01$). However, identifying the nature of this interaction proved difficult as none of the univariate analyses yield a significant interaction. While, the interaction between context and reason on responsibility was close to reaching significance and the simple comparisons displayed in Table 4.8 indicate an interaction, Figure 4.8 suggests that this interaction is dominated by the main effects. However, for illness absence especially and for childcare as well, there is a stronger effect of context compared to the other reasons. This result suggests that when context

demands attendance, missing work due to a cold or due to childcare demands becomes less acceptable. As such, hypothesis 8a is partially supported. Finally, in terms of the effect of context on behavioral intentions, Hypothesis 9 predicted that context would influence intent to punish but not intention to help. This hypothesis was supported as demonstrated in Table 4.5. While desire to punish was significantly higher when context demanded attendance ($F=35.6$, $p<0.001$), the reverse was not the case for intentions to help ($F=2.393$, $p=.123$). Evidently, when work demands are urgent, coworkers can overcome their anger and desire to punish in order to help the work get done.

Overall, the hypotheses were supported/unsupported as follows:

Hypothesis 1:	Supported
Hypothesis 2:	Supported
Hypothesis 3:	Supported
Hypothesis 4a:	Supported
Hypothesis 4b:	Partially supported
Hypothesis 4c:	Not supported
Hypothesis 5a:	Supported
Hypothesis 5b:	Partially supported
Hypothesis 6:	Not Supported
Hypothesis 7:	Supported
Hypothesis 8a:	Partially supported
Hypothesis 8b:	Not supported
Hypothesis 9:	Supported

4.5.3 Additional analyses

As explained, additional post-hoc analyses were performed to explore the impact of gender of the respondent, parental status, and supervisory duties. MANCOVA analyses were performed by adding gender and supervision as factors. There were no direct or interaction effects for either of these variables. As such, the results hold regardless of gender of the respondent or whether or not the respondent performs supervisory duties. Regression analysis indicated that age of respondent did not affect the dependent variables either.

I was intrigued by the strong effect that absence legitimacy had on the dependent variables and decided to explore the predictors of this recently developed variable. Regression analysis was used with age, gender, hard work, centrality of work, and conscientiousness as predictors. As indicated in Table 4.9, age, hard work ethic, and conscientiousness were all negatively related to absence legitimacy.

Finally, the qualitative comments of respondents were read to gain additional insight into reactions of coworkers when a colleague is absent. Fortuitously, 200 respondents supplemented their questionnaire answers with additional comments. Many respondents used the comments to expand or explain their answers relating to the vignettes, e.g. "Someone with a bad cold often needs to take the day to reoperate (sic) rather than come in infect everyone else and get sicker.", "We are all stressed, but should come to work to help each other with the project and help/rely on one another with the stress" or "Pamela has impacted the workload of the entire project team. While I wouldn't necessarily punish, I would consider her absence when making rewards for progress." However, a common theme in several of the comments concerned the absentee's pattern of behavior over time. Comments consistent with this focus included "These answers

would change if Tom had history of this type of thing. But if he is a reliable worker, then these are my responses,” “Only how often does this happen? If it very rare, I would be more willing to set in and help, but if it is a on going problem, then I think something should be done, as in replaceing (sic) her on the team,” and “My aggravation level and desire for discipline would go up if I knew this type of asbsence (sic) was habitual. It would go down if I discovered his illness was more than just a cold and he reported to work the next day prepared to work harder to make up.” Such comments are consistent with the study by Conlon and Stone (1992) who demonstrated that absence prone employees are quickly labeled across observers and situations and receive fewer recommendations for promotion in simulated selection scenarios. Consistent the attribution theory, these comments also suggest the importance of consistency effects (Kelley & Michela, 1980) when making attributions. From the perspective of Doise’s (1986) levels model, this interest in patterns of behavior emphasizes that judgments of responsibility involve interpersonal issues that develop over time in a relationship.

4.6 Discussion

The results of this study indicate that not all absenteeism is created equal, but that reason for absence and context surrounding absence can influence how responsible/accountable an employee will be held for an absence episode. Context and reason can also influence emotional reactions and behavioral intentions of coworkers. Overall, the study offers a novel method of operationalizing Nicholson’s (1977) absence continuum model. Specifically, context surrounding an absence episode and reason for absence will be important factors for determining if an episode falls closer to the A side (legitimate) or the B side (illegitimate) of the continuum. The study also extends

Weiner's judgment of responsibility model to a workplace setting and creates links to Schlenker et al.'s (1994) judgment of responsibility triangle, especially in terms of the event-prescription link.

In terms of specific findings, several relating to reason for absence deserve mention. First, as predicted, illness appears to be a legitimate reason to miss work. While this finding may appear quite mundane, the aforementioned lack of transparency surrounding illness and the information asymmetry between the employer and employee increase the possibility that illness may be used as a self-serving excuse to deflect responsibility and punishment. Managers should keep this in mind when developing policies that provide sick leave absences. Such policies may encourage absenteeism by providing employees with a convenient way to present A-type absenteeism in terms of Nicholson's (1977) continuum. From a social expectation/absence culture perspective, the results suggest that there is a high-level absence culture operating which legitimates illness absence. At the same time, the fact that illness absence, which purportedly is an involuntary reason for absence, was responsible for the interaction between context and reason is also of interest. Evidently, the respondents in this study view not coming in due to a cold to be a conscious decision that is less socially acceptable when context demands attendance. Overall, illness absence needs to be looked at more closely in future research. Second, results clearly indicate that absence to redress inequity is considered by others to fall on the B-side of Nicholson's continuum. This finding is especially interesting given the general finding that individuals view engaging in absenteeism as a legitimate means to redress inequity they themselves are experiencing (Johns, in press). As previously stated, this contradiction is likely caused by the differences in perceptions of one's own

versus another's behavior. This is consistent with the large body of research on attributions indicating that individuals evaluate themselves differently than they do others; specifically, individuals view negative outcomes concerning others as caused by personal factors, while negative outcomes involving oneself are perceived to be caused by external factors. Many of the additional comments by respondents clearly indicated that absence due to inequity was perceived as a personal failing rather than a response to an unfair situation. Examples of comments include "Pamela is showing that she is not reliable," "Pamela sounds self-centered and not a responsible person," and "Behaviour of this type is childish and has no place in a professional setting." In terms of absence and inequity, future studies should assess this self versus others issue directly by using vignettes that position the respondent him/herself as the focal actor versus vignettes in which a coworker is the focal actor. Third, the results indicate that childcare duties are perceived as a legitimate reason to miss work that solicit sympathy and helping. This should serve as a reminder to managers and researchers that absence often has to do with factors external to the organization, or, alternatively, that individuals can use the childcare excuse to deflect sanctions. Finally, the results for stress as a reason for absence indicate that individuals are viewed as responsible/accountable for this type of absence but that they still garner sympathy and intentions to help. The pattern of results indicates that stress is not viewed the same way as illness. More research will be needed to understand the legitimacy of stress-related absence.

The gender of the absentee had little effect on the dependent variables in this study. Results for gender did not differ by reason, including childcare, and post-hoc tests revealed no effect of gender of the respondent. Overall, explanations for the consistent

findings that women are generally more absent than men remain unclear. In the current study, perhaps the occupational group (managers and IT professionals in a higher education setting) suppressed the effect of this variable, but more study will be required to support this claim. Given the story depicted in the vignettes, it is possible that a *team member* social identity trumped the *gender* social identity. Several of the additional comments by respondents focused on team membership and duties/expectations of team members.

The results clearly indicate that work context plays an important role in the evaluation of workplace behaviors. What may be a benign and acceptable behavior in one situation may not be in another, including illness. This study manipulated context based on closeness to deadline and uncertainty about completing tasks on time. The results are another indication that organizational researchers need to include contextual variables in their studies. The vignette approach in the current study allowed for this important variable to be assessed. Further studies on absence, turnover, and other workplace behaviors would do well to find a way to include issues of context in research designs. Other contextual factors such as the consequences of missing a deadline, the centrality and uniqueness of skills of the absentee, and the existence of formal absence control policies would all be useful extensions to the current study.

The study further confirmed the viability of the absence legitimacy construct and scale. It appears quite clear that individuals have a wide range of personal opinions concerning the legitimacy of absenteeism as a work behavior, and that this influences reactions to the absence of coworkers. Future studies on absence should continue to include this attitude.

Finally, the additional comments provided by respondents suggest that absence proneness represents an area of interest in future research. Absence proneness is identified by Johns and Nicholson (1982) as an important theoretical direction to consider, but one that has, once again, been more about speculation than empirical study. Proneness to absence is linked to personality and deviance models of absence (Johns, 1997) but research on absence and personality has been slow to emerge (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). At the same time, Johns and Nicholson (1982) note that not all people who are prone to absence have deviant personalities but may be prone for different reasons. Still, regardless of the reason, it seems likely that a high absence rate over a long period of time will grab attention and lead to a reaction from supervisors and coworkers. In their case study of the British Rail, Edwards and Whitston (1993) reported that absence policies were enacted only for repeat offenders, and that individuals prone to absence were highly stigmatized. As such, one could predict that as absences increase, judgments of responsibility would become stronger leading to more anger and more punishment. Even if the absences are for a valid reason, it is not difficult to imagine managers or coworkers saying “enough is enough” at one point. Overall, it appears that when an individual makes a judgment of responsibility concerning absence, the absentee's prior record will be taken into account. This is consistent with past research by Conlon and Stone (1992). Future studies should include a manipulation for absence proneness to explore this variable directly.

In terms of Doise's (1986) levels of analysis model, the study demonstrates that social expectations concerning absence involve intrapersonal factors (absence legitimacy), interpersonal factors (evaluations of others, team duties), and factors that

seem to be operating at a cultural (such as the legitimacy of illness absence and the importance of context).

4.6.1 Limitations

As previously noted, an inherent limitation of vignette studies concerns their artificial nature that limits ecological validity. At the same time, many of the questions explored in this study would be difficult to study through other methods. The ability to manipulate context, gender, and reason is the primary strength of this method. Still, additional methods, including qualitative approaches, would be useful to further explore the variables in the current study.

Another weakness of the study is the common method variance in terms of the relationships between the dependent variables, and the dependent variables and absence legitimacy. While the correlations between the dependent variables were high, it is useful to note that the pattern of relationships between the manipulated variables and the DV's demonstrated variability. Furthermore, absence legitimacy was a control variable rather than a primary independent variable.

From a substantive standpoint, the results only support the event-prescription link of Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model of responsibility. While the gender variable did not shed light on the identity-related links, other variables such as proneness deserve future consideration. Given the significant impact of the absence legitimacy outcome on the dependent variables, this construct also deserves future study. Also, future studies should expand the list of reasons for absence to include other types of illnesses, other workplace factors, and other non-work factors. Finally, other occupations should be surveyed in future studies to enhance the generalizability of this study's results.

4.7 Conclusion to Study 1

Study 1 has demonstrated that, when studying absenteeism, social expectations beyond a simple lack of presence are very important. The results suggest that there is a high-level absence culture legitimizing illness absence, and that social expectations concerning absenteeism are very sensitive to context. Based on these social expectation factors, along with general attitudes concerning absenteeism, individuals will make different attribution-type judgments that will involve emotions and behavioral intentions.

While Study 1 took a very fine grained approach to absenteeism focusing on social expectations surrounding a distinct episode, Study 2 will step back and explore social expectations concerning absenteeism that are discernable and manifested through the popular press.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. STUDY TWO: ABSENCE IN THE POPULAR PRESS

Martocchio and Harrison (1993) note that absenteeism has been a major subject of research for over 50 years in organizational behavior due to its perceived costs to organizations, the availability of data through company records, and the fact that it is inherently interesting. As underlined in the introduction, one source of this inherent interest is likely due to the fact that most regular people have come in contact with the concept and it is part of the public consciousness. This presence of absence in the public domain is underscored by the number of times absenteeism is mentioned in newspapers. The strong presence of absenteeism in the press creates a unique opportunity for absence researchers to explore the meaning of the concept within North American society. Through a content analysis of articles featuring absence from work appearing in the *New York Times*, this review tracks the treatment of absenteeism, its perceived causes and outcomes, and links to pertinent theoretical models of absence over time.

Study 1 demonstrated that social expectations surrounding absenteeism are more important than a simple lack of presence when exploring the consequences for individuals following an absence episode. These social expectations partially reflect societal-level absence cultures and influence where judges perceive an absence episode falls on Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum. If the social expectation aspect of absenteeism is important, then one must ask: Where do such expectations come from? Nicholson (1977) remarks that understanding absenteeism requires taking the beliefs and values salient in an individual's social environment into account, and that pertinent norm-sending influences must be identified. The mass media can be one such influence. As also

noted in the introduction, Nicholson and Johns's (1985) concept of absence cultures relates not only to proximal forces of the workgroup, but also includes cultural and socioeconomic-level factors. Given that newspapers can provide a window into cultural and socioeconomic norms and context, the treatment of absenteeism in newspapers can provide clues to general norms and expectations surrounding the behavior in society.

The content analysis of articles in the *New York Times* will thus be primarily concerned with the ideological level of Doise's (1986) level of analysis framework (although other levels will be covered as well). Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses, the content analysis will describe the public representation of absence from work in the media, explain the causal linkages surrounding absence that appear regularly in the press, demonstrate the links between absenteeism and societal context, and hopefully shed light on the source of stereotypes and commonly held assumptions and beliefs about absence from work.

5.1 Business thinking and the popular press

As noted by Gephart (1993), there is an incredible amount of information on business topics available in documents, but it is sometimes difficult to convert this information in a systematic way in order to make it manageable. An example of texts regularly dealing with business topics is daily newspapers.

Mass media studies have long been a fixture in journalism and communications studies research. Increasingly, however, researchers from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, and business have begun analyzing media messages (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005). This wider scope of academic interest has come about through the belief that the mass media can have powerful effects on action, that

individuals and groups can use the mass media for their own purposes, and that there is sometimes an interesting discrepancy between what is reported in the media and reality (Riffe et al., 2005). The following passage explains the multi-dimensional interest in mass communication consistent with the emphasis in the current study:

Communication is central to human existence, and the content of communication represents a rich data source whether one focuses on describing images and portrayals because of their assumed effects or examines content as an unobtrusive indicator of antecedent conditions on behaviors (Riffe, Lacey, & Fico, 2005 p. 17).

The notions that newspapers can have an impact, can be used by groups/individuals in the public domain, and are written from certain points of view are essential. Although the press is often presented as objective and unbiased, no text is ever truly objective but always contains ideological underpinnings and reproduces social relations that exist within society (Fairclough, 1995). Mass media have the power to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, and social identities on issues ranging from gender, patriotism, social class, money, leisure and family, and are also a mirror for social norms and values that already exist. The content of newspapers is not facts about the world but ideas articulated from a particular ideological position (Fowler, 1991). A more accurate description is that news is the “end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selection of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories” (Hall et al., 1978, p.53). The categories that newspapers use are very broad (Fowler, 1991) which is likely due to the constraint that papers face in producing a new edition everyday. The result is that news stories often gloss over complexity in the pursuit of familiarity and often end up perpetuating

stereotypes (Fowler, 1991). But what about workplace issues in general and absenteeism in particular?

From a business standpoint, Abrahamson (1991, 1996) has been particularly active in suggesting that actual choices and policies within organizations can be influenced by outside forces, including the popular press. It is quite clear that business leaders read major newspapers more regularly than academic business research. In this sense, the popular press, best sellers, and business gurus can have much more of an impact on what actually happens in organizations than academic research (Abrahamson, 1991; 1996). Abrahamson advocates studying the rhetorics disseminated through the mass media in order to get research into the mainstream, and notes that the rhetorics present are a manifestation of the ideologies underpinning organizational topics of interest. Similar sentiments have been echoed by Johns (1993), who notes that organizational researchers' quest to emulate the natural sciences has cut researchers off from the applied field, and that theories need to ring truer to actual managers to be viewed as relevant. By focusing on media representations that relate to absenteeism, this study intends to forge these links to the applied business world, and produce findings that will be recognizable and of interest to businesspeople. An underlying assumption in this study is that the press does more than report information, but can be a source and manifestation of social values. In this role, the press is useful for studying societal-level phenomena including social expectations surrounding absenteeism and societal-level absence cultures.

Beyond the general ideological component inherent in the medium, what other elements are pertinent when considering the treatment of absenteeism in the press? How

can one explain the strong presence of the topic over the years and what can we say about the coverage in general? As previously underlined, absenteeism has indeed been a recurring theme in newspapers over the last 150 years. One reason may be the fact that newspapers have a preference for printing negative stories (Hall et al, 1978; Fowler, 1991). As absenteeism is generally perceived in a negative light (Johns, 1994), absenteeism is automatically more newsworthy than, for example, job satisfaction. Beyond specific concepts, however, it is important to note that newspapers are intricately tied to business concerns. First, while editorial content may vary to a certain extent, major newspapers in North America are generally pro-capitalist and pro-business (Fairclough, 1995). Second, the voice of business leaders is strongly represented in the press. As specified by Hall et al. (1978) and Fowler (1991), newspapers do not create news but basically rely on credible sources for their content. Hall et al. (1978) refer to such sources as 'primary definers' who define what the issues are, provide primary interpretation, and specify the limits for discussion. Given the need to produce a paper on a daily basis, newspapers will continually return to credible sources over and over again. The result is that the views of powerful, institutional and accredited sources, such as government representatives, business leaders, union leaders, and various experts, are over-represented in the press (Hall et al., 1978). As such, treatment of absenteeism is likely to be framed by business leaders, as a labor relations issue, and include the views of experts and leaders in society. Finally, North American newspapers represent major businesses themselves that rely on profit, have ties to many other industries, and have their own internal labor relations issues (Fowler, 1991). As such, they should have the same interest in absenteeism as other businesses.

Still, the for-profit aspect underlines another important point: Newspapers must attract and satisfy their readers. They are commercial products that rely on customers for their viability. It would be false to view the impact that newspapers have on values and ideology as a sort of conspiracy of the powerful with newspapers shaping all of our minds. In truth, newspapers must conform to the expectations and values of their readers (Fowler, 1991). Publishers cannot afford to displease vocal publics if they expect to have some longevity (Krippendorff, 2004). As such, major newspapers are more like mirrors reflecting society's views on a number of topics as opposed to messages based solely on writers' and editors' opinions and interests.

Overall, tracking changes in the news regarding workplace absence over time, across gender, across contexts, and examining causal linkages should lead to interesting insight into how absenteeism is perceived within society.

5.2 Research Questions

A common misconception about content analysis and other methodologies heavily reliant on qualitative data is that such strategies should be purely inductive processes that rely on no theoretical foundations. On the contrary, Miles and Huberman (1994) relating to qualitative research and Riffe et al. (2005) relating to content analysis underline that these research strategies always involve a certain conceptual grounding, and that formal theory can be invaluable for framing research questions and anchoring the research. In qualitative research, research questions make theoretical assumptions more explicit and allow the researcher to channel his or her energy in specific directions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In content analysis, research questions are important for proceeding efficiently, both in terms of locating relevant texts and developing an

appropriate analysis strategy, and avoiding the danger of getting lost in abstractions (Krippendorff, 2004).

For Study 2 of this thesis, research questions were developed from two sources: The theoretical and substantive issues relating to absenteeism described in Chapters 2 and 3, and a qualitative pilot study of a sub-sample of the news articles under study. To recap, Chapter 2 emphasized theoretical directions such as absence cultures, level of analysis issues, and the important lens of attribution theory in studying absenteeism, while Chapter 3 focused on reasons for absence, gender and absence, contextual factors, and the treatment of absence as an independent variable. As indicated in those chapters, the current content analysis focuses on these issues, as will be reflected in the research questions.

Another important source of direction was a qualitative pilot study (Patton, 2005) of 270 newspaper articles within the overall sample. Specifically, the pilot study focused on articles from each decade from 1900 to 2000 by reviewing all articles on the 4s (1904, 1914, 1924, and so on). The pilot study demonstrated that, although the portrayal was overwhelmingly negative in terms of outcomes, absenteeism was often represented in different ways in different contexts, and that the connotation of deviance was not constant. Strong qualitative research likely leads to serendipitous findings and new integrations, helps researchers to go beyond initial conceptions, and helps to generate or revise conceptual frameworks (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Consistent with this, the pilot study suggested new directions and coding categories that were not evident at the outset of the project.

Based on the theoretical focus, substantive absenteeism issues, and the pilot study, the following five research questions were developed:

Research Question #1: How prevalent are the different absence models identified by Johns (1997) in the popular press, and are other reasons for absence also prominent?

This study represents an excellent opportunity to compare how a commonly studied topic in OB/HR is portrayed in the public domain versus academic research. The review of absence's treatment in academic research by Johns (1997), with the different models described in Chapter 3, will serve as a comparison point with the treatment in the press. As previously noted, academic research has traditionally had a predominant focus on work withdrawal as an explanation for absenteeism (Johns, 1997; 2003; Martocchio & Harrison, 1993) as the measurement of job attitudes using questionnaires facilitates correlational analyses involving absence records. If the pilot study (Patton, 2005) is a good indication, the reasons for absence described in the press are more varied and do not focus primarily on issues of work withdrawal. Similar to the case studies and direct queries on reasons for absence conducted by Edwards and Whitson (1993), there appears to be a strong focus on non-work related reasons for absence in the press.

Another focus will be on the ebb and flow of different reasons for absence over time. In the pilot study (Patton, 2005), some absence models appeared to be more prevalent in some time periods than others. For example, deviance and conflict models were prevalent during World War II and continued into the 1970s, medical models were prominent from the 1950s then disappeared only to return in the 1980s and 1990s in a

qualitatively different form. Stress models were all but absent until the 1990s, and withdrawal models appeared most prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. Other portrayals, such as deviance by politicians, were constant throughout the sample or appeared only in very specific contexts.

Causal links and qualitative treatment of absence based on different reasons will also be explored. For example, are certain models painted in more or less of a negative light? Are certain models associated with certain types of workers? What other phenomena are the different models associated with?

Another key element is to explore how the different absence models are associated with each other. The models described by Johns (1997) are not intended to be mutually exclusive, but are simply prominent models that exist in academic research. To the extent that they are present in the press, it is interesting to examine if certain models are linked. In the pilot study (Patton, 2005), there was evidence that deviance and conflict models were commonly linked. Furthermore, findings indicated that in the 1990s, stress, medical and withdrawal models became intertwined. Overall, such linkages will be explored. Whether or not articles featuring absence treat the behavior as having a single cause or representing a multi-faceted phenomena will also be explored. Given the press's penchant for categorization and simplification, the expectation is that most individual articles will focus on a single or a very limited number of reasons for absence.

Finally, consistent with the qualitative aspect of the research, care will be taken to uncover any new models that may emerge through the review. As previously noted, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that strong qualitative research allows the researcher to

go beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks.

Krippendorff (2004) notes that categories in content analysis should always be considered tentative and open to be combined, split or added to.

Research Question #2: How does the reporting on absenteeism vary across macro-contextual factors?

Consistent with Doise's (1986) conceptualization of behaviors involving factors beyond the individual, and the thesis's overarching emphasis on context, the content analysis will pay close attention to societal factors. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysts need to reconstruct the world in which a text makes sense in order to understand it. As such, he advocates attention to context as essential for conducting content analysis. An interesting feature of the articles included in the content analysis is that, while they all reference absenteeism, they are most often centered on a different topic. The pilot study (Patton, 2005) demonstrated that worker absenteeism can appear in articles on a wide range of topics such as industrial production in times of war, workplace stress, a politician's re-election campaign, a flu epidemic, snowstorms, labor conflict, or political turmoil in third-world countries. In this way, the articles reviewed are not only about absence, but also provide insight into what was going on in society during the time period in question.

While Study 1 emphasizes context at the local and interpersonal level, Study 2 will provide insight into how absenteeism is perceived across societal contexts. Edwards and Whitson (1993) state that social, cultural, and political contexts have a strong

influence on when absenteeism becomes viewed as an important issue in society. As previously noted, they suggest that in times of war or social upheaval, a “moral panic” (p.6) surrounds absenteeism that exaggerates the problem. This was demonstrated in the pilot study (Patton, 2005) in which 103 out of 279 articles featuring absenteeism appeared in 1944 although this represented only one of the eleven years in the sample (none of the other years was during World War Two [WWII]). In terms of exaggeration, Fowler (1991) demonstrated, through his review of a food poisoning scare in Great Britain, how the press has the power to create a crisis surrounding an issue when the actual problem may be quite small. Consistent with the discussion of attribution theory and Nicholson’s (1977) A-B continuum of absence in Study 1, perception is often more important than reality when considering absenteeism. Further relating to external context, Edwards and Whitston (1993) found that attention to and crackdowns on absenteeism were often initiated by outside forces such as increased competition rather than by any actual increase in absenteeism within organizations. As such, external context should be an important factor relating to the representation of absenteeism in the press.

The emphasis on external context underscores another important element of Study 2 that is made possible by the proposed methodology: extreme longitudinality. As suggested by Harrison, Johns, and Martocchio (2000), changes in the nature of work are causing the nature of absenteeism to change, and absence cultures are apt to change over time. In one of the few studies focusing on absenteeism and extreme longitudinality, Taylor and Burrige’s (1982) study of the British Post Office from 1891 to 1981 demonstrated that government policy relating to public health care and benefits had a

strong impact on the absence behavior of postal workers, and created a new absence culture in Great Britain. It is quite impossible for cross-sectional studies to capture such contextual changes. In addition to the WWII context previously mentioned, the pilot study (Patton, 2005) demonstrated links between absence and such societal-level phenomena as the 1974 oil crisis, the Cold War with communist countries, and political upheavals in countries across the globe. Given that the pilot study only covered 11 discrete years, the full review should uncover many more links between absenteeism and external context.

Furthermore, consistent with the multi and cross-level nature of contextual factors, the content analysis will focus on articles in which social context are reported to influence worker absenteeism, and articles suggesting that worker absence can influence context through societal level outcomes.

Research Question #3: What differences exist in the reporting of men's and women's absence in the press?

As described in Chapter 3, gender will be an important focus in the content analysis. Gender researchers (Deaux, 1984; Durkin, 1987) have identified the press as an important vehicle for perpetuating gender stereotypes. Indeed, Fowler (1991) notes that women are defined almost exclusively through family roles, and as more emotional than men in the press. As such, an intergroup division (Doise, 1986) exists between men and women in the press, and the content analysis will explore if such divisions are manifested through reporting on absenteeism. In the limited sample of the aforementioned pilot study

(Patton, 2005), there was strong evidence that women's absence is reported differently than that of men's. Specifically, while absence by men in 1944 was painted as highly deviant, women's absence lacked this connotation and was linked primarily to domestic duties which required employers and the government to offer support. Furthermore, the study found that women's issues disappeared in 1954, 1964, and 1974 only to re-emerge in 1984 and beyond.

Consistent with this preliminary data, the full content analysis will track the level of coverage of women's absence over time and will verify if the treatment of absenteeism by men vs. women differs in terms of reason for absence and outcomes of absence. Based on the results of the pilot study, it is expected that articles featuring absence by women will be very gender-centric while articles concerning men's absence will have little emphasis on sex.

Overall, if social expectations surrounding absence are different for men versus women, there is a strong possibility that these differences will be manifested through the press. As such, newspaper articles featuring absence by women may demonstrate the existence of a separate absence culture for women. While this would be consistent with theory and representations in the press, it is important to mention that Study 1 did not demonstrate gender effects. As such, it will be interesting to assess the convergence or disparity between Study 1 and Study 2 on this question.

Research Question #4: Is absenteeism featured most commonly as an independent variable or a dependent variable in the press?

As noted in Chapter 3, absenteeism has been predominantly positioned as a dependent variable in academic research while the negative impact of absenteeism has been an almost constant underlying, yet usually untested, assumption. If the evidence of absenteeism leading to negative organizational outcomes is weak, the source of such widespread beliefs must be determined.

It is possible that the popular press has influenced the negative perception of absenteeism as a cause of negative organizational outcomes. Contrary to academic research, one would suspect that absenteeism is regularly treated as an independent variable leading to negative outcomes in the popular press. This prediction is supported by two facts related to newspaper reporting. First, as previously noted, newspapers have a preference for negative stories (Fowler, 1991; Hall et al., 1978). As such, newspapers are much more likely to focus on the negative impact of absenteeism than any positive features. Second, as noted by Fowler (1991), newspapers are rarely interested in reporting on complex processes, and prefer simplified versions of events highlighting outcomes. Consequently, newspapers are less likely to report on the complex processes that cause absenteeism, and will focus primarily on its negative impact. The pilot study (Patton, 2005) supported these notions. The study demonstrated that absenteeism is overwhelmingly painted in a negative light, as is regularly linked to costs and production problems.

Consistent with the multi-level focus of this research, the content analysis will also explore outcomes of absenteeism beyond the organization. One of the hallmarks of traditional absence research is its positioning as an organizational problem (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). The content analysis will also explore what other outcomes of absence

are reported, including outcomes relating to society as a whole, public policy, and advocacy for different products and services. At the same time, the content analysis will also assess the purported power of managers to solve absenteeism regardless of the cause.

The evolution of various outcomes over time and the links between various reported reasons for absence and different outcomes will also be explored.

Research Question #5: When is absence reported to be punishable versus legitimate?

Legitimacy is often part of the rhetoric surrounding absenteeism (Nicholson, 1977), and as previously noted, absenteeism is still one of the primary triggers of disciplinary action in the workplace (Edwards & Whitson, 1993; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Simpson & Martocchio, 1997). As such, causal links between representations of absenteeism in the press and concepts such as punishment and responsibility will be highlighted in the review. Numerous articles reviewed in the pilot study (Patton, 2005) suggested that absence was a punishable offence. Other articles, although still painting absenteeism as a negative occurrence, refrained from calling for punishment and took a softer approach.

The treatment of absence in the press should provide unique insight into what is acceptable versus punishable absence. Stories in the press can represent signals to workers on how to justify their absences in a self-serving way in order to avoid conflict and sanction. Descriptions of government and organizational responses to absenteeism can also provide clues as to what is viewed as legitimate versus illegitimate absenteeism.

Furthermore, it will be interesting to assess, in cases in which individuals are reported to be punished for absence, who or what is apparently harmed by absence.

Overall, reports featuring absence in the press represent a different way of assessing Nicholson's (1977) A-B continuum of absenteeism. The press is a vehicle for presenting certain absence, based on norms and context, as falling on either the A-side or the B-side of the continuum. While the web survey in Study 1 provides one way of assessing the A-B continuum, the content analysis of newspaper articles represents a different, but equally compelling, approach. As previously noted, Nicholson (1977) asserts that it will be observers who determine where an absence episode falls on the A-B continuum. Representations in the press can send strong cues as to what type of absenteeism is legitimate (absence due to flu, perhaps) or under what circumstances absence is acceptable or not (illegitimacy of absence from factories during war time versus legitimacy of absence following a natural disaster, for example.) Again, the overriding focus is on social expectations surrounding absence rather than on a simple lack of presence.

It is important to note that the five research questions are not mutually exclusive. For example, the gender issue (*Question 3*) can be seen as a subset of the reason for absence issue of *Question 1*. *Question 1* (reasons) will also be closely related to issues of outcomes (*Question 4*) and legitimacy (*Question 5*). Context (*Question 2*) and gender (*Question 3*) are likely to be closely related to outcomes (*Questions 4*) and legitimacy (*Question 5*). Furthermore, all of these questions will be sensitive to the common notion of time. Overall, the five research questions will serve as important initial guides for coding and analysis. Consistent with Krippendorff (2004) and Miles and Huberman

(1994), however, these research questions should be considered tentative and open to restating or addition once the analysis begins.

A sixth research question could be to identify the different stakeholders present in the articles featuring absenteeism. However, this question is basically present in each of the first five questions. While the traditional stakeholder is the organization, the pilot study (Patton, 2005) highlighted that absenteeism is also reported to involve consequences for absentees (through punishment and dismissal, political attacks), unions (through potential sanctions and court orders), and the general public (threat to national security in times of war, harm to children in schools, harm to the national economy, disruption to the legislative process of a country). As such, the identification of stakeholders within the articles becomes an important element in understanding the treatment and representation of absence in the press. Again, with reference to Doise's (1986) model, to fully understand absence, we need to consider the full specter of those individuals, groups, and entities that intersect with the phenomenon.

5.3 Methodology

Content analysis can be defined as any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specific characteristics within texts (Kabanoff, 1997; Stone, Dunphy, Smith & Ogilvie, 1966). The emphasis on *any technique* indicates that content analysis should be considered a series of techniques as opposed to a clear cut, rule-bound methodology. As noted by Weber (1990), there is no single way of undertaking a content analysis and a great deal depends on the nature of the substantive question. The common element in all content analyses is the creation of a coding scheme that reduces a text into categories and extracts manageable data for analysis. In addition

to reducing the danger of data overload often associated with qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), content analysis is characterized by several strengths including its often unobtrusive nature and analysis of naturally evoked information, the possibility of longitudinal analysis, and the possibility of quantifying qualitative data (Kabanoff, Walderess, & Cohen, 1995; Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990).

The interplay between qualitative and quantitative analysis is an inherent feature of content analysis, and one that will be fully exploited in Study 2. At its core, qualitative data usually come in the form of words (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While words can be counted, measured, and converted to quantitative data (Kabanoff, 1997; Krippendorff, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994), content analysis is never just about words but is also concerned about where, when, and by whom a text was written and read (Krippendorff, 2004). According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysts must understand the world where the texts make sense. Such an approach requires human readers who have the ability to recognize and interpret shifts in cultural contexts relative to which texts are read and understood.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research is concerned with the study of naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, and explicating how people come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations. This is consistent with Krippendorff's (2004) views on content analysis, which suggest that content analyses are more likely to succeed when they address phenomena that are of a public, social, or political nature or concern phenomena of individuals' participation in public, social, or political affairs. As previously explained,

absenteeism is indeed a public social behavior. As such, a qualitative, context specific orientation is crucial to the content analysis performed in this study.

At the same time, quantitative analysis can be invaluable in making sense of large amounts of written data. Riffe et al. (2005) define quantitative content analysis as:

A systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from communication to its context, both of production and consumption. (p. 25)

The systematic nature of quantitative content analysis allows for the coding of a relevant set of variables and the statistical analysis of trends and relationships. The replicable aspect of quantitative content analysis allows for reliability testing. Overall, quantification makes it possible to reduce very large sets of data to a manageable form. At the same time, Weber (1990) notes that the key questions surrounding quantification concerns how to reduce the information in a text without losing the richness of meaning. Information must be reduced in order for it to be manageable, but enough information must be retained to make interesting and useful generalizations. Given the emphasis on variety, context, and change surrounding absenteeism, a more detailed approach is required for this content analysis. The emphasis here is not only on creating order or simplified categories based on newspaper articles about absenteeism, but on exploring the variability and rhetoric that exists in the reporting. In all, it is important to acknowledge the dual qualitative/quantitative nature of the research that was conducted in this study.

The procedures employed for the content analysis will follow the guidelines set forth by Krippendorff (2004), who stresses the necessity of including qualitative analysis

while acknowledging the value of quantitative techniques. Every step and choice in a content analysis is part of the analytic process, and this form of research does not follow a sequential path but is always tentative and open to changes in direction. At the outset, however, Krippendorff (2004) underlines that undertaking a content analysis involves a series of choices and justifications concerning sampling, recording units, coding, and analytical procedures.

5.3.1 Sampling

Unlike purely quantitative studies, sampling strategies in content analysis do not regularly focus on probabilistic sampling aimed at representing a larger population. Instead, sampling decisions in content analysis are concerned with ensuring that the questions you are interested in can be studied through the chosen sample (Krippendorff, 2004). These textual units are not a sample of a population of texts, they *are* the population of relevant texts that have been pre-screened for inclusion in the study.

Articles from the *New York Times Historical Database* represented the source of data for the current study. A search on the word *absenteeism* was performed and over 3,000 articles were identified. Alternative searches were performed on related words such as *absent* or *absence* and strings of words such as *away from work*. However the results of the search on *absenteeism* were retained as the population of articles for various reasons. First, the searches on *absent* and *absence* returned literally hundreds of thousands of articles unrelated to absence from work. Second, while the *away from work* search returned employment-related articles, it captured many stories inappropriate for the current study such as those on strikes, vacations, leisure time, and distance from work. Furthermore, the results using the term *absenteeism* returned articles in every

decade from 1850 to 2000, featured workers in over 150 jobs that could be sorted into eleven distinct categories, contained close to two hundred different reasons for and consequences of absence from work, and featured stories from over 70 countries. As such, the characteristics of the initial sample indicate a broad range of articles featuring a variety of jobs, countries, and absence models.

Consistent with Krippendorff (2004), sampling in content analysis requires initial checking to ensure that each article is relevant to the research questions. As such, the initial search results were verified to ensure relevance with workplace absenteeism. This triage resulted in a final sample of 2,785 articles. Articles removed consisted of advertisements, articles on student absence from school, voter absenteeism, and so on.

The *New York Times* was chosen for several reasons. First, the *New York Times Historical Database* allows for extreme longitudinality, spanning over 150 years and capturing stories about absenteeism in times of peace and in times of war, in times of prosperity and in times of recession, and across generations. Second, the *New York Times* is not only a local city newspaper, but a paper that has a national and international circulation. Its standing as part of the 'elite' media coupled with its worldwide circulation makes the newspaper very influential. As such, it can be considered a source of influence and information about widely held social values. Third, it is a wide-ranging newspaper that covers local, national and international events, business news, and lifestyle trends. This variety facilitates the assessment of absenteeism across cultures and topics. Finally, focusing on a single major newspaper avoids the need to sort through identical stories that are picked up and run in smaller media outlets. Overall, the *New York Times* is a primary and well-recognized news source with original reporting on a host of issues

(Krippendorff, 2004; Wells & King, 1994). At the same time, as a mainstream American newspaper, the *New York Times* is certainly an outlet where the views of business leaders will be present. Reviewing 150 years of *New York Times* articles provides insight into norms surrounding absenteeism in the general public as defined by a mainstream influential news source.

5.3.2 Recording and coding

5.3.2.1 Recording units. The unit of analysis was the article as opposed to words or sentences. In some content analyses, such as the Kabanoff et al. (1995) and Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) studies, the unit of analysis is the word. Such content analyses usually focus on scanning a small number of texts, such as speeches, interviews, or annual reports, and counting words based on emergent themes or against pre-set dictionaries. For the current study, however, the focus was on how a specific concept, absenteeism, was treated across a large number of articles. Furthermore, as previously noted, many of these articles were on very different topics (reports on war production, influenza outbreaks, political campaigns, political turmoil in third-world countries, and so on). Unlike corporate annual reports or interviews concerning teamwork, word by word analysis of articles on absenteeism would not lead to interpretable data. As such, as opposed to many content analyses where the empirical unit of analysis is the word and the level of analysis is the text, both the empirical unit and the level of analysis for this study was the article.

In terms of similar studies, Hoffman's (1999) study on how environmental issues are portrayed in trade journals within the chemical industry provides a useful template. Hoffman (1999) identified 2,358 articles in the trade journal *Chemical Week* and

manually coded each article for variables such as focal actors and actions taken. A combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis was performed by which critical events were determined and distinct time-based phases were identified. The current study followed procedures similar to those employed by Hoffman (1999). Specifically, each article was manually coded for theoretically pertinent information.

5.3.2.2 Coding. Procedures and analysis techniques for content analyses are highly dependent on the nature of the substantive question (Weber, 1990). Given the focus on context and the article-level coding, the coding did not rely on computers but was performed manually. As emphasized by Krippendorff (2004), when the phenomena of interest are social in nature, mechanical measurements can have serious shortcomings that only culturally competent humans can overcome. While computers are essential tools in content analysis, Krippendorff (2004) stresses that computers do not perform the content analysis, they *aid in it* as they have no sense of what they do, who their users are, or what the character strings they are processing may mean to human readers. While such manual coding may appear to be daunting, many of the articles reviewed in the sample were quite short. Furthermore, Krippendorff (2004) highlights several large content analyses that have been performed over the years without the benefit of computers, including studies by Shuman (1937) featuring 4,022 advertising slogans and Pool (1952) reviewing 19,553 editorials. As previously noted, the content analysis by Hoffman (1999) about institutional forces in the chemical industry as assessed through the 2,000-plus articles in *Chemical Week* was also manually coded.

Data in content analysis are made, not found (Krippendorff, 2004), and researchers need to be clear about how they have chosen to collect and code data (Miles

& Huberman, 1994). In this vein, it is helpful if recording and coding is not totally idiosyncratic but rooted in theory and informed by the research questions (Krippendorff, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, even when coding is performed manually, in the interest of reliability and validity, the coding should be performed by individuals with relevant backgrounds in the theoretical area so that the coding makes sense to others with similar knowledge (Krippendorff, 2004). Coding in the present study consisted of a two step process. The first involved creating a text rich matrix to capitalize on the qualitative richness of the data. Following this step, more structured, quantitative coding ensued.

For the text rich matrix, each of the 2,785 articles was read and summarized into categories based on the five primary research questions. The information summarized for each article consisted of :

- 1) The date of the article
- 2) The title of the article
- 3) A general summary of the article as a whole
- 4) Type of workers featured in the article
- 5) Gender of workers featured in the article
- 6) General treatment/portrayal of absenteeism in the article
- 7) Cause of absence
- 8) Consequence of absence
- 9) Major correlates of absence
- 10) Country of workers

- 11) Type of article (news story, editorial/commentary, short note, long feature, or letter to the editor).

The summaries were entered into a spreadsheet with each row consisting of an article and each column representing one of the eleven coding elements outlined above. In this original matrix, written detail was provided for each column so that, while the data in the articles was reduced, much of the richness was retained in a narrative structure. The resultant spreadsheet consisted of several hundreds of pages of text and provided an in-depth overview of the content of the articles. While the analysis will be explained in greater detail below, the qualitative coding of the articles brought to light several interesting facets of the articles such as the prominence of reporting on the absence of politicians, the important influence of societal factors on the reporting of absence, and the clear difference in the reporting concerning men versus women.

At the same time, the volume of data in the first matrix was still somewhat overwhelming, and further reduction was performed in order to facilitate quantitative analysis. Krippendorff (2004) warns content analysts not to skip too quickly to abstract codes and numbers when transforming data, as it is possible to become confused and to lose the sense of what information the data contains. In order to guard against this, the qualitative data in the first matrix provided the coding scheme and categories for the second matrix. It is wise to consider the coding of qualitative data as part of the early data analysis with analysts open to adding, splitting, combining, or dropping categories as the coding moves forward (Krippendorff, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the same time, the quantification of the data is vital in order to broaden the analytical possibilities and strengthen the validity of the coding by making it possible to test for reliability.

Based on the text-rich matrix, a coding protocol was created for the quantitative coding. Apart from the variable “Year”, all variables were measured at the nominal level. Specifically, categories were created for each variable. The data in the qualitative matrix informed the data conversion and the category definition for the quantitative matrix. For the quantitative matrix, the variables retained were:

1) Year of article

2) Job of workers

- Based on the qualitative matrix, each article focused only on a single occupation or, alternatively, made no mention of occupation and only discussed workers in a generalized, abstract form. As such, the nominal categories for job consisted of:

1. Politicians
2. Factory workers
3. Miners
4. Teachers
5. Municipal/government workers
6. Dock Workers
7. Office/White collar workers
8. Retail workers
9. Healthcare workers
10. Other workers
11. Job not specified

While Riffe et al. (2005) warn against the use of catch-all categories such as “other”, articles that fell into this category dealt with single jobs that usually appeared only once or twice in the sample. The “other” category of workers represented only 2.2% of the sample

- 3) Gender of worker (1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = not specified)
- 4) General treatment of absenteeism (1 = positive, 2 = negative)
- 5) Cause of absenteeism

➤ For this variable, the qualitative summaries indicated that multiple reasons were occasionally provided and that a single value could not be provided for each article. As such, as per the recommendations of Krippendorff (2004) and Riffe et al. (2005), variables in this category were made to be mutually exclusive by creating a series of dichotomous codes to keep the data as clean as possible. Specifically, for each of the following reasons for absence, 1 = present or 0 = not present was indicated:

- 1. Medical reasons
- 2. Labor conflict
- 3. Economic choice
- 4. Deviance
- 5. Domestic responsibilities
- 6. Non work events
- 7. Leisure
- 8. Stress

9. Absence as complex phenomenon (i.e. articles in which the author presents absenteeism as multifaceted)
10. Workgroup norms
11. Withdrawal from work
12. Alcohol/drugs
13. Spousal abuse
14. Societal conditions
15. Not specified (i.e. articles in which no cause of absence is provided).

6) Consequences of Absence

- Based on the preliminary analysis that indicated that more than one consequence was often discussed in each article, the same dichotomous coding (1 = present and 0 = not present) was employed for the following consequences.

1. Societal outcomes
2. Business outcomes
3. Absentee/worker outcomes

These first three consequences represent the negative, unwanted consequences of absenteeism. The next four consequences concern the more action-oriented consequences that absenteeism brings on.

4. Advocacy for products/services
5. Management action

6. Government action
7. Labor conflict/negotiations
- 7) Geographic Region (1= North America, 2 = Europe, 3 = East Asia, 4 = South America, 5 = Caribbean, 6 = Australia, 7= North Africa & Middle East, 8 = Horn and Southern Africa, 9= Not Specified).
- 8) Article Type (1= Short note, 2 = News story, 3 = Editorial/Commentary, 4 = Long feature, 5= Letter to the editor).
- 9) Other concepts/constructs featured in the articles
 - Through the qualitative summaries, a number of other topics regularly appeared in the articles alongside absenteeism. While some of these, such as turnover and lateness, have strong theoretical links to absence research, others were strictly emergent based on the data. As with reasons and consequences of absence, dichotomous coding (1 = present and 0 = not present) was employed.
 1. Turnover
 2. Accidents
 3. Lateness
 4. Communism
 5. Criminal behavior
 6. Discrimination against groups
 7. Acad. Research/Business conferences

While these variables represented the basis for statistical analysis, it is important to note that subcategories for many variables were also created. On the one hand, subcategories

created a stronger bridge between the first matrix (qualitative) and the second matrix (quantitative/categorical) so that the reduction from the qualitative to the quantitative does not result in an unacceptable loss of information. On the other hand, the presence of subcategories allows for additional quantitative analyses if required. Examples of subcategories include:

- In the Job of Workers category, subcategories for factory workers included auto workers, war plant workers, textile workers, and so on. For municipal/government workers, subcategories included police/firefighters, transit workers, and civil servants.
- In the Outcomes category, subcategories for societal outcomes included effects on legislation, financial problems for the country, and harm to society in other areas.
- In the Geographic region, subcategories for Europe include Great Britain, Russia/Soviet Union, East Bloc countries (Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, etc), Italy, France, and so on. Subcategories for the Caribbean were Cuba vs. the rest. For Asia, subcategories included India, China, and Japan.

Overall, the goal of the subcategories is to better represent the articles in the sample and to facilitate traveling back and forth between the first matrix and the second matrix.

5.3.2.3 Reliability testing. Reliability testing in content analysis can be defined as agreement among coders about categorizing content (Riffe et al., 2005). Reliability in content analysis, as with other methodologies, is crucial for ensuring the validity of the data in terms of the classification scheme and interpretation of the findings (Weber, 1990). To assess reliability, a second coder was asked to recode a random sample of 100 articles from the full sample. This coder, another PhD candidate, was selected based on

her advanced knowledge of absence research and familiarity with Johns's (1997) absence models. As noted by Krippendorff (2004) it is important that coding not be idiosyncratic and that other coders with similar knowledge and appropriate backgrounds agree with the coding structure and are able to make sense of it. The second coder received a coding sheet for each of the hundred articles, a protocol explaining the categories and definitions (see Appendix B), and received training to clear up any initial confusion. In terms of specific test, given the nominal nature of the data, Scott's Pi test was employed. This test computes the percentage of agreement between coders while taking into account the level of agreement that could be expected to occur by chance (Riffe et al., 2005). Overall, for nominal-level data, Scott's Pi is advocated as the best choice for assessing reliability (Krippendorff, 2004; Riffe et al., 2005). In the current study, the reliability testing also served as an important verification that the transition from the qualitative matrix to the quantitative matrix did not result in a change in meaning from the original articles. As previously explained, the quantitative coding was based on the qualitative data of the first matrix. For the reliability testing, however, the second coder coded the full articles using the quantitative coding scheme. To test for reliability, PRAM software (Neuendorf, 2002) was used. This program calculates both percentage of agreement and Scott's Pi.

In terms of percentage of agreement, the coders agreed an average of 98% of the time across variables. Taking chance into account, the average of Scotts Pi over all the variables was 88%. One variable, the correlate "academic research/conferences," had an unacceptable reliability score of 44% and was dropped from the analysis after discussions with the other coder led to the conclusion that this variable was ambiguous in nature.

5.3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both matrices and focused on the same goals: To identify trends, patterns and differences in the reporting on absenteeism as framed by the five research questions. For the text-heavy first matrix, the goal was to uncover patterns and to qualitatively cluster articles together. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), clustering is a tactic that can be applied at many levels to qualitative data. In all instances the goal is to understand a phenomenon better by grouping and then conceptualizing objects that have similar patterns or characteristics. The pilot study conducted in advance of Study 2 (Patton, 2005) used this procedure to isolate patterns (i.e. repeated regularities [Kaplan, 1964]) and changes in absence reporting over time. Among others, specific patterns were found concerning absence by women, absence by politicians, absence during war time, and recent absence reporting involving stress, health and withdrawal. The process of qualitatively clustering articles involves reading across rows and down columns of a matrix, and grouping records in a conceptually ordered display that is less abstract and more interpretable than the raw data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition to interpreting the articles, this qualitative clustering also informed the categories and variables in the second matrix, as previously described.

In terms of analyzing the data in the second matrix, quantitative analysis was employed. Given the nominal nature of the variables in the second matrix, describing the data involved assessing frequencies and cross-tabulations (i.e. the joint frequency distribution of cases according to two or more variables [Weaver, 2003]). For assessing co-occurrences and the strength of the relationships between variables, χ^2 and Cramer's V were used. χ^2 measures the statistical significance of the relationship between two

variables at the nominal level, while Cramer's V measures the strength of the relationships (Riffe et al., 2005; Weaver, 2003). Cramer's V is similar to the well known Phi measure, with the advantage of being able to deal with tables with more than two rows and two columns. Consistent with Hoffman (1999), plots of the number of articles by year and by variable were inspected to ascertain trends and potential distinct periods in which absenteeism seemed particularly salient.

As previously indicated, the analysis and interpretation of the data involved going back and forth between the quantitative results and the qualitative data in order to provide a complete overview of the meaning of the articles. As noted by Krippendorff (2004), content analysts "support their interpretations by weaving quotes from analyzed texts and literature about the contexts of these texts into their conclusions, by constructing parallelisms, by engaging in triangulations, and by elaborating on any metaphors they can identify" (p. 88). Consistent with this, the goal of this content analysis is to uncover social expectations concerning absence. To recap, the process involved creating a set of theory-based research questions, generating qualitative data, displaying the data in matrix form, reducing the data into categorical variables that can be counted and quantitatively analyzed, and going back and forth between the qualitative and quantitative data to draw conclusions.

5.4 Results

The goal of this section is to tell the story of the data in order to answer the research questions. To do this, the quantitative and qualitative results will be reported together. As the questions are not mutually exclusive, there will be overlap in places. There will also be an emphasis on particularly interesting or unexpected findings.

Overall, the goal is to accurately reflect the content of the articles through the coding structure.

5.4.1 General Trends

In terms of a general description of the data, there were 2,785 articles in the final sample between 1855 and 2005. The year with the highest number of articles was 1943 with 346. In fact, the four years between 1942 and 1945 accounted for 21.6% of the entire sample with 603 articles. This obviously represents the strong impact of World War Two and war production on the coverage of absenteeism in the press; this point will be discussed in greater detail in the section concerning context. Given the large percentage of articles from these four years, certain analyses to come will exclude war plant workers (a subcategory of factory workers) to ascertain certain trends in the data. In order to facilitate the assessment of trends over time, a new variable, decades, was created. This variable grouped all of the pre-1940 articles (representing 5.9% of the articles) into one category, and created a new category for every subsequent decade. As noted by Langley (1999), while breaking down data by decade does not necessarily have any theoretical rationale, it is nevertheless a useful and familiar way of structuring a description of events. Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 show the number of articles by period for all articles and with war plant workers removed, respectively.

Of the 2,785 articles, only 15 advanced the idea that absenteeism could be positive. Six of these articles advocated that employees stay away when ill, while the rest suggested that absenteeism could have positive outcomes or was misconstrued as absence when an individual was busy on a related activity. Overall, the general negative connotation of absence was overwhelming.

Seven hundred articles (25.1%) featured absence by men, 140 articles (5%) reported on absence by women, and the majority (1,945 articles or 69.8%) were gender neutral.

The majority of articles concerned workers from the United States (2,185 articles or 78.5%). Still, there were articles featuring workers from over 35 countries on every continent except for Antarctica. Following the United States, the largest number of articles concerned Great Britain (144 articles or 5.2 %) and the combination of the Soviet Union/Russia with other Eastern Bloc countries (146 articles or 5.2%). Given the large majority of American focused articles, a new variable was created by categorizing all of the U.S. focused articles in one category and all the non-U.S. articles in a second category.

In terms of jobs, the highest percentage of articles were not specific in terms of a particular job (31% of the articles). Not surprisingly, the largest percentage of articles featuring specific jobs focused on factory workers (28.4% of the articles). However, this result is inflated due to articles about war plant workers in WWII. If the 471 articles about war factory workers are removed, then factory workers represent 14% of the remaining articles and the percentage of articles specifying no particular job rises to 37%. To better capture the differences in articles in which a specific job is mentioned and those for which there is none, another variable was created by categorizing all of the articles referencing a specific job in one category and all articles that make no mention of job or occupation in a second category. As previously noted, some analyses will also remove the war plant workers from the data to ascertain trends and relationships without these workers from this exceptional era. An unexpected result was the large presence of articles

concerning the absence by politicians. Overall, there were 370 articles featuring absence by politicians, and this was the only occupational group featured in every single decade of the sample. In analyzing the content of the articles, two primary themes emerged. First, in terms of the nature and cause of absenteeism, the articles consistently portray the behavior by politicians as deviant. Second, from an outcome standpoint, the articles indicate that the absence of politicians can have important consequences on the legislative efficiency of a country, and can have a substantive influence on specific legislation and even the survival of governments. Both of these issues will be expanded upon in conjunction with the research questions.

Finally, in terms of general characteristics of the sample, 59% of the articles were regular news stories, 21% were long feature articles, 11% were short news items, 7% were editorials or commentaries, and 2% were letters to the editor.

As previously explained, the analyses based on the five research questions will be both qualitative and quantitative. While both sets of results will be discussed in the body of the text, Table 5.1 displays a summary of the quantitative results for each of the research questions. Please remember that the five research questions are not mutually exclusive. As such, while the results in Table 5.1 are displayed in order presented within the research questions, the associations reported often have cross-research question implications.

5.4.2 Research Question #1: Absence models and reasons for absence

Research Question #1 concerned the various reasons for absence that appear in the press, and whether or not these match with the common absence models in academic research identified by Johns (1997). Indeed, all of the models described by Johns were

present, but the emphasis was clearly different. Somewhat surprisingly, the highest proportion of articles (629 or 22.6%) provided no reason whatsoever for absenteeism. This fact will be discussed in greater detail in relation to Research Question #4 concerning the treatment of absence as an independent variable versus dependent variable. In the next several paragraphs, the emphasis will be on the other 77.4% of the articles.

The withdrawal reason (absence due to low job satisfaction and so on) is represented in only 9.7% of the articles. This is in sharp contrast to academic research for which withdrawal reasons have traditionally dominated. While the proportion of the articles is somewhat small, some of the themes surrounding withdrawal absence in the press are similar to academic research. Specifically, there was a strong relationship between withdrawal reasons for absence and reports of management action to combat absenteeism ($\chi^2 = 114.43$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.203$ $p < .001$). There was also a positive relationship between withdrawal reasons for absence and advocacy for policy change and product use ($\chi^2 = 61.20$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.148$ $p < .001$). This is consistent with the notion that managers can be proactive in fighting absenteeism. Also not surprisingly, removing war factory workers for which the articles often had different themes, there was a strong association between withdrawal absenteeism and factory workers in the articles ($\chi^2 = 93.04$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.201$ $p < .001$). In terms of trends over time, the articles featuring withdrawal reasons for absence were spread differently across decades ($\chi^2 = 50.29$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.134$ $p < .001$) and were most prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s (46% of the withdrawal articles). Furthermore, analyzing decade as a moderator, the relationships between withdrawal reasons and management action, and withdrawal

reasons and advocacy were higher ($\chi^2 = 51.32$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.326$ $p < .001$ and $\chi^2 = 52.09$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.328$ $p < .001$, respectively) in the 1970s. This interest during the 1970s should not be surprising, as this era marked a growing interest in the field of management as a field of research with the rise to prominence of motivation theories such as McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y, Herzberg's (1968) two-factor model of motivation, and renewed interest in Maslow's (1970) needs hierarchy. In fact, several articles during the 1970s make reference to such theories and highlight many current organizational behavior concepts. For example, "Motivating the 'Cage'" (Jan. 9, 1972) references Herzberg's theory:

"Mr. Walters is a commercial apostle of the theories of Frederick Herzberg....the international sage of job enrichment.....Many have made a connection between ennui and the increasingly nagging problems of absenteeism, turnover and diminished productivity"

"Jobs Rotated to Fight Boredom" (Feb. 5, 1973) suggests that management techniques can reduce absence, and "Experiments in Cooperation Of Workers and Management" (July 6, 1977) and "Trust as a Labor-Management Cost Item" (March 31, 1978) focus on participation and trust, respectively. Also, withdrawal from work absence appeared to be a cross-national occurrence as several countries were featured in the articles, especially Japan "Explaining the 'Japanese Paradox'; Made in America, Managed By Japan" (Nov. 16, 1986) and Scandinavian countries "Work Democracy Tested At Scandinavian Plants" (Nov. 11, 1974):

"The problem of worker morale, which takes the form of high rates of turnover and absenteeism, is acute in Norway and Sweden.....With top executives and labor officials in many countries watching, the ideas of the work reformers are being tested in Swedish and Norwegian industries.....particularly at Volvo, which is trying to eliminate the traditional assembly line."

In terms of the common conceptualization of withdrawal from work as involving both absenteeism and turnover (Johns, 2001a), there was indeed a significant association between absence due to withdrawal and mentions of turnover ($\chi^2 = 54.87$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.140$ $p < .001$) which was particularly strong during the 1960s ($\chi^2 = 17.35$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.239$ $p < .001$) and 1970s ($\chi^2 = 67.00$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.372$ $p < .001$). There was no association between withdrawal absence and references to lateness, which is another commonly conceptualized example of withdrawal. Overall, withdrawal from work was featured in a qualitatively familiar way, but the proportion of articles was small compared to academic research.

The absence reporting consistent with the deviance model was also present in the articles, but only 11% of the articles directly attributed absenteeism to deviant behavior/personality. Such articles painted absence as deviant behavior based on personal failings. Not surprisingly, there was an association between deviance absence and time period ($\chi^2 = 62.30$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.150$ $p < .001$) with the largest proportions occurring between 1850 and the end of the Second World War. While the pre-1940 articles often portrayed absence as a dishonorable lack of work ethic (e.g. "Illegal Salary Grabs" [March 19, 1879] and "A Disgusting Record" [July 17, 1901]), the deviant absence articles during WWII suggested that the behavior was unpatriotic and a dereliction of duty against the country. For example, articles such as "Swastika 'Honor' for Absenteeism" (Feb. 17, 1943) explained that a plant in the U.K. was giving a Hitler plaque inscribed with a swastika to the crew with the poorest attendance record on a weekly basis, while "Gets 6 Months for Absenteeism" (Jan. 13, 1945) described how a war plant worker received a six-month jail sentence for flagrant absenteeism. After

World War Two, absence as deviance became much rarer except for politicians and in somewhat idiosyncratic cases.

For politicians, the deviance was less identified as a reason for absence than through political attacks by rivals. The articles that appeared between 1850 and 1900 were the most explicit, regularly stating that absenteeism by politicians, particularly from the United States Congress, was a dereliction of duty and something to be severely punished. The rhetoric was also very explicit with articles entitled “The Useless Member” (May 4, 1870), “The Crime of Absenteeism” (Aug. 5, 1872), and “The Evil of Absenteeism” (Sep. 15, 1883). The word evil appeared in other articles, as well as the portrayal of absenteeism by politicians as an incurable habit in “Absenteeism in the House” (May 12, 1877), and as the bane of the house in “Democratic House Caucus” (Mar. 7, 1894). Several articles, especially prior to 1900, presented absenteeism from Congress or the New York State Assembly as a criminal act:

“Mr. Patterson offered a resolution directing the Sergeant of Arms to arrest and bring to the bar of the House all members absent without leave, and that he be authorized to employ a sufficient number of deputies to execute the order.” (“Mr. Crisp Asserts Himself” - March, 30 1894)

In terms of political attacks, 83 articles appeared since 1901 in which charges of absenteeism were used as a campaign attack. These attacks have been aimed at politicians at the municipal, state, and federal levels of government. Attacks of this nature were made against presidential nominees such as President Harding, President Franklin Roosevelt (“Harbord Attacks Roosevelt Record” [Oct. 28, 1932]), President Eisenhower, and President Kennedy (“G.O.P. Issues Absentee List” [Oct. 12, 1960]). Governors, mayors, congressmen and women, and senators have all been targeted. The most recent article in the sample featuring absenteeism as a campaign attack involved current

American Vice-President Dick Cheney, who accused his 2004 rival John Edwards of having a 70% absence rate from the U.S. Senate ("For Cheney and Edwards, It's Now a Running Debate"[Oct. 7, 2004]). Cheney went so far as to state that he had never seen or met Edwards in Washington, a claim that proved false through photographs. The story remained in the press for several days and even involved the nominees' wives.

In the 'oddity' category associated to deviance, a number of articles have linked absenteeism to criminal activity of individuals, thus creating a generalized deviant connotation. For example, "Dismissed Employee Charged in Slaying" (Mar. 4, 1967), "Hijacker Killed by F.B.I. Agent at Kennedy" (Aug. 24, 1971), "Violinist Arrested on Drug Charges" (Apr. 6, 1983), "Manhattan Couple Are Charged in Beating of 6-Year-Old Daughter" (Nov. 3, 1987) and "Missouri: Factory Worker Kills Three and Himself" (July 3, 2003) all mentioned individuals' record of absence from work in conjunction with terrible crimes:

"A factory worker fatally shot three co-workers and wounded five others in Jefferson City, then killed himself during a gun battle with the police, the authorities said. The police said Mr. Russell was close to being fired for absenteeism. They also said he was facing the possible breakup of a romantic relationship." (July 3, 2003)

Overall, while deviance as a stated cause of absenteeism was only present in 11% of the articles, the deviant connotation of absenteeism was apparent in other ways in other articles.

In contrast to organizational behavior academic research in which illness absence is all but ignored (Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995), there was a strong presence of articles concerning absenteeism for medical reasons. In fact, with 388 articles or 13.9% of the sample, absence for medical reasons was more common than absence caused by work

withdrawal or absence caused by deviance. Of the 388 articles concerning illness absence, 42.8% did not talk about specific illness but talked about illness in the abstract. In terms of specific illnesses, the most common problem featured were colds and flu with 100 articles or 25.8% of the 388 illness stories. Mental illness/depression represented 9.5% of the illness absence articles, fatigue related illnesses were reported on in 6.4%, alcohol/drug abuse were featured in 5.9 %, and there were also articles relating to smoking, nutrition, obesity, and ergonomics problems among others. It is also interesting to note that for 62.4% of the illness absence articles, no link to any specific jobs was made. This association between illness absence and job specificity is demonstrated by the significant Cramer's V of .271 $p < .001$. Excluding war plant jobs, the relationship strengthens to a Cramer's V of .304 $p < .001$. The common lack of specificity in terms of job and actual illness clearly indicates that a good proportion of illness absence articles were quite abstract in nature. In terms of trends over time, illness absence was feature in all decades since 1900 but the greatest proportions were in the 1950s and the 1990s. At the same time, the qualitative nature of illness absence in the press certainly changed over the years. While the fatigue articles were almost the exclusive domain of the World War Two articles, the majority of the illness absence articles from the end of the 1940s to the beginning of the 1970s concerned colds and flu. In those years, 76 of the 100 flu and colds articles appeared. Stories on widespread flu epidemics and absence appeared in 1898, 1943, 1957/58, 1962, 1966, 1967/68, 1968/69, 1972, 1976, and 1908. From 1980 to 2005, however, only 5 articles concerning absence due to colds and flu were written. Over the last three decades, mental illness and depression, ergonomics, smoking, and obesity have characterized the articles on illness absence; many of these reasons were

non-existent in the sample prior to 1970 (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). Another characteristic of the articles about illness absence is the strong link to advocacy for policies, interventions, and products. Excluding war plant workers, the association between illness absence and advocacy is robust ($\chi^2 = 180.34$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.279$ $p < .001$). From the early part of the century to the 1970s, there were a large number of articles advocating industrial medicine and medical research, particularly pertaining to colds and flu. Examples include "Care of Workers Vital to Industry" (May 8, 1921), "Employers Push Industrial Health" (Oct. 29, 1937), "Workers' Health as Factor In Industry Being Studied" (Nov. 17, 1946), "Workers' Health Vital Factor In Nation's Industrial Output" (Jan. 20, 1952), and "Mobile Lab Goes to Workers" (Dec. 10, 1972). In the 1980s and beyond, the emphasis was commonly on alcohol rehabilitation, fitness programs, and wellness programs. Articles in this vein included "Westinghouse Aids Alcoholics" (Jan. 16, 1979), "New Health Plans Focus on 'Wellness'" (Aug. 24, 1981), and "Employee Fitness Programs Growing" (Oct. 17, 1993). Illness absence was also used to raise awareness and funding for different conditions in the 1990s and 2000s such as depression, as in "Diagnosing Realities of Health Care Reform; Parity for Mental Care" (Oct. 15, 1993), "Mentally Ill Needn't Make Workplace Inefficient" (May 7, 1997) and "Mental Health, on Equal Terms" (Nov. 12, 2001), or obesity ("Employers Focus on Weight As Workplace Health Issue" [Sept. 6, 1999]). Finally, illness absence was also used as a pretense for advocating a host of products, from beauty creams to bottled water. Examples of articles recommending products to quell illness absence included "Absenteeism in War Work Is Reduced by Sun Lamps" (Mar. 28, 1943), "Vanishing Cream That Prevents Infections Is Praised by War Plant Safety Engineer" (Nov. 4, 1943),

"Massage Machine Held Employee Aid" (Sep. 3, 1953), and "In Europe, the Road to Good Health Leads to a Spa"(Nov. 11, 1970). Contrary to the indications in the pilot study (Patton, 2005), no association between withdrawal reasons and medical reasons were detected in the later years in the sample.

An interesting set of articles indirectly related to illness absence suggested that fears of illness absence could lead to discrimination against individuals and groups such as the elderly, the disabled, or cancer survivors. Articles in this vein included "President Spurs Aid For Disabled" (Nov. 5, 1947), "Age Ban in Employment (Mar. 18, 1958), "Job Discrimination: The Special Case of Cancer Patients" (Aug. 26, 1979), "Genetic Tests by Industry Raise Questions on Rights of Workers" (Feb. 3, 1980), and "Panel Reports Genetic Screening Has Cost Some Their Health Plans" (Nov. 5, 1993). For example, the following are excerpts from the cancer-related article:

“ ‘Employers would never tell an applicant that he cannot have a job because of his race or sex, but they think nothing of saying, ‘we don’t want you, you’ve had cancer’...The company contended that it had rejected the applicant because of his higher risk of absenteeism and the higher cost of insuring him” (Aug. 26, 1979)

Overall, despite the relative lack of interest in illness absence in management research, it represents a major theme in the press concerning absenteeism.

In terms of other reasons/models for absence, 8.1% of the articles suggested that employees miss work due to economic choice considerations and 8.5% featured absence as caused by labor conflict. For the economic model articles, there were three main types. Some articles such as “Congress Is Different in an Election Year” (Sept. 22, 1970) suggested that individuals would engage in absenteeism when they had something they viewed as more important to undertake such as campaigning for reelection. Articles

featuring absence caused by leisure pursuits (representing 6.4% of the total sample) were similar to this as they indicated that workers were willing to trade pay for leisure. Other articles suggested that monetary incentives were key to attendance (“Cotton Makers Laud Worker Dividend Plan” [Oct. 31, 1929], “War Bond Prizes for Workers” [Jan. 22, 1943]). Finally, several articles reported that absence could be more profitable than attendance if overtime pay or medical/social benefits were generous (“Sick Leave Abuse in Schools hinted” [May 31, 1967], “Koch Says Police Have Increased Sick Leave Since Cut in Days Off [Feb. 21, 1978]). For absence due to labor conflict, when war plant jobs were removed, a strong absence/ job association emerged involving miners and government workers. The relationship between job type and labor conflict as a reason for absence was $\chi^2 = 297.63$ $p < .001$, Cramer’s $V = 0.327$ $p < .001$.

It is interesting to note that analyses of the links between various reasons for absence yield no strong associations. It appears that the vast majority of articles featured only a single reason for absence or indicated no systematic relationship between reasons. In fact, only 17 articles presented the view that absenteeism is a multi-faceted concept that can be caused by several different reasons. Most of these articles appeared in the context of government hearings and reports on absenteeism during WWII such as “Absenteeism Is Analyzed” (Mar. 8, 1943) and “Absenteeism is not Simple” (Mar. 11, 1943):

“There is plenty of evidence, however, that deliberate slacking is not the whole case. Bad housing, long trips to and from the job, the necessity, especially on the part of women workers, for doing the family shopping, fatigue and strain are all contributory....But there is no cure-all for the problem”

The association between complex representations of absenteeism and war workers was significant ($\chi^2 = 112.47$ $p < .001$, Cramer’s $V = 0.201$ $p < .001$). Overall, most articles in

the full sample presented either a simplistic or very abstract portrait of absence concerning reasons.

Consistent with the studies by Edwards and Whitston (1993), Haccoun and Desgent (1993), and Nicholson and Payne (1987), articles in the sample consistently reported that absence is caused by non-work factors. What was somewhat unexpected was the overall percentages of such articles within the sample. Over 25% of the sample featured absence due to domestic responsibilities (5%), external events (10%), and general societal conditions (12.3%). While the articles concerning domestic responsibilities will be featured in the section of gender differences in the reporting, the external event articles and the societal condition articles are directly linked to Research Question #2: Issues of context.

5.4.3 Research Question #2: The reporting of absence across macro-contextual factors

The importance of societal context surrounding absence from work was manifested in many ways through the articles. While Study 1 concerned context as a product of isolated workplace circumstances (i.e., strong work demands brought about by looming deadlines), the context featured in the content analysis involved contextual issues at a societal level. Consistent with the context work of Cappelli and Sherer (1991) and Mowday and Sutton (1993), the contextual factors relevant to Study 2 operate in the larger environment at a high level of analysis. It must be underlined, however, that although it is difficult to assess the impact of context on actual absence behavior in most cases, the suggestion is often made that social conditions cause worker absence. What is clear is that contextual factors operating at a societal level affect the reporting on

absenteeism and offer clues as to what form of absence is legitimate, and in what circumstances is absence more or less acceptable. Furthermore, consistent with Johns (2001b), the articles also strongly suggest that absenteeism by individuals can have an important impact on social outcomes, underscoring the cross-level effects of organizational behaviors from micro to macro levels.

In terms of reason for absence, societal conditions (343 articles or 12.3% of the sample) was second only to medical reasons for absence (13,9%) among articles in which a reason for absence was provided. Furthermore, 40.5% of the articles in the sample reported that absence from work could have an impact on societal outcomes. While a strong proportion of these "outcome on society" articles concern war plant workers and the outcome of the war effort, the relationship between societal reasons for absence and societal outcomes for absence actually strengthens when these articles are removed ($\chi^2 = 128.12$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .235$ $p < .001$). Also, the articles suggesting that societal conditions lead to worker absence had a distinctively international flavor, as the association between these articles and non-U.S. countries consisted of $\chi^2 = 758.65$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .573$ $p < .001$. At the same time, the strongest example of changes in the reporting of absence due to social context involved the reports of absenteeism during World War Two.

5.4.3.1 Absence in the context of war. As previously underlined, the clearest manifestation of the effect of social context on the reporting of absence involved absence from work during the Second World War. The 510 articles between 1941 and 1945 concerning the absence of war plant workers or others closely involved in the war effort are a salient example of the type of "moral panic" that can occur surrounding

absenteeism, as described by Edwards and Whitson (1993, p. 6). From the effect-of-absence-on-context perspective, a substantial number of articles made direct links between absence in war plants and soldiers dying on the battlefield. Articles from 1943, in particular, featured this representation. For example:

“If necessary to make us appreciate our duties, bring back the troops from the hellholes of the world and place them in the factories, take the war workers and place them in the foxholes with filth, vermin, diarrhea, malaria and the Japs – then our production will be increased, doubled within thirty days....The perpetual slowdown in war industry, caused by absenteeism, particularly in the aircraft industry, where it exceeds 10 percent, is probably the most flagrant abuse of your obligation since Pearl Harbor” (“Workers Adjured by Rickenbacker” - Feb. 3 1943)

Overall, there was a significant association between war plant workers and reports of deviance ($\chi^2 = 44.58$ $p < .0001$, Cramer’s $V = 0.136$ $p < .001$ when politicians are removed from the sample).

Many articles advocated using social pressure to combat deviant absenteeism. Speeches from returning soldiers, service pins, posters in plants, and other appeals to patriotism were used. The Army-Navy “E” awards to recognize production excellence in war plants were tied to absenteeism. In addition to these positive social pressure tactics, negative tactics and shaming were employed, as exemplified by the aforementioned article describing the “awarding” of a Hitler plaque to workgroups with the poorest attendance record.

Absence by workers also resulted in government action. Governments also became involved in combating deviant absenteeism during WWII. Great Britain and New Zealand passed National Service Acts to severely limit labor conflict and constrain absenteeism. The United States Congress presented a bill calling for workers who were unjustifiably absent to be conscripted into the army. This “Work or Fight” bill was

proposed in 1943 and was debated until 1945 but was never enacted. Laws such as the Selective Service Act were reportedly implemented in locally indigenous ways. For instance, plants provided local draft boards with the names of workers benefiting from military deferrals who were deemed not to be fulfilling their duty due to absenteeism. A weak but significant association emerged between war workers and government intervention ($\chi^2 = 32.48$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.108$ $p < .001$).

Still, it seems that the reasons that no National Service Act covering absenteeism was passed in the United States was the realization that not all absenteeism was deviant. While certain members of congress and military leaders favored legislation to curb absenteeism, other government agencies and officials, such as the War Production Board, the War Manpower Commission, and the Secretary of Labor took a broader view on combating absenteeism. While condemning deviant absenteeism, these agencies and officials acknowledged in several articles that absence is a multi-faceted phenomenon that required study and understanding before action could be taken. Many articles, such as "Absenteeism Bill Is Opposed by WMC" (Mar. 9, 1943), "Miss Perkins [Secretary of Labor] Hits Absenteeism Bill" (Mar. 11, 1943), and "Approves Absenteeism Inquiry" (Apr. 22, 1943), presented speeches by officials and discussed studies undertaken along these lines. An example of these articles was provided through an excerpt in the previous section. The significant association between the depiction of absence as a complex phenomenon and war workers was also highlighted in the last section. Other recommendations, including several by government agencies, present absenteeism as not strictly a management problem or deviance issue, but as an outcome caused by outside forces. In 1944 and 1945 in particular, many articles featured various government

agencies identifying social and community problems such as lack of adequate transportation, lack of housing, and inadequate services in growing war factory towns as contributing to worker absenteeism. Several articles discussed the benefits of in-plant food and shopping services as a way of combating absenteeism.

The articles also demonstrated that certain forms of absence received specific representations in a war context. For example, leisure activities related to absenteeism received a distinct treatment during the war years. First, unlike most other periods in the sample, time off for holidays was referred to as absenteeism during the war. Thus, workers' lack of presence on Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Labor Day was considered absenteeism and detrimental to the war effort. Second, horse racing was banned in several areas by order of the War Mobilization Department due to its supposed link to absenteeism. This ban generated 16 articles between 1943 to 1945, including "Links Absenteeism to Racing" (Nov. 7, 1944) and "Mayor for Wartime Racing Ban to Cut Down Job Absenteeism" (Nov. 13, 1944), and raised fears that professional sports such as baseball would be banned as well. Overall, despite its overwhelming negative framing, the coverage of absenteeism in the context of World War Two was remarkably varied. In each case, some more explicitly than others, the message was the same: Absence from war industries may affect the outcome of the war.

As previously noted, many of the articles featuring absence and social context concerned countries other than the United States. Some of the earliest articles in this vein involved the difficult conditions in Germany and Japan following the end of the Second World War. Several articles blamed high absenteeism due to lack of food and low motivation after defeat as hindering German coal production from 1946 to 1948 (e.g.,

"U.S. Faces Big Task on German Labor" [Dec. 18, 1946] and "Revival of Ruhr Industry Key to the Marshall Plan" [July 20, 1947]). By the end of 1948, lowering absenteeism through better food supplies and attendance bonuses were identified as factors in the rise in coal production. In Japan, food shortages were identified as initially causing absenteeism, but a new form of absenteeism emerged as important in Japan in 1947 and 1948--absenteeism as a form of social protest. In the early years following the war, the new Japanese government imposed wage controls on civil servants. Workers were outraged, and, given a ban on strikes, used mass absenteeism to protest these controls. According to several articles, such as "Unions in Japan Denounce Regime" (Oct. 24, 1947) and "McArthur's Curb Embitters Unions" (July 25, 1948), these tactics led to serious problems in transportation, mail service, and tax collection. For example:

"The Socialist coalition Government of Premier Tetsu Katayama was under violent attack by organized labor today as a result of its warning to unionized public service employees to desist from mass absenteeism and "wildcat strikes" in their drive for higher wages.....At Tokyo's central postoffice today 930 of 2,500 employees did not report for work. At the large Nihonbashi postoffice 298 of 400 stayed away from their jobs. Absenteeism, according to Japanese labor sources, appeared to be spreading rather than declining as a result of the Cabinet's warning." (Oct. 24, 1947)

This form of conflictual absenteeism in Japan also involved a factor that would be a major issue in articles on absenteeism over the next 40 years: The link to communism.

5.4.3.2 Absenteeism in communist countries. Across the sample, communism was linked to absenteeism in 231 articles. From a context standpoint, these articles suggested that social context could lead to absence and that absence could affect societal outcomes. These articles also speak to the context under which these newspaper articles were written.

As tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union began to rise in the late 1940s with the division of Europe, stories about absenteeism in communist countries began to emerge. From 1948 to 1959, 68 stories appeared in the *New York Times* featuring absenteeism in communist countries. During this decade, most of the stories concerned the Soviet “satellite states,” such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, Romania, and Hungary. In these articles, absenteeism was often presented as a method of passive resistance on the part of workers. As such, absenteeism was consistent with a societal conflict model. Examples of articles in this vein included “Balking Coal Miners Cause Output Crisis in 3 Satellites” (Nov. 20, 1950), “Russia Has Difficulty Herding the Satellites” (Nov. 26, 1950), “Satellite Labor Impeding Output” (Apr. 2, 1951), and “German Sabotage Alarms Russians” (July 23, 1951):

“Popular resistance to Communist rule in Eastern Germany, newest and least assimilated of Soviet satellites, has reached a point where Soviet authorities are urging the East German Government to inflict new and heavier penalties for economic sabotage.....The Russians suggested that the scale of punishment prevailing in other satellite states for sabotage, absenteeism and malingering be introduced....”

The stories in the *New York Times* linking absenteeism and communism in the 1950s were also used to describe the brutality of the Soviet system in contrast to capitalist countries. Stories describing crackdowns on absenteeism through tactics such as jail and work camps included “Soviet Tops Czars in Forced Labor” (July 28, 1949), “Soviet Labor Boss Has Jailing Power” (Apr. 22, 1951), “U.S. Handling of Steel Issue a Contrast to Soviet Bloc's” (Dec. 27, 1951), and “6 Czechs Jailed for Absenteeism” (May 5, 1953). Punishment tactics were also tied to economic views of absenteeism. For example, in an attempt to curb absenteeism, the Czechoslovakian government wiped out all personal savings of citizens in 1953 to force people to work who had previously been getting by

on their savings. In all, 28 articles featuring absenteeism in Czechoslovakia appeared from 1949 to 1958 and demonstrated that this country represented an attendance problem for the Soviets.

In total, 35 articles featured absence in Poland from 1949 to 1985. The stories featuring Poland toward the end of the 1950s included not only an aspect of social protest, but also an element of absenteeism as a sign of despair and as a form of withdrawal. Unlike traditional withdrawal models of absenteeism in which absence represents withdrawal from an organization, these stories present absenteeism as an anomic form of withdrawal from society:

“The hopelessness so apparent in Poland’s industrial centers today is compounded of many factors.....The Poles won freedom from fear of the police last October. But now that they are unafraid they have the highest rate of absenteeism from their jobs since the Communists took power after World War II.....Freedom from fear has exposed the nation’s deep-rooted demoralization, a product of both the German occupation and the kind of Communist rule that existed until recently” (“Poland’s Industrial Output Declines Despite Appeals” - July 31, 1951).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, absenteeism was featured as a prominent element in the rise of union protests and civil unrest involving the Solidarity movement, and the imposition of martial law in late 1981. Beginning in 1960, Cuba became a country regularly connected to absenteeism from work. From 1960 to 1988, 32 articles featured absenteeism in Cuba. In the 1960s, the articles portrayed it as a problem caused by worker indifference to the new system and as something that was hurting the Cuban economy. There were several reports of government crackdowns on absenteeism and reports on several speeches by Fidel Castro decrying it.

While the Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe dominated the absenteeism-communism link in the 1940s and 1950s, and Cuba was a primary focus in the 1960s and

early 1970s, absenteeism problems within the Soviet Union itself only emerged as a regular topic of articles in the 1970s and the 1980s. A recurring theme in the reporting on absenteeism in these years was its link to alcoholism and social problems. Unlike in other communist countries where absenteeism was often portrayed as a form of social protest, the emphasis on absenteeism in Russia was on the flaws of the communist system that bred despair, alcoholism, and a general malaise in the workforce. While Brezhnev's attacks on absenteeism as a "great evil" ("Where Are the Stakhanovites?" [Jan. 30, 1977]) were obtained from confidential sources behind the Iron Curtain, his successor, Yuri Andropov, was very public in his war on absenteeism, openly calling for its reduction along with reductions in sloth and corruption. During his brief regime in 1983, 12 articles appeared discussing Andropov's measures including "Andropov's Tall Order: Rousing the Loafers" (Jan. 4, 1983), "Even Steam Bath Is No Refuge for Soviet Shirkers" (Jan. 31, 1983) and "Moscow Orders Stern Punishment for Shirking or Drinking at Work" (Aug. 8, 1983):

"Tough new measures were ordered today in Yuri Andropov's campaign against idlers and drunkards in Soviet factories and other enterprises.....The degree bore the personal imprint of Mr. Andropov, whose first major move after taking office was to order squads of policemen to go during daytime working hours to food stores, lines outside movie theaters and even into bathhouses to search for people absent from their jobs without authorization."

While this former head of the KGB's plans initially caused fear and raised output, his drive was already deemed a failure by the end of 1983. Absenteeism was also featured in articles during Mikhail Gorbachev's regime, in which it was commonly linked to alcoholism, lack of motivation, lack of pride, and lack of initiative. It was reported as a factor in Gorbachev's restrictions on vodka and also his Glasnost and Perestroika reforms, which ultimately led to the dismantling of the communist system. Even in the

post-communist years of the 1990s, articles such as “A Worry in West Germany: Indolence in East Germany” (Apr. 4, 1990) and “Eastern Europe, Post Communism: Five Years Later -- A Special Report; Fast and Slow Lanes on the Capitalist Road” (Oct. 7, 1994) presented costly absenteeism as an unfortunate holdover from communist rule. From a management perspective, it is interesting to note that typical management action such as discipline, incentives, or socialization efforts did not seem to be effective against absenteeism in these countries.

From a contextual standpoint, the articles clearly suggest that absence is being caused by social contextual factors (social protest, social withdrawal) and can affect societal outcomes. As explained by Krippendorff (2004), however, content analysis also involves understanding the social context in which the texts are written. In the context of the Cold War, it is essential to point out that these articles appeared in a major American newspaper, if not an American institution, during a time period in which the Berlin Wall was erected, the communist revolution in Cuba occurred with its extension to the missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Nikita Khrushchev’s threat to bury the West, the nuclear arms race in Europe, and on and on. It is not unreasonable to suspect that articles featuring absenteeism problems in communist countries were not reporting on this issue for its own sake, but that this was part of a general campaign to disparage communism and promote capitalism.

5.4.3.3 Other examples of societal level causes/outcomes of absenteeism.

Communist countries are not the only ones where absenteeism has been seen to have an important impact on society. Several examples exist in the sample in which absenteeism has negatively influenced national economies on an historic scale. Chief among these

illustrations is the economic crisis that gripped Great Britain following World War Two. While the war left much of Great Britain in physical ruin, the next ten years saw the U.K. lose, in many ways, its rank among the world's economic powers. From 1946 to 1951, there were 65 articles in the *New York Times* describing the devastating effect that miner absenteeism was having on the British economy. Several articles analyzing the British worker such as "British Apathy in Crisis Like That in 'Phony War'" (Sep. 5, 1947), "British Worker Unexcited by Crisis over Currency" (Sep. 4, 1949), and "Worker Shirking Disturbs Britain" (Jan. 20, 1952) seemed to suggest that British coal miners were not overly ambitious, were happy to just get by, and suffered from a mindset of entitlement. A 1946 editorial, "British Socialists Choose 'Hard Way'" (Apr. 21, 1946), suggested that balancing nationalization and a democratic system was extremely difficult, and that nationalization and government control were better suited for totalitarian regimes:

"As systems of government, Italian fascism and German Nazism have gone, but Russian communism is stronger than ever, and it is the contrast between Russian and British socialism that is being brought home to Britons these days.....There is an acute realization that nationalization of coal mines is getting off to a bad start and the Minister of Fuel and Power, Emmanuel Shinwell, has been saying so in no uncertain terms. His chief complaint (and it is, indeed, the primary reason for low production) is absenteeism, lateness and a general shortage of manpower."

The British experience, although probably the most dramatic, is by no means unique. The economic difficulties of many other countries have been linked to absenteeism. For example, Italian absenteeism has been covered prominently. In the 1970s, there were 16 articles discussing how absenteeism was contributing to the economic crisis facing the nation. Articles such as "Rome Decrees Austerity for '2 Nations'" (Jan. 15, 1971), "Rising Absenteeism in Italy Now Troubles Economy" (Aug. 23, 1972), "Mood in Italy

Is Likened to Dancing on the Titanic” (June 10, 1974), and “Italian President Portrays a Country in Dire Trouble” (Oct. 16, 1975) position absenteeism as a plague that was dragging down the nation:

“He (President Leone) denounced absenteeism by workers, saying it was “one of the causes of the crisis.” There are those who stay home, he added, because of a “scanty sense of responsibility” and because of “permissiveness” of doctors who vouch for those with supposed illnesses.” (October 16, 1975).

Both the British and the Italian coverage featured the notion that government policy aimed at providing a social safety net for workers can have the unintended consequence of encouraging absenteeism. Harmful absenteeism as an outcome of generous social benefits was also reported from Northern Europe. The 1990s through 2004 included stories on Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands describing how generous government sick leave benefits were leading to high absenteeism compared to neighboring countries and thus hurting national competitiveness. These stories are somewhat ironic as, in the 1960s and 1970s, the labor policies in these countries were portrayed in the *New York Times* as an avant-garde source of competitive advantage.

The 1980s also featured articles on the decline of American competitiveness and the rise of the Far East. Stories comparing the U.S. to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan noted how low absenteeism in Asia, based on cultural differences, was a factor in the success of these countries (e.g. “Wages, Discipline Give Korea an Edge” [Apr. 6, 1986], “Explaining the ‘Japanese Paradox’; Made in America, Managed By Japan” [Nov. 16, 1986]). This is consistent with Edwards and Whitson’s (1993) case studies demonstrating that competitive pressures from outside a firm can make absenteeism an issue even if organizational data show that absenteeism is not really a growing problem. These stories

do not clearly indicate that absenteeism is a problem in the United States from a base rate perspective, but that it is a weakness in comparison to international rivals. Finally, there has been a series of individual articles linking national economic problems to absenteeism in countries such as Angola, Burma, Argentina, Chile, Egypt, Mexico, Portugal, and Zambia. Overall, these articles frame absenteeism as an important variable influencing the national economy.

From a context perspective, these articles can be analyzed in a similar way to the articles featuring communist countries. The articles suggest that absenteeism can be caused by societal factors (apathy in the U.K., laziness in Italy, overgenerous social benefits in Scandinavian countries), and can have a negative impact on the social economic context of a nation. From a context of reporting aspect, one could also assert that the negative stories about Britain, Italy and the Scandinavian countries can be seen as an editorial rebuke of somewhat socialist policies.

5.4.3.4 The impact of individual absenteeism on legislative context. Beyond national economic consequences of absenteeism, important legislative outcomes have also been influenced by absenteeism, as previously mentioned, of politicians. In 1925, President Calvin Coolidge's nominee for Attorney general was rejected due to absenteeism of three senators and the Vice-President ("Republicans Warn Coolidge Against Renaming Warren" [May 12, 1925]). It was the first time in 57 years that a presidential nominee to a cabinet post had not been accepted. In 1958, a \$1 billion loan program was defeated by a vote of 41-40 due to absenteeism ("Democrats Lose Works Bill Test" [Apr. 16, 1958]). President Carter suffered an important defeat concerning the Panama Canal when his plan lost by 11 votes while 40 members of congress were absent

("House Vote Defeats a Bill to Carry Out Panama Canal Pact" [Sep. 21, 1979]). On at least five occasions civil rights legislation was hampered by absenteeism, for example "House Declines, 137-134, to Curb Voting Referees" (Mar. 19, 1960), "Absences Delay Debate on Rights" (Apr. 5, 1964), and "Registration Bill Killed In Senate" (Mar. 16, 1972). Key votes on military and atomic/nuclear weapons were also influenced by absenteeism ("Atom Pact Appears Dead In Senate Until Next Year" [Oct. 10, 1968], "Senate Puts Off Bomber Decision Until February" [May 21, 1976]), as well as decisions concerning the United States's pull out of Viet-Nam ("End-the-War Amendment Killed in Senate, 45 to 42" [Sep. 27, 1972] and "In the House, Portents of Change" [July, 27, 1972]). Further on the international scene, absenteeism influenced a U.S. treaty with Japan ("Harding Assured Treaty Will Pass" [Mar. 23, 1922]) and a controversial aid plan to Russia that represented an important test of President Lyndon Johnson's presidency just after President Kennedy's assassination ("Congress Delays Close of Session in Snarl over Aid" [Dec. 22, 1963]). Many other important issues, such as trade and tariff bills, minimum wage bills, environmental protection bills, anti-trust legislation, and price controls were influenced by absenteeism in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. On the international front, the article "Russian Cabinet in Hard Position" (Oct. 13, 1917) was perhaps the most significant as it states that absenteeism in the Russian parliament allowed the Bolsheviks to gain control of powerful levers in government, which eventually led to totalitarian rule.

5.4.3.5 Absence as a form of social protest. Absenteeism due to social conflict and protest were also featured in a similar way as had occurred with Japan at the end of World War Two and communist satellite states. There were 23 articles from 1951 to 1986

linking turmoil in Argentina to worker absenteeism. Over the years, there were also links between absenteeism and political or social problems in Chile involving both the take over by General Augusto Pinochet in the early 1970s and the beginning of his downfall in the mid-1980s. Perhaps the most historically significant example of worker absenteeism as a form of social protest involved black workers in South Africa revolting against white rule. Twelve articles from 1960 to 1991 discussed absenteeism in this context, with particular emphasis on riots in Soweto in 1976 and successful strikes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the articles in the 1970s and early 1980s focused on the violence and turmoil surrounding the protests and the fact that absenteeism was being caused both by workers protesting apartheid and workers being intimidated by rebels, the later articles clearly explained mass absenteeism as an organized, peaceful, and successful protest aimed at paralyzing the South African economy:

“A nationwide strike, described by its organizers as the biggest in the country's history, paralyzed factories and businesses across South Africa today and left people without the basic services normally provided by black employees. Several million black workers stayed home as part of a work stoppage to protest the Government's recent imposition of a revised new sales tax. The strike is to continue Tuesday for another day.....” “The success of the general strike shows decisively that this Government has no legitimacy to take decisions on behalf of the people of this country on any issue,” his 1.2 million-member labor federation said in a statement. The South African Chamber of Business said absenteeism in greater Johannesburg, Durban and the Eastern Cape hit 80 to 100 percent, while 40 percent of workers in Cape Town and up to 80 percent in Pretoria stayed away. The chamber estimated that \$35 million was lost in wages.” (“Strike by Blacks Paralyzes South Africa” – November 5, 1991).

Absenteeism has been linked to protests in many other countries. Isolated stories represented absenteeism as a form of protest against the government in Algeria (1962), the Congo (1962 and 1964), Pakistan (1964 and 1971), Viet Nam (1966), and India (1974

and 1982). Absenteeism was also treated as a form of protest by Chinese workers in Shanghai following the Tiananmen Square massacres in Beijing 1989, and by Iranians in 1978 and 1979, at the urging of Ayatollah Khomeini.

5.4.3.6 Absence caused by context in terms of social events. Finally, 278 or 10% of the articles in the sample indicated that absence from work could be caused by discrete societal events. While the social protest articles fit into this category, snowstorms, transit strikes, sporting events such as the Olympics or World Cup of Soccer, national tragedies such as the deaths of Charles De Gaulle in France and Martin Luther King in the United States, and terrorist threats such as the anthrax scare in U.S. post offices in 2001 were all identified as absence-inducing events.

Overall, three main conclusions can be drawn from all of these articles. First, depending on social context (e.g. in times of war or in times of intense international competition), absence becomes more important and newsworthy. Second, absenteeism is reported to have an important impact on societal outcomes (economic, social, and legislative). Third, absence can apparently be caused by societal conditions or societal events that have little or nothing to do with how individuals feel about their job. The non-work related reasons for absence are also featured in regards to Research Question #3: the difference in reporting concerning the absence of women vs. men.

5.4.4 Research Question #3: Gender and absence

As previously reported, only 5% of the articles in the sample featured absence by women workers, compared to 25.1% for men, and 69.8% of the articles that were gender neutral. While the percentage of articles concerning women is small, there is remarkable consistency in terms of how absence by women is portrayed.

Focusing only on the 840 articles that specified the gender of absentees, women were over-represented in articles that did not specify a particular job or that dealt with factory workers ($\chi^2 = 327.83$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.625$ $p < .001$ and $\chi^2 = 127.92$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.390$ $p < .001$), and were strongly associated with absenteeism for domestic reasons ($\chi^2 = 422.05$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.709$ $p < .001$). This association concerning gender and domestic responsibilities was among the highest detected in the entire study. There were more modest associations indicating that women were less absent than men due to labor conflict ($\chi^2 = 8.86$ $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = 0.103$ $p < .01$), economic reasons ($\chi^2 = 10.18$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.135$ $p < .001$), leisure ($\chi^2 = 14.80$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.133$ $p < .001$), or deviance ($\chi^2 = 20.49$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.156$ $p < .001$). Interestingly, absence by women was associated with greater harm to business outcomes in comparison to men ($\chi^2 = 17.84$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.146$ $p < .001$). Furthermore, there were relatively strong associations between absence by women and management action to reduce it ($\chi^2 = 49.25$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.242$ $p < .001$) and advocacy for different policies ($\chi^2 = 108.89$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.355$ $p < .001$). Finally, in terms of trends over time, there was a strong association between reporting on the absence of women and time period ($\chi^2 = 87.28$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.322$ $p < .001$) with articles appearing primarily during the Second World War, becoming very rare during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and reemerging in the 1980s and 1990s.

The large number of articles featuring absenteeism by women in the 1940s (62 articles) is a testimony to the important impact that women had on war production during World War Two. Given the paucity of articles about women and absence prior to 1941, these articles also represent the first examples of women being linked to absenteeism in a

significant way. Although men's absenteeism during WWII was often portrayed as deviant, unpatriotic, or caused by labor conflict, women's absenteeism was presented as being caused primarily by domestic responsibilities. At the same time, stories featuring absenteeism by women were not unanimously supportive in nature. Particularly in 1942 and early 1943, articles often portrayed women as fragile, uncommitted, and not particularly suited for war plant work. December 1942's "Women Cautioned About War Jobs" (Dec. 13, 1942) and "Women Urged To Stick" (Dec. 16, 1942) suggested that women were actually retarding the war effort due to their absenteeism. In these articles, women were portrayed as accident-prone (due to their high heels, according to the female U.S. Secretary of Labor) and not serious about work (e.g., apt to skip work in order to attend parties and get their hair done):

"Miss Perkins (U.S. Secretary of Labor) said that employers held that women fatigue more quickly than men, that they take days off "to go shopping" and that they feel their first duty is with their children if the "baby gets sick"She added that many accidents occur because women insist on wearing high-heeled shoes." (December 13, 1942)

Other articles in early 1943 suggested that women lacked the necessary toughness for war work and that they would be absent "whenever they get a little scratch" ("Safety Pleaders Reach Los Angeles For Drive Against Plant Accidents" [Feb. 8, 1943]). As 1943 advanced, however, there was increasing acknowledgement that women were vital to war production, that their output was impressive, and that their absenteeism was due primarily to child care duties, transportation problems, and shopping needs. Articles such as "It's A Woman's War, Too" (Mar. 28, 1943) and "Their First 'Sub'" (May 9, 1943) and "Women Have Increasing Role In Campaigns To Speed War Plant Output, Cut Delays" (Jan. 13, 1944) attested to the valuable role that women were playing in the war effort. In addition,

articles such as “Store Sets Up Unit In Jersey War Plant” (Apr. 5, 1943), “Child Care Group Formed In Buffalo” (Apr. 6, 1943), and “Women In War Jobs Seen In Need Of Aid” (Apr. 17, 1943) indicated that women needed assistance and services to combat their absenteeism. For example:

“President Roosevelt took steps today to help the recruiting of women in industry in war plants by directing the War Production Board to make available materials for building more rest rooms, cafeterias, and other facilities for women war workers.” (“President Speeds Women’s Facilities” - December 23, 1943)

Overall, of the 62 articles featuring women’s absenteeism during the Second World War, 46 linked absenteeism to domestic duties, and most of these called for additional services for women.

The 24 articles featuring women’s absenteeism over the 30-year period between 1950 and 1979 are an indication of how women were not a strong part of the employment landscape over that time. Apart from one article in 1951 that advocated child care (an article that was written from the perspective of the U.S. returning to a war footing), the articles in the 1950s and 1960s commonly represented women’s absenteeism as an indication that they were not good workers, and that men should be favored. Short articles such as “Office Absentees Cited” (July 15, 1957) and “Women Job Absenteeism Slightly Above Male Rate” (Nov. 2, 1969) noted that absenteeism by women was higher than men’s, while articles such as “A Secretary Is Set to Wed Or Get Ahead” (Apr. 23, 1961), “Working Women Pose Problems, Employers Find” (Mar. 3, 1961), and “Employment Agency Backs Men As Office Typists and Secretaries” (Nov. 30, 1963) portrayed women as unreliable, neurotic, and inefficient from an employment perspective. For example, the 1963 article featured the following passage:

“When they are young, and presumably ‘man hunting’ there seems to be constant time lost in their visits to the powder rooms and on the telephone. Later, dates interfere with their efficiency; when they are married, pregnancies, sick children and unreliable baby sitters contribute to absenteeism. Emotional upsets at home-husbands, money, in-laws and a wealth of other responsibilities distract them from full attention to their work.” (November 30, 1963)

However, a new theme that emerged during this period was the notion that women were being discriminated against in the workplace and that exaggerated accounts about their absenteeism were being used to create barriers. This idea had appeared once or twice in the articles from World War II but became a larger focus over these later years. A 1959 article on women stock brokers, “Women A Trial To Some Brokers But Strong Force In Stock Field” (June 10, 1959) indicated that women brokers could be very successful dealing with women or open-minded male clients, but that they faced barriers in being hired due to fears of high absenteeism. As the civil rights and the women’s liberation movements gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, articles such as “Women’s Pay Gap Is Still Widening, U.S. Official Says” (Nov. 16, 1964), “Women Are Breaking The Blue-Collar Barrier” (Aug. 26, 1973), and “To Women, Insurance Companies Are At Fault On Many Things” (Feb. 9, 1974) suggested that women’s higher absenteeism was actually a myth being used to discriminate against women in various business domains. Furthermore, two articles in the 1970s “Women March Down Fifth In Equality Drive” (Aug. 27, 1970) and “Most Of The Nation’s ‘Alices’ Stay On Job, Ignoring NOW’s Call For One-Day Strike” (Oct. 30, 1975) presented absenteeism as a form of organized protest by the women’s movement to advance women’s rights.

The 1970s witnessed the emergence of a trend that would dominate the reporting on women’s absenteeism in the 1980s and 1990s: Corporate child care and alternative work arrangements. Articles such as “While Mother Works, The Company Takes Care

Of The Children” (Aug. 26, 1970), “Woman Economist Backs Part-Time Work” (Sep. 9, 1972) and “Workers Find 'Flextime 'Makes For Flexible Living” (Oct. 15, 1979) revived a discourse that had been almost totally absent since the articles during World War Two - the need to provide women with assistance in order to help balance work and family.

The 1980s saw women stake a much greater place in employment. This important presence of women in the workplace is underscored by the number of articles featuring women’s absenteeism in the 1980s and 1990s. In all, 61 articles touching on absenteeism by women appeared from 1980 to 2005. From a gender role perspective, 47 of these articles featured women’s absenteeism as a result of domestic duties, most commonly involving child care. Articles repeatedly discussed the need for corporate child care, or the need for companies to fund daycare centers in their communities. Unlike the articles during World War Two, the child care issue was overwhelmingly portrayed as a problem that private enterprise should deal with as opposed to the government. Many articles had a strong advocacy aspect but also portrayed corporate child care as a win-win situation for mothers and companies that leads to corporate success. Articles such as “Child Care And Business, Side By Side” (May 6, 1986), “Child Care Connected With The Workplace Makes Good Business Sense” (Feb. 10, 1987), “Wooing Workers In The 90's: New Role For Family Benefits” (July 20, 1988), and “Corporate Day Care Pays For Itself” (Apr. 30, 1989) strongly suggested that child care is an important recruitment and retention tool that reduces costly absenteeism. For example:

“Citing a Fortune magazine survey that attributed much of workers' absenteeism and unproductive time to lack of child care, Ms. Bloom said that every year the number of work-site child-care centers increased. "Corporations found it improves employee morale and productivity, lowers absenteeism and helps recruit and retain employees," she said. "On-site child care has made it easier

for real estate developers to rent space to good tenants." ("Caring for Children at the Work Site" - Aug. 5, 1990).

While many articles called for more family-friendly policies, it is important to emphasize that the benefits of family policies for companies are often presented as unsupported by hard data, and some articles demonstrated resistance from managers and negative outcomes for women relating to child care and family policies. For example, the aforementioned "Wooing Workers In The 90's" (July 20, 1988) featured a comment from an executive that he had no intention of getting involved with daycare and would just not hire women likely to become pregnant. Other articles suggested that many managers were taking a very cautious approach to child care support and that they were skeptical as to its cost efficiency. It is important to note that, as will be explained in the section relation to Research Question #4 concerning advocacy for services surrounding reducing absenteeism, that the focus of these articles were usually the child care or family-friendly policies themselves, as opposed to articles focusing on absenteeism. As such, absenteeism by women was *used to illustrate* the need for and benefits of such policies. Furthermore, there were indications in the 1980s and 1990s that women could still be fired due to child care difficulties. A particularly telling example consisted of three stories in 1991, including "Child Care In Conflict With A Job" (Mar. 2, 1991) describing how a Minnesota woman had been fired for excessive absenteeism caused by caring for her very sick child. The articles focused on a lawsuit filed by the woman (which she won) asking for unemployment insurance benefits that had originally been denied to her since she was fired. She did not contest the firing per se, and the articles indicated that in the mind of the company, the judges, and even the employee herself, the firing was justified. In terms of discrimination based on women's absenteeism, articles such as "Single

Mothers Join Suit To Enlist In The Military” (Dec. 25, 1984) and “On A Cultural Battlefield: Women In The Military” (June 23, 1997) described how young mothers were facing barriers enlisting and staying in the military due to unsubstantiated fears about absenteeism, while 1995’s “For Many In Work Force, 'Glass Ceiling' Still Exists” (Mar. 16, 1995) described the findings of a federal commission looking into discrimination that reported that myths surrounding absenteeism by women were not allowing women to move beyond middle management. The report suggested that purported higher absenteeism by women was based on stereotypes and that, when maternity days are removed, women actually have less absenteeism than men:

“The commission report suggested that what is really happening is that women and minority groups are not receiving the close mentoring and other support that white men automatically receive from other white men. And they must combat unfounded stereotypes with which white men need not contend. Hispanic workers, for example, are assumed to be foreign born and lazy. Yet two-thirds were born in the United States, and they have the highest labor force participation rate of all the groups surveyed for the report. Women are perceived as more prone to absenteeism than men. Yet, after excluding time lost for maternity leaves, women are absent from work less often than men, the report says.” (March 16, 1995)

Finally, from 1988 to 2004, there were 6 articles linking women’s absenteeism to spousal/relationship abuse and sexual harassment. Examples included “When Abuse Follows Women to Work” (Mar. 10, 1996) and “Victim Of Domestic Abuse Gets City Job Back” (Sep. 29, 2004).

In all, consistent with Fowler’s (1991) explanation of how women are portrayed in the press, the articles featuring absence by women were about *women*. Articles featuring absence by men or gender-neutral articles usually make no mention of any gender issues or gender roles. For women, however, work behavior is almost exclusively

framed from a gender perspective. The majority of articles report that absence by women is primarily an issue of domestic responsibilities and advocate for greater services for women. At the same time, the articles also paint absence by women to be more harmful to business than absence by men. Furthermore, there are many articles advancing negative stereotypes of women workers as not serious and unreliable, and articles suggesting that women are being discriminated against and held back due to fears of absenteeism.

5.4.5 Research Question #4: Absence as a dependent variable or an independent variable

As underlined in Chapter 3, academic research on absenteeism traditionally positions the behavior as a dependent variable in studies, while its negative impact is a widely held underlying assumption. In the newspaper articles featuring absenteeism, this trend is somewhat reversed and the focus is primarily on what absence results in or what actions it stimulates.

While the previous pages are a testimony that there is a strong presence of articles focusing on the causes of absence (domestic responsibilities, societal events or conditions, deviance, medical reasons, and so on), remember that the highest proportion of articles in terms of reasons did not specify why individuals were absent at all. Overall, 629 or 22.6% of the articles in the sample do not give a clear reason why people are absent from work. In contrast, only 4.7% of the articles reported no consequences of absenteeism. In terms of specific outcomes, 40.5% of the articles reported that absenteeism influence societal-level outcomes (as explained in the previous section on absence and context in the press), 54.6% reported that absenteeism is harmful to business,

and 21.8% reported that individuals can be punished/harmed by absenteeism. Furthermore, 17% of the articles described management interventions aimed at quelling absenteeism, 14.1% reported government interventions, 7.8% discussed labor disputes/negations *caused* by absenteeism, and 17.5% described groups or proponents of some intervention advocating for their cause on the basis that it would reduce absenteeism.

The link to advocacy was somewhat unexpected at the outset of the study. However, as explained in the other sections, absence from work has been a vehicle to promote many various policies and initiatives such as industrial medicine, medical research on specific illnesses, wellness and fitness programs, interventions for depression, counseling for drug and alcohol abuse, management interventions and techniques such as job enrichment and participative management, social programs involving housing and transportation, and daycare services and family friendly policies for women. A number of other interventions and products have also been advocated under the pretense of reducing absenteeism, such as sun lamps, air conditioning, Muzak, and clean air. In fact, many of the articles that stated specific reasons for absence seemed to do so in order to highlight a management intervention or advocate a policy or practice. It is interesting to note the strong association between advocacy and specific reasons for absence ($\chi^2 = 120.43$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.228$ $p < .001$ with war plant workers removed) but that there was also a strong association between advocacy and articles in which no specific job was indicated ($\chi^2 = 302.91$ $p < .0001$, Cramer's $V = 0.362$ $p < .0001$ with war plants removed). It appears that advocacy is issue driven and not focused on particular occupations.

In terms of trends over time, there were a number of significant patterns that emerged. In terms of management interventions, there was a significant association with time period ($\chi^2 = 155.61$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.259$ $p < .001$) which indicated that the view that managers could reduce absenteeism was especially prevalent in the 1970s, notably in terms of absenteeism caused by work withdrawal ($\chi^2 = 51.32$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.326$ $p < .001$ in the 1970s). Controlling for the war plant workers during WWII, there was also a significant advocacy/time period association ($\chi^2 = 126.47$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.233$ $p < .001$) with advocacy particularly present in from the 1970s on.

In terms of labor conflict arising from absenteeism, this was particularly prevalent during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s when companies, especially automobile manufacturers, began demanding that absenteeism levels be included in labor agreements. Examples of such articles include "Ford Calls on U.A.W. to Agree To Tough Curb on Absenteeism" (July 29, 1970), "G.M. and Union Clash on Absenteeism and Hiring" (July 21, 1979), "No Longer Just Another Gig; After a Strike Over Absenteeism, City Ballet Musicians Are Changing Course" (June 28, 2000), and "Union and Verizon at Odds on Focus of Talks" (June 30, 2003). It is interesting to note that these absenteeism-as-a-labor-negotiation-issue articles did not usually indicate that the labor negotiations focused on particular reasons for absence, but treated all absence the same. The associating between labor conflict as an outcome of absenteeism and the lack of specificity in reason for absence was $\chi^2 = 40.81$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.291$ $p < .001$ in the 1970s, $\chi^2 = 22.49$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.251$ $p < .001$ in the 1980s, and $\chi^2 = 10.65$ $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = 0.226$ $p < .01$ in the 1990s.

Finally, as previously explained in the section relating to Research Question #2 on macro contextual factors, societal outcomes and government interventions were significantly associated with societal reasons for absence and non-U.S workers when war plant workers were removed from the sample.

In terms of the negative impact of absenteeism on business that was present in 1,521 articles or 54.6% of the sample, this notion was so widespread that no particular associations emerged with other variables such as job, reason for absence, or decade. It was a common theme running through every category of article.

Overall, the data suggest that absence's position as an independent variable leading to outcomes or actions is the primary focus of newspaper articles. Consistent with the nature of the press (Fowler, 1991), the interest in absence from work seems to be based on the negative outcomes it engenders, rather than on the reasons for which it occurs. At the same time, the focus on the negative outcomes begs the question (Research Question #5): When is absence portrayed as legitimate?

5.4.6 Research Question #5: When is absence viewed as legitimate?

As previously noted, the portrayal of absenteeism in the press is overwhelmingly negative with only 15 of 2,785 articles suggesting that absenteeism can be positive or beneficial in some way. At the same time, as described in the section regarding reasons, only a relatively small percentage (11%) suggest that absence is caused by personal deviance. But what about the other reasons for absence? Do representations of other reasons for absence reference questions of legitimacy? In order to explore this issue, it is useful to focus on individual outcomes following absence, notably stories in which individuals are punished for absenteeism.

Within the sample, 21.8% of the articles indicated that absence leads to negative outcomes for individuals. Not surprisingly, there was a significant association between deviance reasons for absence and negative outcomes for absentees ($\chi^2 = 183.95$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.257$ $p < .001$). Also not surprisingly, medical reasons for absence were associated with a lack of punishment ($\chi^2 = 64.44$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.152$ $p < .001$). Only 6.2% of articles concerning illness absence discussed punishment for employees, and for the 100 stories on absence due to colds and flu, not a single article discussed punishment or other negative outcomes for absentees. This is consistent with the findings from Study 1. Focusing on men versus women, men had a greater association with punishment than women ($\chi^2 = 20.25$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.155$ $p < .001$). An interesting finding was that when no specific reason for absence was given in the articles, there was a greater chance that punishment would be invoked ($\chi^2 = 120.99$ $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.229$ $p < .001$ with war plant workers removed). It seems that when absence is discussed in abstract terms, it is often described in disciplinary terms. This is consistent with the notion that absence from work is a mildly deviant behavior (Johns, in press). This is also exemplified by the aforementioned articles mentioning absenteeism records in the context of criminal behavior.

The job that was most associated with negative individual outcomes was that of politician. As previously described, charges of absenteeism have been consistently featured in the press since the beginning of the 20th century. These attack stories on politicians also contribute to the relationship between lack of reason in the articles and negative outcomes for absentees as most of the political attacks do not specify why politicians were away.

There was also a contextual component to the legitimacy/punishment question. As previously described, deviance and punishment were common themes in the reporting on absence from war plants in World War Two, particularly for men. Articles such as "House Body Votes Absentee Curb; Would Draft Navy Yard Shirkers" (Feb. 24, 1943), "For Penalizing Absenteeism" (Mar. 3, 1943), and "Absentees Face Jail" (Mar. 12, 1943) testify to the deviant/punishment connotation to absence during war time. Furthermore, while labor conflict was not associated with deviance or punishment over the full sample, when the sample was split to focus exclusively on war time workers, a significant association between labor conflict and deviance emerged ($\chi^2 = 10.38$ $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = 0.152$ $p < .01$). Examples of articles indicating that labor conflict was deviant during wartime included the previously excerpted "Workers Adjured by Rickenbacker" (Feb. 3 1943), as well as "Our Soldiers in Africa Condemn Strikes Here, Army Paper Reveals" (June 6, 1943), "Says Strikes Hit Morale" (Oct. 28, 1943), "Firing of Strikers is Upheld by WLB" (May 17, 1944), and "WLB Warns Lewis Walkouts Must End" (Apr. 6, 1945).

Overall, the punishment/deviant focus in the articles was certainly not a constant, but crystallized around certain articles such as absence by politicians, articles concerning criminal activity, labor conflict during war time, and absence in general during war time. In terms of reasons that appear to be the least punished, illness absence is clearly a form of absence that is viewed as legitimate.

5.5 Discussion

Although highly descriptive in nature, the content analysis conducted for Study 2 reveals several trends related to the five research questions and to the ideas introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. The articles demonstrated a multi-level treatment of absenteeism, and

the cause-and-effect chains reported in the articles offered a novel method of assessing attributions concerning absenteeism. What theoretical contributions can be derived from the description of the articles?

5.5.1 Absence Cultures

From an absence culture perspective, the articles remind us that several absence cultures can be in operation simultaneously and that norms and expectations surrounding absence can exist at various levels of analysis. The articles in the sample reveal that there is not a single absence culture but that various absence cultures may exist around certain reasons for absence, types of workers, and so on. The one trend that does suggest a widespread generalized representation of absence is its overwhelming negative connotation. As described in the results, only 15 of the 2,785 articles, or 0.5%, painted absenteeism in a positive or potentially positive light. This is a strong confirmation of the underlying assumption that absence is harmful as noted by Goodman and Atkin (1984) and Johns and Nicholson (1982). As previously underlined, the findings that presenteeism is more costly to organizations than absenteeism (Johns, 2007) are challenging this assumption. As noted, 6 of the 15 positive articles on absenteeism advocated staying away from work when ill. Apart from the general conceptualization of absence as negative, the articles demonstrated a remarkable amount of variability in terms of different themes. At the same time, there was strong consistency within themes.

Each of the following sections in the discussion involves more subtle norms and expectations surrounding absence. The articles speak to the types of expectations that involve reason for absence, context surrounding absence, and gender of an absentee.

Each theme can be conceptualized as a form of absence culture and future research would do well to explore their existence through more direct study.

5.5.2 Reasons for Absence

In terms of the first research question concerning reason for absence, it is interesting to note that a fair proportion of articles were very abstract in terms of reason for absence, job of absentee, and so on. Consistent with the general nature of the press, only a handful of articles acknowledged that absenteeism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be easily explained. Overall, from an attribution process (antecedent) viewpoint, the articles were vague. At the same time, each of the absence models identified by Johns (1997) was represented in the sample. The withdrawal model, that has historically been a major focus in academic research on absenteeism, was less present in the newspapers than was expected. At the same time, the articles that did report on withdrawal absence were consistent with the academic focus, such as linkages with turnover, and the presence of these articles was consistent with the growth of organizational behavior as a field of research in the 1970s with several articles referring to well known OB theories.

The articles fully support Atkin and Goodman's (1984, p. 61) comment that absenteeism is a "bouillabaisse" made up of different discrete behaviors and episodes that are very diverse in nature. The results of the study should remind researchers that reason for absence, similar to the results of Study 1, should be taken into account when studying absence. The articles may also be a signal to researchers that the withdrawal model is overemphasized in academic research, and that more research may be warranted on absence for other reasons that seem to be newsworthy. The reasons focused on in the press and associations made with other behaviors could lead to exciting academic

research, specifically in relation to cross-level research whereby absence by individuals is caused by societal factors or can influence societal outcomes.

Medical discussions of absence were also prominent among the articles that provided a reason for absence. This medical focus should also be a signal to researchers that this form of absence from work is discussed in the public domain and deserves to be studied. Exploring the “black hole” (Nicholson & Martocchio, 1995, p. 605) of illness absence would be worth academics’ time, both in terms of theory and practitioner interest.

5.5.3 Context

The importance of considering context when studying absenteeism was demonstrated in several ways in the study. The overarching focus concerned context at a more macro/societal level of analysis but contextual importance was manifested in various ways. A first context related theme indicated that social conditions or events could lead to worker absenteeism. Social protests aimed at communism, apartheid and various government institutions were reported to cause worker absenteeism. Social withdrawal and despair (Poland and Soviet Union), overly generous social benefits (Sweden and Norway), or a general shared mindset of workers (U.K. coalminers and Italians) were also reported as causes of absenteeism. Many articles also suggested that absence by workers could have important outcomes on societal context, particularly in terms of hurting the economic health of a country. Other specific themes relating to the negative impact of absence on societal outcomes included the effects of absence by politicians on important legislation, and the impact of absence of war workers on military victory.

Related to the legislation and war outcome stories, the articles also demonstrated the importance of context in another way: Determining when absence from work “matters”. Articles demonstrated that absence episodes and base rates were not always as important as the social context in which absence was occurring. The clearest example of this was the extremely large number of articles featuring absence from work during World War Two. In this context, absence became newsworthy. Social context was also shown to alter the representation of absence, with links to deviance, absence related to labor conflict and absence due to leisure activities receiving a particular treatment during the war years.

This also illuminates another element of context: The presentation of absenteeism in the context of news reporting. Krippendorff (2004) asserts that conducting a content analysis is not simply about analyzing words and ideas written in the texts, but also requires understanding the context in which a text is written and read, by whom a text is written and read, and the constraints and biases that may be present in the medium involved. For newspapers, the description of the press provided prior to the results speaks to the constraints that newspapers face when publishing stories (e.g., the need to rely on credible sources, the need to decide what is interesting and acceptable for readers, the preference for negative stories, the inevitable simplification of reality that is necessary, and so on). As such, the context of news reporting surely leads to a particular representation of absenteeism with associations with important stories of the period. Furthermore, the desire to spur patriotism and war production during war time, and the emphasis of the negative aspects of communism and socialism can cogently be described as evidence of a certain measure of bias on the part of the *New York Times*. This is also

exemplified in how absence in non-U.S. countries is reported on. In a way, the treatment of absence in the *New York Times* concerning non-American workers is similar to the notion of the fundamental attribution error in attribution theory. In attribution theory, at an individual level of analysis, the fundamental attribution error is the proclivity of observers to attribute negative outcomes of others to internal factors. In a similar way, the articles treat American absenteeism as something that is caused by all sorts of reasons, while absenteeism by non-Americans is treated as an indication of conditions in other countries. While the attribution error explanation is a more micro-psychological treatment of the phenomenon, one could also suggest that it is a deliberate and politically biased simplification that serves particular goals.

Overall, the articles underscore the importance of context on several fronts. The news stories suggest that social context can influence the absence of workers and that the absence of workers can have serious societal outcomes. Furthermore, the articles demonstrate that absence from work can be more or less newsworthy depending on social context and the context that the reporting is occurring in. Finally, the stories remind us that content analysts must be aware of the contextual reality and constraints inherent in the texts they analyze as these influence the treatment of the substantive topic of interest. All of these issues should be followed up on in future research.

5.5.4 Gender

From an intergroup perspective of Doise's (1986) model, strong trends were found along gender lines (Research Question #3). In fact, the association between gender and domestic reasons for missing work was the strongest detected in the study. Domestic responsibilities are overwhelmingly associated with women, and other stories concerning

absence by women were highly gender-centric. The articles about absence by women were about women; the articles concerning absence by men put little or no emphasis on gender. It is interesting to speculate how this overall representation may affect women in general. Indeed, several articles suggested that exaggerated fears of absence were resulting in discrimination against women, and that women's high rate of absenteeism is a myth. There exists a large body of research suggesting that gender stereotypes harm women in the workplace, and the categorization aspect of gender can be a potent enabler of unfair biases against women. Dipboye and Colella (2005) suggest that discrimination is a consequence of heuristics employed in processing information concerning women or other historically disadvantaged groups. In the workplace, it is widely acknowledged that women suffer from pay inequity, still encounter glass-ceiling effects, receive lower starting pay, hold less prestigious and influential jobs, advance more slowly in organizations, and are less likely to benefit from transfers and job changes than men (Cleveland, Vescio & Barnes-Farrell, 2005; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). A separate absence culture for women driven by stereotypes may be a contributing factor to barriers that women face in the workplace. An absence culture that features a general expectation that women are more absent than men may lead to women being discriminated against in hiring, promotion, and pay decisions. The same implicit stereotypes that justify a system (Jost & Banaji, 1994) in which women are more absent can also lead system-justification for discriminating against women in the workplace. The absence culture for women that emerges from the newspaper articles can be interpreted as the outcome of what Glick and Fiske (2001) call *benevolent sexism*. While benevolent sexism is built around subjectively favorable stereotypes about women (family oriented, nurturing, requiring support and

protection, and so on) that are often cherished by men and women alike, this disarming form of sexism ultimately reinforces gender inequality (Glick & Fisk, 2001). The reinforcement of gender divisions is consistent with the popular press's general treatment of women (Durkin, 1987; Fowler, 1991).

At the same time, the expectation that women will be more absent than men that is regularly promulgated in the press may also be a driving force in women's higher absenteeism which has been consistently demonstrated in academic research. Despite the lack of support for the child care responsibility/absenteeism link for women in academic research, the consistent message that women will be more absent than men in the press may provide all women with greater discretion when deciding to be absent. Again, the reporting of women in the press can create an absence culture in which absence is more expected for women, which can lead in turn to more absenteeism by women. While Study 1's results were not consistent with this, these contradictions will be addressed in the final chapter. Overall, the results of the content analysis offer interesting insight into the portrayal of women in the press and should stimulate future research on gender and absence focusing on expectations and stereotypes.

5.5.5 Absence as an independent versus dependent variable

From an independent versus dependent variable perspective (Question #4), the articles demonstrated that absence is most predominantly treated as an independent variable leading to negative outcomes as opposed to the traditional academic treatment of absence as a dependent variable. Overall, the attributional process (consequences) surrounding absence was more emphasized than the attribution process (antecedents). The aforementioned negative connotation of absenteeism in 99.5% of the articles usually

demonstrated this through negative outcomes on society, on individuals, and most commonly on business outcomes. In fact, the reported negative effects of absenteeism on business outcomes was so pervasive that no particular associations could be detected between such outcomes and the other variables under study. Overall, this is consistent with the press's preference for reporting negative stories.

Also consistent with the nature of the press, the voices of business leaders, government leaders, and various experts were predominant in the articles. The expert testimonies relating to medical absence, withdrawal absence, and domestic absence in particular, were strongly related to advocacy in the articles. The advocacy-type articles are a clear demonstration that absenteeism can be an important rhetorical tool to bring attention to issues important to interest groups. The use of absenteeism as a vehicle to promote various interventions and policies, and their relative effectiveness represents an interesting area of future research. It is interesting to note that the articles concerning non-U.S. workers, particularly the British and Scandinavians, suggest that policies such as generous sick leave benefits or reduced work hours which are aimed at reducing or controlling absence can have the unintended consequence of encouraging absence. This is consistent with the findings that many management interventions are ineffective due to poor choices by managers and that managers often "get what they ask for" in terms of absence policy (Johns, in press).

5.5.6 Absence as a legitimate behavior

From a reason/legitimacy perspective (Question #5), illness emerged as a form of absence that is legitimate and rarely punished. It is also a form of absence associated with powerful groups advocating various solutions, programs, and products to combat it.

From the intrapersonal/interpersonal perspectives of Doise's (1986) levels model, deviance emerged as a reason that is punished and associated with terrible personal behavior such as murder, hijacking, and child abuse. The multi-level influence on questions of legitimacy was demonstrated by the deviant connotation of absence during WWII and the links between deviant absenteeism and labor-conflict absenteeism that emerged during those years.

In terms of occupation, it appears that absence by politicians is viewed as illegitimate (Question #5) regardless of reason, which leads to attacks by opponents. At a higher level of analysis, the articles also strongly suggested that absenteeism by politicians hurts legislative functioning and can impact the outcome of crucial votes (Question #2).

While medical reasons for absence emerged as the most legitimate reason for absence, other articles indicated that risks were still present for workers perceived as illness-prone. Similar to the limited number of reports of discrimination faced by women due to beliefs about absenteeism, articles also noted that other groups, such as disabled workers, older workers, and those recovering from illnesses such as cancer could see their career prospects hampered by fears of absenteeism. As such, even though illness absence is portrayed as the most legitimate and least punished form of absence, fears of illness absence can pose risks to workers at an intergroup level.

As previously discussed, social contextual factors, such as a country being on a war footing or traversing difficult economic time, also influence the representations of legitimacy surrounding absenteeism. From a theoretical perspective, the articles in the content analysis suggest interesting future research on absence legitimacy focusing on

Nicholson's A-B continuum, absence and deviant personality traits, and absence and social context.

In total, the articles presented many accounts of absence painting a complex picture across themes, but a simplified view within themes. An important question that needs to be addressed in future research is determining the role that the press or other sources of information used by managers play on absence policy in organizations. If managers, as suggested by Abrahamson (1991, 1996), base their policies decisions more on the press and less on academic research, then at the very least we need to underscore this to them and test the claims being made in the media. On the one hand it is possible that the press can signal avenues for future academic research by focusing on different elements, such as the framing of absence as an independent variable. On the other hand, it is also possible that the press is cutting off research in certain directions through consistent claims about absence that take on a sort of common-sense nature such as absence being harmful or framing absence by women as a child-care issue. It is up to researchers to sort this out and it is important that managers be made aware of the limits of claims appearing in the press. At the same time, researchers should monitor the press and try to get studies mentioned in the press. As previously noted, newspapers have a preference for credible, expert sources, and researchers could most likely find an avenue to managers through the press. The press can also serve as a means of advancing research agendas and creating awareness of new topics. A good example is the concept of presenteeism which is becoming a more prominent research area while simultaneously becoming more reported on in the press. In terms of presenteeism, there have been 3 articles about it in the *New York Times* since 2003. It would be advisable that academic

researchers insure that they are part of the discussion as this concept becomes more recognized in the future.

Overall, newspapers make many consistent claims and cause-and-effect attribution links about absenteeism and work in general that academic researchers need to take a critical look at. These articles reach managers and workers, and we need to be part of the discussion; at the very least, we should continue studying what is written in articles about our topics of interest through scientific means.

5.5.7 Limitations

In terms of limitations, the single source of material represents a drawback to the generalizability of the results. While the *New York Times* represented an interesting choice for the reasons already explained, future research using different types of materials, such as different newspapers within the U.S., newspapers outside of the U.S., and trade journals represents an important next step. While one could cogently argue that the *New York Times* represents a mainstream establishment-based view, a comparative analysis with a more conservative, business focused paper such as the *Wall Street Journal* would be useful. Comparing the treatment of absenteeism between papers in a country with a stronger socialist/labor voice, such as in Great Britain where there is a great deal of variability in editorial content among daily newspapers in London, would also be interesting. Overall, the *New York Times*, is but one example of mainstream media, but an influential one nonetheless.

As previously underlined, one cannot discount the potential bias in the reporting concerning the negative aspect of absenteeism, and especially the links between absenteeism and communism/socialism. One would not expect a major American

institution and corporation such as the *New York Times* to report favorably on such affairs. At the same time, newspapers do not have the same standard of validity as academic research, but their influence and reach exceed academic findings. From this perspective, exploring how our topics are treated in the press is a worthwhile pursuit.

Another limitation is the reliance on nominal-level data for the quantitative analyses. Such a coding strategy does not account for the intensity of arguments and other characteristics of the articles, and limits the types of statistical analyses that can be performed. Still, the large sample size would have made it difficult to become more specific about each article. Furthermore, the qualitative analyses which complemented the quantitative findings were performed to provide insight into the details of the articles that could not be demonstrated by the quantitative results alone. In futures studies, perhaps a more in-depth treatment of a limited sample of articles could be performed quantitatively through interval-level variables, or qualitatively through discourse analysis. For this study, however, I believe the trade-off between categorization and in-depth analysis was balanced in an appropriate manner.

5.6 Conclusion to Study 2

The articles reviewed in this content analysis raise interesting points that can inform future academic research. The news articles consistently tackle issues related to gender and absence, the legitimacy of various reasons for absence, contextual influences and consequences of absence, and absence as a multi-level phenomenon. Many of these points that consistently appear in the press are rarely focused on in academic research. While newspapers are not scientific, they are influential. To the extent that they make strong and consistent claims concerning our topics, it is incumbent upon us to verify their

validity through academic research. I believe this content analysis will encourage such research.

CHAPTER SIX

6. GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF BOTH STUDIES

6.1 Implications for absence theory and research

The goal of this thesis has been to focus on issues surrounding absenteeism that I believe to be important for understanding the behavior, but which up to now have been rarely addressed by research. Specifically, the goal was to focus on social expectations concerning absence from work with particular attention to reasons for absence, gender of an absentee, and context. The theoretical foundation of the thesis borrows heavily from attribution theory and focuses on both attribution processes (explanations for absence) and attributional processes (consequences of attributions concerning absence). Another important goal of the thesis was to explore the neglected avenue of considering absenteeism as an independent variable. Finally, both the theoretical foundation and substantive questions in this thesis were aimed at acknowledging the multi-level nature of absenteeism and the need for mixed-methods research. What conclusions can we draw from the two studies in this thesis and what are the implications for managers for dealing with absenteeism?

In terms of social expectations concerning absence, consistencies emerged between the studies. Specifically, the results of both studies indicate that illness, and to a lesser extent childcare, are legitimate reasons to miss work. There appears to be a strong absence culture that legitimizes being absent when sick, even in regards to the common cold. From an attributional perspective, both studies indicated that illness absence was rarely associated with punishment. In terms of which reasons do illicit negative feelings and punishment, Study 2 demonstrated that absence associated with deviant behavior or

charges dereliction of duty leads to punishment but also indicated that punishment was often part of the rhetoric surrounding absenteeism when the behavior was discussed in abstract terms. In Study 1, the most negatively viewed reason for absence by others was absence to redress inequity. As discussed at the end of Study 1, this result is particularly interesting since it goes against previous research suggesting that redressing inequity through absenteeism is viewed as acceptable. As discussed however, the basis for the predictions in Study 1 concerning redressing perceived inequity through absence that were supported by the results were based on the findings from attribution research that individuals judge others differently compared to how they judge themselves. Finally, it is worth pointing out again, from a reason for absence perspective, that withdrawal from work models of absence were not featured prominently in the press when compared to academic research on absenteeism. From a qualitative standpoint however, the withdrawal articles in the press, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, broached similar themes as found in the academic literature.

Both studies were also consistent in demonstrating that attribution processes are influenced by context. Study 1 emphasized internal context and clearly demonstrated a strong effect whereby absence becomes less acceptable when work demands are high. In this context, even illness becomes less acceptable. Internal context clearly influenced the event-prescription link of Schlenker et al.'s (1994) triangle model of responsibility. Study 2 emphasized societal context. It was demonstrated that context alters the representation of absence from work and that the behavior can shape social context. The news articles concerning absence during World War Two and in Great Britain were evidence of the moral panic concerning absence that can grip countries when important societal outcomes

are in play. In these contexts, base rates or a simple lack of presence appear less important than the social expectation that people attend work and remain at their post. These news articles also showed that context could increase the prevalence of deviant representations of absence and also created associations between labor conflict and deviance that did not hold when social context was more stable. Furthermore, the news articles suggested that absence from work could lead to important societal outcomes such as hurting national economies, altering important legislative outcomes, and harming the proper functioning of society. Finally, the stories in the *New York Times* reported that absence from work could be caused by societal factors such as social protests, communism, and general social withdrawal. Unlike traditional absence research, these stories rarely suggest that individuals are absenting themselves from work because they do not like their jobs, but demonstrate the cross-level and multi-level representation of absenteeism. Overall, both studies provide strong evidence that context matters and that not all absence can be considered equal: Situational constraints loom large. This reality is difficult to detect using traditional records-based methods in absence research.

In terms of gender and absence, the studies presented contradictory results. Contrary to predictions concerning the identity-event and identity-prescriptions links of Schlenker et al.'s (1994) model based on widely held stereotypes and the social construction of gender, judgments of responsibility and the other dependent variables were not influenced by gender of the absentee regardless of reason or context. In Study 2 however, the strongest trend in the data was for absence by women to be framed as a gender/domestic responsibility issue in a very stereotypical representation. As such, while the data in Study 1 did not support the gender hypothesis, the data in Study 2 was

consistent with it. How can these results be reconciled? Several possible explanations come to mind. First, characteristics of the sample for Study 1 may have negated the impact of gender. The sample consisted of white collar employees primarily involved in the informational technology field. Traditionally, women have been underrepresented in technical areas (Lemons & Parzinger, 2001) and would be working in a male-dominated domain. A recent study (Svartengren et al., 2007) demonstrated that women working in male-dominated organizations tend to engage in less absenteeism and have similar absence rates compared to men. This is consistent with Ely's (1994) study demonstrating that women in professional fields often eschew their female social identity when the landscape is dominated by men. As such, occupational social identity may be trumping gender social identity. Alternatively, the fact that the sample consisted of university employees to a large degree may also have negated the impact of gender, as university environments may be somewhat more open and liberal, and less sensitive to gender divisions. A second explanation is that the vignettes used in Study 1 did not provide a salient enough manipulation on gender. Qualitative additional comments by respondents indicated a regular emphasis on the project outcomes and team membership. As previously noted, it is possible that the vignettes created a primary focus on team member social identity that overpowered gender identities. Third, it is possible that the gender representations in the press had little to do with absenteeism and were simply a reflection of the general representation of women in the media. The representation of women in the articles featuring absence was consistent with the stereotypical portrayal and gross categorization that characterizes newspapers (Fowler, 1991). In fact, with the exception of women war plant workers, newspaper articles reporting on women's absenteeism

rarely mentioned specific jobs and generally wrote about women in fairly abstract terms. Perhaps as more details are provided, as in the vignettes from Study 1, social expectations move away from gender considerations and focus more on proximal work/situational concerns. Again, this is consistent with Krippendorff's (2004) comment that content analysts must take the nature and context of the medium into account when analyzing texts. In a way, the studies in this thesis are consistent with the notion that gender differences are smaller than society leads us to believe (Barnett and Hyde, 2001; Durkin, 1987; Hyde, 2005; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Overall, more study and further exploration of the gender-absence link is still sorely needed. Hopefully, the results of these two studies will lead to new questions and future research on this topic.

Each study provided an avenue to include attribution theory in the study of absenteeism. In Study 1, a subset of attribution theory, i.e. judgments of responsibility, and the related field of accountability theory represented the theoretical foundation for research. The experimental manipulations in Study 1 were designed to assess the attribution processes, while the dependent variables focused on the attributional processes surrounding absence from work. The accounts of absence in Study 2 featured cause-and-effect explanations concerning absence which represents an equally compelling method for exploring attributions about work behaviors.

Both studies also extended research on absenteeism by highlighting the effects of absence from work. Unlike traditional studies which usually position absenteeism as a dependent variable, Study 1 positioned absence as an independent variable leading to reactions of coworkers while Study 2 emphasized absence as leading to negative outcomes and actions by different stakeholders.

From a substantive standpoint, two other findings that emerged in the studies deserve particular mention. First, in Study 1, the attitude *absence legitimacy* (Addae & Johns, 2000), a general attitude on the acceptability of absence from work, emerged as an important factor for judgments of responsibilities and other reactions to absence. Consistent with the ideas put forth by Harrison, Johns, and Martocchio (2000) that individual factors surrounding absence may loom larger in the future as organizational ties are loosened, this attitude concerning absence should be researched further and included in future studies. Second, absence proneness emerged as an important theme in both studies. The additional comments provided by respondents in Study 1 indicated a strong preoccupation with questions of patterns of absence over time, while Study 2 linked absence proneness to being drafted into the army, getting fired, hurting the economic output of countries, and suffering unrelenting political attacks. In Study 2, reports of proneness often did not indicate the reasons for absence. As such, absence proneness may also be a strong factor in social expectations concerning absence from work. Labeling an individual as absence-prone may have serious consequences for that person indeed, and more research on proneness would be advised for the future.

Finally, both studies underscore the fundamental multi-level nature of absenteeism. Using Doise's (1986) framework, all levels were represented in the thesis. From an intrapersonal perspective, the absence legitimacy results demonstrated that individuals have personal views and beliefs about absenteeism that have an impact of how they evaluate the behavior. From an interpersonal viewpoint, Study 1 demonstrated that the absence leads to judgments, emotions, and behavioral intentions of coworkers. The variability displayed in these variables indicates that such reactions are not the same

for all absence but represent a thoughtful process dependent on circumstances and personal views on absenteeism. The comments in Study 1, with regular reference to team member duties and interdependence among workers also highlight the interpersonal reality of absenteeism. In terms of the intergroup dimension, Study 2 in particular demonstrated the importance of this level. The links between gender, domestic duties, and absence, and the variability in treatment based on occupation (politicians, war plant workers, miners, auto workers, and so on) and nationalities indicate differing treatments based on social group membership. Finally, at the societal level, the general legitimacy of illness absence appears to represent a widespread absence culture. Furthermore, the external context elements from Study 2 involving both antecedents and consequences, both time related (events, eras, wars) and country related, provides strong support that absenteeism involves societal factors, not just work factors.

Overall, the multi-method approach to this thesis has illuminated some important aspects of absence from work that have not been a regular part of the research landscape. Certain issues have been clarified, while in other ways complexity has been exposed. This thesis has been an attempt to examine absenteeism from a social construction perspective as opposed to a *physical presence* perspective. It is now time for future research to continue exploring absenteeism with more attention to social expectations, context, and gender through multi-level and multi-method strategies.

6.2 Implications for managers

The previous discussion will hopefully encourage future research on new and different questions concerning absence, but what can managers take from these studies? From Study 1, the primary lesson is that circumstances around an episode matter. When

an employee is absent, people's feelings and people's intention to punish or help will depend of factors beyond the simple lack of presence. As per Schlenker et al.'s (1994) responsibility model, the links between events, identities, and prescriptions will matter more than outcomes associated with absence. As such, a finer-grained approach to absence control whereby managers have discretion to make decisions on absence on an episode-by-episode basis may be the best method of control. While more formal absence control policies have been shown to be ineffective when managers make poor intervention choices (Johns, in press), Study 2 provides insight for managers on why so many absence control interventions are available.

A regular message that emerges in the news articles of Study 2 is that there are many groups and people who use workplace absenteeism as a vehicle for advocating a policy or a product. From industrial health, day care services, wellness programs, fitness programs, and medical research to air conditioning, Muzak, and cosmetics, absence reduction is a huge and lucrative business. The advocacy in the newspapers is focused on specific reasons for absence and not on context or circumstance, and rarely on specific jobs. Given that absence is multi-faceted and that the advocacy is aimed at specific types of absence, the effectiveness of advocated solutions can only be limited. However, by publicizing different interventions aimed at quelling absenteeism, the press may be creating the causal loops between norms/social context and absence control policies discussed by Nicholson and Martocchio (1995).

Managers need to understand the limited effectiveness of many interventions advocated in the press aimed at reducing absenteeism. Effective policies for absence control should focus on specific reasons for absence and context surrounding discrete

events. In all, a more thoughtful discretionary approach may be required. A recent study in Sweden (Ahlberg, Bergman, Parmasund, Stoetzer, Svartengren, & Waldenström, 2007) found that managers who relied on greater discretion in dealing with absence and relied less on formal absence control systems had lower worker absence in their organizations. As we have learned, workers can recognize formal absence control systems and exploit their limits when they are overly rigid. A case by case assessment may be the most efficient. In fact, Edwards and Whitson (1993) described several case studies in which managers had formal absence control policies at their disposal but only enacted them in special circumstances or for chronically absence-prone workers. Overall, study one should remind managers that reason for absence and context surrounding absence matters for intraorganizational stakeholders when an employee is absent, while Study 2, by exposing the advocated interventions that can only address certain forms of absenteeism, should clarify the inherent limits of any single absence control policy. Before punishing or enacting absence control policies, punishment, or costly programs to quell specific forms of absenteeism, managers should ask the same question that was asked at the beginning of this thesis: Does this particular absence episode matter?

6.3 Implications for management research

Finally, completing this thesis has provided me with certain insights concerning management research that I believe may be of interest to other researchers. I strongly believe that management research, at its core, involves processes and constraints at different levels of analysis. As asserted by Rousseau (1985), management research is fundamentally multi-level and concerns the coming together of various scientific disciplines. This thesis is an example of this.

The levels of analysis typology developed by Doise (1986), while not regularly featured in management research, can serve as an important reminder to management researchers that our inquiries must go beyond a limited focus approach. To fully understand our topics, a multilevel approach should always be considered, even in small ways. Whether using Doise's typology of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, and ideological levels or other typologies, management research requires this exercise. Using the Doise typology, this thesis demonstrated that social expectations surrounding absence involve intrapersonal factors such as the absence legitimacy attitude, interpersonal factors such as judgments of others and reciprocal obligations, intergroup factors such as gender and nationality, and ideological level factors such as national customs and widespread beliefs concerning absence and the nature of work. While each level is interesting in isolation, the truly interesting aspect is uncovering how the various levels are related and exploring links traveling from the top to the bottom and vice-versa. This work continues. Furthermore, these questions are not unique to absenteeism but are relevant to numerous other topics such as leadership, job satisfaction, turnover, trust, and so on.

The multi-level nature of absenteeism was further emphasized by the attention to context in the studies. Beyond the contextual issues surrounding cause and effect (i.e. when does context influence worker absenteeism and when does worker absenteeism affect important societal outcomes), context in this thesis is also related to the question: When does absence matter? This is an important question that could also be asked in relation to numerous topics. When does leadership matter? When does job satisfaction matter? When does trust matter? When does turnover matter? When does socialization matter? And on and on. The context manipulation in Study 1 and the newspaper reporting

in Study 2 clearly show that absence matters more in certain circumstances. One could reasonably ask if our topics are worth researching and theorizing about in circumstances in which they do not matter. I believe that researchers should always ask this question and seek clarification from workers and managers when needed. These individuals will recognize when a topic becomes important and what aspects are most meaningful. Researchers removed from the field may have difficulty recognizing such subtleties. This may be a factor in the research/practice divide that has characterized management research to date (Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006). Understanding when our topics matter to managers is a pathway toward conducting research that matters. While newspaper articles, such as the ones analyzed in Study 2, may appear uninteresting from a scientific perspective, such sources may hold important clues for future research directions and can also be used as data in their own right. I hope Study 2 has illuminated these points.

At the same time, both studies also underscore the importance of considering another contextual factor in the research: The choice of methodology. As explained in the studies, using the vignette approach in Study 1 and news stories in Study 2 imposed certain constraints on the research that required acknowledgement. In each study, I attempted to explore the impact of the methodological choices and the limitations these led to, specifically in regards to external validity. The sampling choices in both studies also surely influenced the results, and researchers need to consider this when analyzing their data. Still, I am particularly glad the choices in the studies allowed several occupational groups that have not been commonly featured in absence research to be highlighted (e.g., white-collar professionals in Study 1, politicians in Study 2, etc.). As

explained, the methodological traditions in absence research have often limited the focus to jobs for which absence records are maintained, such as blue-collar workers and nurses. Researchers would do well to expand methodological horizons to include workers not traditionally studied in their topic areas. If methodological rather than theoretical reasons are excluding certain groups of workers from research, then new research designs deserve consideration.

In the current thesis, the desire to highlight the multi-level nature of absenteeism and the desire to focus on white-collar workers was a driving force in the decision to use two separate research designs for the studies. While this may seem risky, it turned out to be less problematic than expected. The theoretical foundations of both studies were compatible and the methodologies employed were appropriate for the questions explored. This should be the criteria for selecting an appropriate methodology. Furthermore, while some may hesitate to undertake a research project involving multiple methods because they are uneasy with the complexity involved, I repeat my earlier comment that the methodologies employed in this thesis are not particularly exotic or complex; they are simply not regularly combined. In fact, there is no disputing the fact that many studies taking a very narrow focus on a topic have used much more complicated methods than those employed in this thesis. The important point is to remember that theory and research questions should drive the choice of methodology, not the reverse.

Finally, this thesis makes some level of analysis contributions that other researchers should consider. Specifically, the exercise of multi-level theorizing, such as the example in which attribution theory concepts (i.e. the fundamental attribution error) was considered at a higher level of analysis in terms of how local newspapers report on

foreign countries, can be a valuable intellectual pursuit. Furthermore, researchers may wish to explore if certain variables normally conceptualized at one level of analysis should be considered at another. In this thesis, compelling arguments were presented suggesting that gender should be considered a group identity as opposed to an individual characteristic. Study 2 demonstrated this clearly while Study one was less conclusive. Still, such considerations merit consideration in all research involving gender.

6.4 Conclusion

In order for researchers and managers to better understand absence from work, we need to continue looking at new questions, exploring new sources and manifestations of social expectations concerning absence, and question underlying assumptions about the behavior. This thesis has strived to demonstrate that absence is a complex phenomenon that involves actors beyond the absentee and his or her organization: Absence also involves coworkers and other actors within and outside organizations.

New questions still need to be asked, new methods need to be employed, experimentation with different management interventions (especially those dealing with increased management discretion) aimed at controlling absence need to be tested. The workplace is changing and so are the relationships between workers and organizations, workers and their colleagues, and workers and society. This is where the future questions surrounding absence are to be found. The underlying premise of future research, however, will hopefully be similar to that which formed the basis of this thesis: Absenteeism is not only about a physical lack of presence, it also concerns social expectations to attend.

Table 3.1: Potential reasons for being absent

Table 3.1 : Potential Reasons for being absent	
Personal illness	Fatigue
Illness in the family	Job dissatisfaction
Childcare responsibilities	Interpersonal problems at work
Eldercare responsibilities	Transportation problems
Work stress	Leisure activities
Non-work stress	Desire to prolong weekend/vacation
Feelings of depression	Personal Business Reasons
Sleep disruptions	Deviant personality

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics and correlations

Descriptive Statistics				Correlations																
	Mean	SD	Age	Gender	Super.	Parental	Hard work	Centrality	Conscient.	Abs. legit.	Respons.	Anger	Sympathy	Punish	Help	VGender	VContext	VReason1	VReason2	VReason3
Age	44.39	9.123	--																	
Gender	1.64	0.480	0.01	--																
Supervisory role	1.34	0.476	-0.20 **	0.03	--															
Parental status	1.25	0.434	-0.27 **	0.02	0.13 **	--														
Hard work ethic	3.52	0.594	-0.13 **	0.04	-0.06	0.01	(.87)													
Centrality of work ethic	3.77	0.566	-0.02	0.00	0.01	-0.07	0.46 **	(.85)												
Conscientiousness	4.21	0.456	0.09	0.16 **	-0.07	-0.08	0.33 **	0.35 **	(.81)											
Absence legitimacy	3.02	0.599	-0.11 *	0.05	0.08	0.02	-0.22 **	-0.20 **	-0.24 **	(.83)										
Judgment of responsibility	4.56	1.753	-0.02	0.04	0.00	-0.05	0.06	0.08	0.12 *	-0.29 **	(.85)									
Anger	3.72	1.707	0.03	0.09	-0.04	0.01	0.04	0.07	0.03	-0.27 **	0.70 **	(.91)								
Sympathy	3.60	1.361	0.06	-0.07	-0.04	-0.13 *	-0.08	-0.03	-0.06	0.21 **	-0.56 **	-0.49 **	(.84)							
Intention to punish	2.40	1.555	-0.06	0.00	-0.02	0.01	0.06	0.06	0.06	-0.31 **	0.68 **	0.68 **	-0.50 **	(.94)						
Intention to help	4.69	1.483	-0.01	-0.10	-0.10 *	-0.10 *	0.08	0.16 **	0.07	0.13 **	-0.35 **	-0.28 **	0.44 **	-0.34 **	(.87)					
Vignette Gender	1.47	0.500	-0.05	0.05	-0.01	0.04	0.01	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.00	-0.06	0.06	-0.07	0.08	--				
Vignette Context	1.46	0.499	-0.05	0.04	-0.07	0.04	0.05	-0.01	-0.01	-0.08	0.20 **	0.26 **	-0.09	0.23 **	0.07	-0.04	--			
Vignette Reason1	0.29	1.128	0.05	-0.02	0.02	0.04	0.05	-0.04	-0.06	0.09	-0.46 **	-0.26 **	0.16 **	-0.34 **	0.17 **	0.05	-0.03	--		
Vignette Reason2	0.23	1.128	-0.04	0.05	-0.04	-0.07	0.05	0.06	0.04	-0.08	0.08	-0.17 **	0.15 **	-0.16 **	0.18 **	-0.03	0.05	-0.35 **	--	
Vignette Reason3	0.26	1.128	-0.02	-0.04	-0.02	0.03	-0.04	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.15 **	0.07	0.02	-0.05	0.01	-0.37 **	-0.32 **	--
Vignette Reason4	0.22	1.128	0.01	0.06	0.04	-0.01	-0.07	-0.03	-0.01	-0.06	0.52 **	0.37 **	-0.48 **	0.46 **	-0.38 **	0.02	-0.03	-0.34 **	-0.29 **	-0.32

** r is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* r is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

n= 418

Table 4.2 : Factor Loadings Weiner Model - Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Responsibility	Anger	Sympathy	Punishment	Helping
Question 4	0.892				
Question 6	0.713				
Question 12	0.874				
Question 9		0.856			
Question 11		0.874			
Question 13		0.944			
Question 1			0.923		
Question 8			0.793		
Question 10			0.618		
Question 2				0.866	
Question 5				0.949	
Question 15				0.952	
Question 3					0.830
Question 7					0.786
Question 14					0.908

Measurement Model Fit: $\chi^2 = 205.65$ $p < 0.001$ $df = 80$, CFI= .980, GFI= .937, RMSEA = .05

n= 409

Table 4.3: Regression of responsibility model elements on individual characteristics of respondents

Variable	Resp (β)	Anger (β)	Symp (β)	Punish (β)	Help (β)
Hard Work	-0.035	-0.029	-0.042	-0.001	0.027
Centrality of Work	0.034	0.052	0.028	0.012	0.166 **
Conscientiousness	0.053	-0.055	-0.012	-0.020	0.031
Absence Legitimacy	-0.283 ***	-0.286 ***	0.209 ***	-0.312 ***	0.178 ***
	$R^2 = 0.09$	$R^2 = 0.08$	$R^2 = 0.05$	$R^2 = 0.1$	$R^2 = 0.05$
<hr/> n = 428 *** p<0.001 ** p<0.01					

Table 4.4 : Cell sizes of experimental conditions

Moderate Work Demands Context		
	Tom	Pamela
Illness Reason	34	37
Childcare Reason	25	22
Stress Reason	35	27
Inequity Reason	28	28

Strong Work Demands Context		
	Tom	Pamela
Illness Reason	30	27
Childcare Reason	29	21
Stress Reason	33	20
Inequity Reason	20	21

Total n = 429

Table 4.5: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses

Variable	Multivariate Pillai's	Univariate F				
		Resp	Anger	Symp	Punish	Help
Absence Legitimacy	0.141 ***	42.54 ***	35.28 ***	19.80 ***	51.74 ***	7.17 **
Gender	0.020	0.07	2.20	1.58	2.77	2.62
Context	0.122 ***	25.40 ***	36.43 ***	4.29 *	35.60 ***	2.39
Reason	0.571 ***	85.36 ***	33.50 ***	41.04 ***	61.94 ***	23.52 ***
Gender X Context	0.014	0.16	1.54	0.55	0.16	1.88
Gender X Reason	0.024	0.90	1.23	0.66	1.70	0.40
Context X Reason	0.083 *	2.29	0.41	1.37	1.54	1.71
Gender X Reason X Context	0.027	0.17	0.89	0.38	0.56	0.97

n = 429

*** p < 0.001

** p < 0.01

* p < 0.05

Table 4. 6: Multiple Comparisons - Games Howell- Reason for Absence

I	versus	J	Mean Difference (I-J)				
			Resp.	Anger	Sympathy	Punish	Help
Illness versus Childcare			-0.99 ***	-0.16	-0.01	-0.38	-0.11
Illness versus Stress			-1.39 ***	-0.90 ***	-0.01	-1.03 ***	0.34
Illness versus Inequity			-2.93 ***	-1.82 ***	1.59 ***	-2.17 ***	1.43 ***
Childcare versus Stress			-0.40	-0.74 **	0.00	-0.66 *	0.45
Childcare versus Inequity			-1.94 ***	-1.66 ***	1.60 ***	-1.79 ***	1.54 ***
Stress versus Inequity			-1.54 ***	-0.92 ***	1.60 ***	-1.14 ***	1.09 ***

n = 437

*** p < 0.001

** p < 0.01

* p < 0.05

Table 4.7: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses with gender of the respondent

Variable	Multivariate Pillai's	Univariate F				
		Resp	Anger	Symp	Punish	Help
Absence Legitimacy	0.138 ***	37.29 ***	35.06 ***	18.77 ***	48.75 ***	5.51 **
Gender - Vignette	0.014	0.01	1.43	1.15	2.50	1.38
Gender-Respondent	0.015	0.45	3.55	1.29	0.01	0.03
Context	0.083 ***	17.14 ***	22.32 ***	3.40	21.95 ***	1.07
Reason	0.561 ***	70.13 ***	32.02 ***	36.87 ***	58.08 ***	18.53 ***
Gender Vignette X Context	0.017	0.15	1.18	1.87	0.00	2.75
Gender Vignette X Reason	0.036	0.98	2.06	0.77	1.64	0.79
Context X Reason	0.070 *	1.97	0.99	0.29	1.18	1.66
Gender Respondent X Context	0.043	1.52	3.19	0.00	6.18 *	0.57
Gender Respondent X Reason	0.036	0.34	0.99	1.04	1.86	1.09
Gender Resp.x Gender Vignette	0.007	0.33	0.21	0.00	0.40	0.60

n =424

*** p <0.001

** p <0.01

* p <0.05

Table 4.8: Tests of Significance for Responsibility x Context interaction

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig of F
Context & Illness	70.11	1	70.11	38.17	.000
Context & Childcare	13.81	1	13.81	7.52	.006
Context & Stress	3.36	1	3.36	1.83	.177
Context & Inequity	.59	1	.59	.32	.572

Context: 1= Weak Context, 2= Strong Context

n = 429

Table 4.9: Regression of Absence legitimacy on individual factors

Variable	β		
Age	-0.102	**	
Gender	0.082		
Supervisory Duties	0.035		
Hard Work	-0.143	**	
Centrality of Work	-0.069		
Conscientiousness	-0.166	**	$R^2 = 0.10$

 n= 423

** p<0.01

Table 5.1 : Measures of association by research question - Summary.**Research Question #1: Absence models and reasons for absence**

Associations	n	X²	Cramer's V
Withdrawal reasons for absence and reports of management action	2785	114.43	0.203
Withdrawal reasons for absence and advocacy for policy change and product use	2785	61.20	0.148
Withdrawal reasons for absence and factory workers in the articles (war plant workers removed)	2314	93.04	0.201
Withdrawal reasons for absence and time period	2785	50.29	0.134
Withdrawal reasons for absence and reports of management action in 1970s	484	51.32	0.326
Withdrawal reasons for absence and advocacy for policy change and product use in 1970s	484	52.09	0.328
Withdrawal reasons for absence and turnover	2785	54.87	0.140
Withdrawal reasons for absence and turnover in 1960s	303	17.35	0.239
Withdrawal reasons for absence and turnover in 1970s	484	67.00	0.372
Deviant reasons for absence and time period	2785	62.30	0.150
Illness reasons for absence and unspecified job	2785	205.21	0.271
Illness reasons for absence and unspecified job (war plant workers removed)	2314	213.20	0.304
Illness reasons for absence and advocacy for policy change and product use (war plant workers removed)	2314	180.34	0.279
Labor conflict reasons for absence and job type	2785	297.63	0.327
Complex representations of absence and war workers	2785	112.47	0.201

Research Question #2: Absenteeism and social context

Associations	n	X²	Cramer's V
Societal reasons for absence and societal outcomes (war plant workers removed)	2314	128.12	0.235
Societal reasons for absence and non-American workers	2785	758.65	0.573
War plant workers and deviance (politicians removed)	2414	44.58	0.136
War plant workers and government interventions	2785	32.48	0.108

Research Question #3: Gender and absence

Associations	n	X²	Cramer's V
Absence by women and unspecified jobs	840	327.83	0.625
Absence by women and factory jobs	840	127.92	0.390
Absence by women and absence due to domestic responsibilities	840	422.05	0.709
Absence by women and a lack of absence due to labor conflict	840	8.86	0.103
Absence by women and a lack of absence due to economic reasons	840	10.18	0.135
Absence by women and a lack of absence due to leisure reasons	840	14.8	0.133
Absence by women and a lack of absence due to deviant reasons	840	20.49	0.156
Absence by women and negative business outcomes	840	17.84	0.146
Absence by women and reports of management action	840	49.25	0.242
Absence by women and advocacy for policy change and product use	840	108.89	0.355
Absence by women and time period	840	87.28	0.322

Research Question #4: Absence as a dependent variable or an independent variable

Associations	n	X²	Cramer's V
Advocacy for policy or product and specific reason for absence (war plant workers removed)	2314	120.43	0.228
Advocacy for policy or product and unspecified job (war plant workers removed)	2314	302.91	0.362
Advocacy for policy or product and time period (war plant workers removed)	2314	126.47	0.233
Management interventions and time period (war plant workers removed)	2314	155.61	0.259
Management interventions and withdrawal reasons for absence in the 1970s	484	51.32	0.326
Labor conflict caused by absence and unspecified reason for absence in 1970s	484	40.81	0.291
Labor conflict caused by absence and unspecified reason for absence in 1980s	357	22.49	0.251
Labor conflict caused by absence and unspecified reason for absence in 1990s	208	10.65	0.226

Research Question #5: Absence and legitimacy

Associations	n	X²	Cramer's V
Absence caused by deviance and punishment	2785	183.95	0.257
Medical reasons for absence and lack of punishment	2785	64.44	0.152
Absence by men and punishment	840	20.25	0.155
Unspecified reasons for absence and punishment (war plant workers removed)	2314	120.99	0.229
Absence due to labor conflict and absence due to deviance (for war plant workers only)	460	10.38	0.152

Figure 2.1: Doise's (1986) Levels of Analysis Model

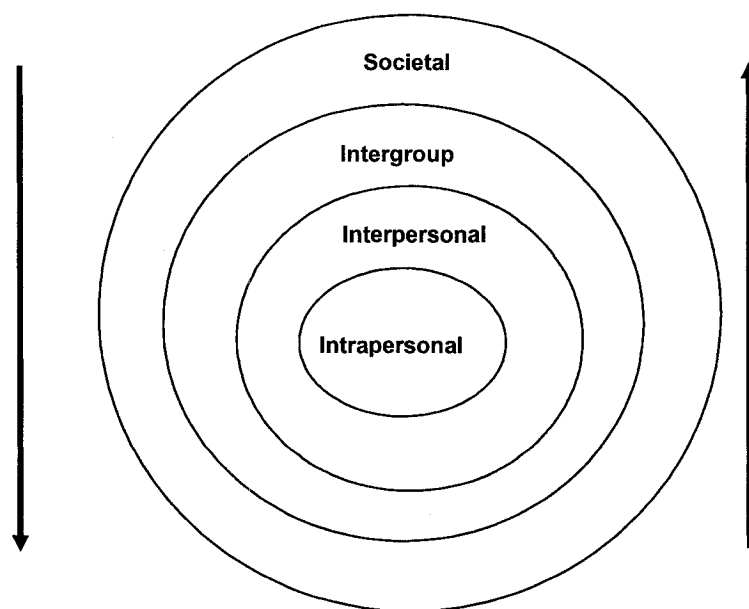
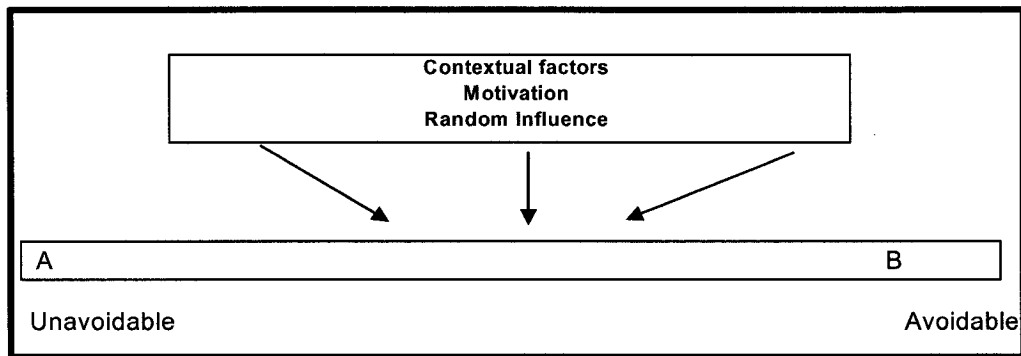


Figure 4.1: Nicholson's (1977) A-B Continuum



Source: Nicholson, N. (1977). Absence behavior and attendance motivation: A conceptual synthesis.
Journal of Management Studies, 14, 231-252

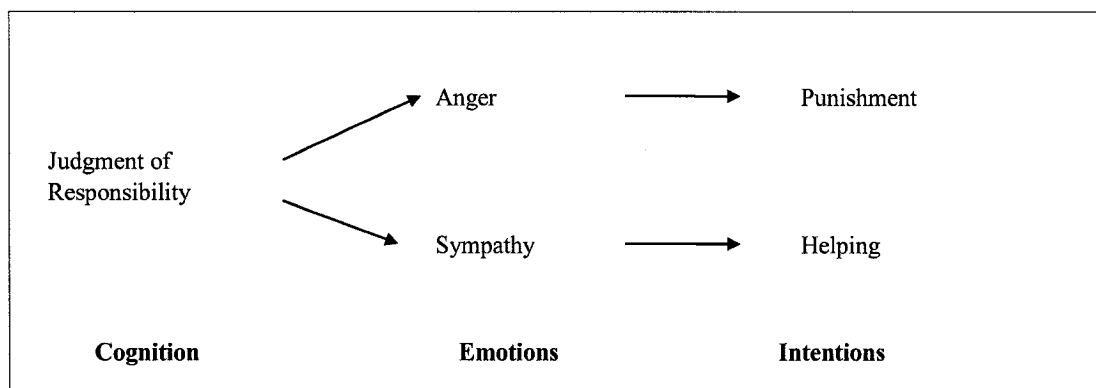
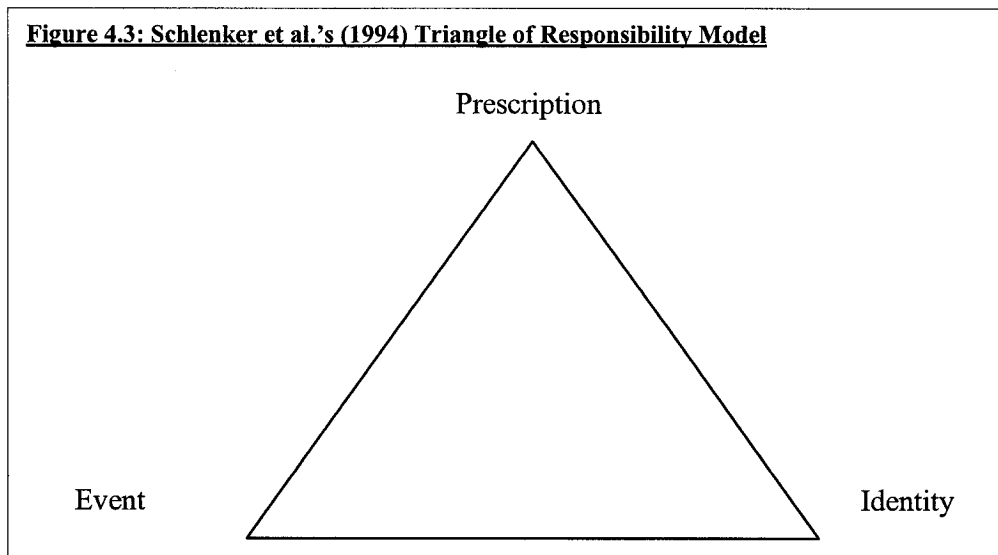
FIGURE 4.2: Weiner's Judgment of Responsibility Model

Figure 4.3: Schlenker et al.'s (1994) Triangle of Responsibility Model



Source: Schlenker, B.R., Britt, T.W., Pennington, J., Murphy, R., & Doherty, K. (1994). The triangle model of responsibility. *Psychological Review*, 101, 632-652

Figure 4.4: Judgment of Responsibility: Single Absence Episode Model

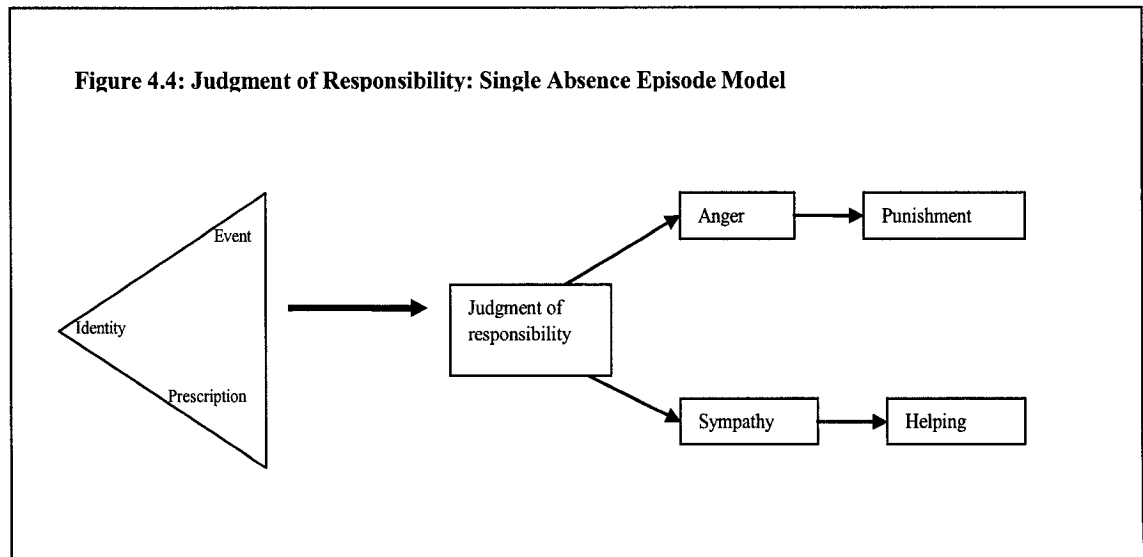


Figure 4.5: Judgment of Responsibility: Single Absence Episode

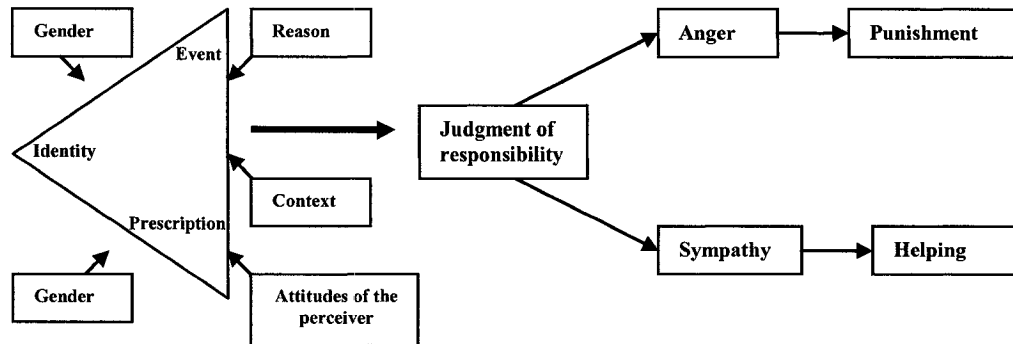
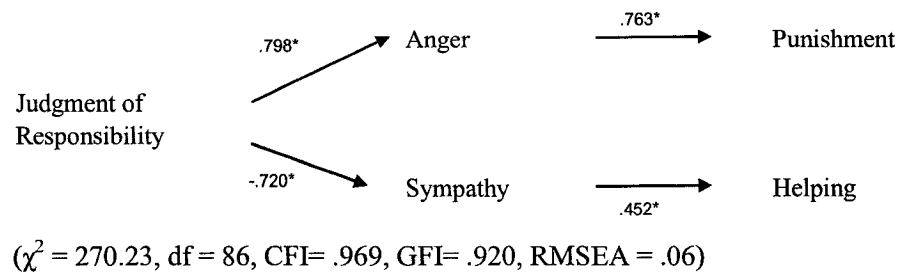
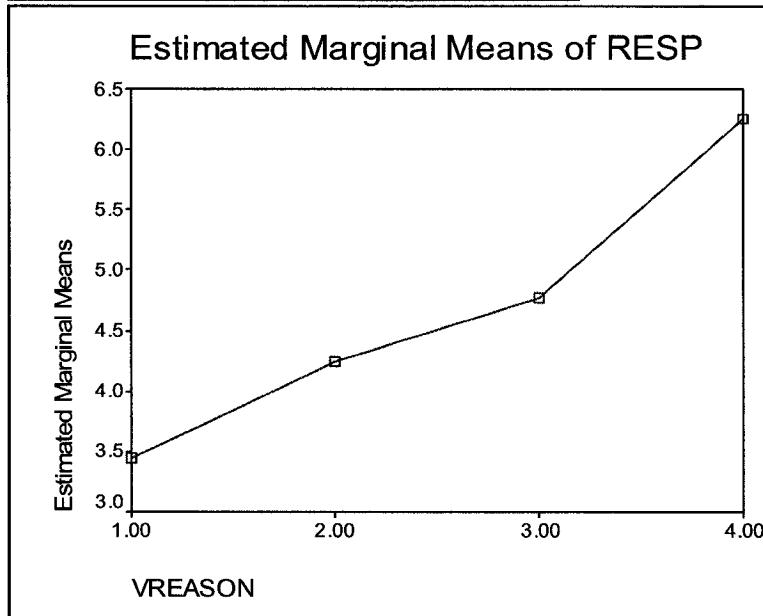


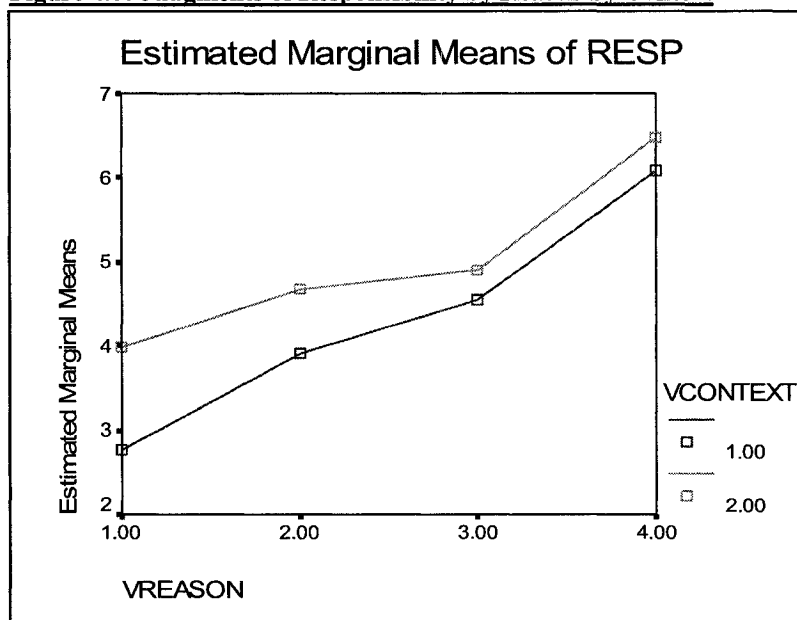
FIGURE 4.6: EQS Results - Judgment of Responsibility Model and Absence

* indicates significant at .05

Figure 4.7: Judgments of Responsibility by Reason



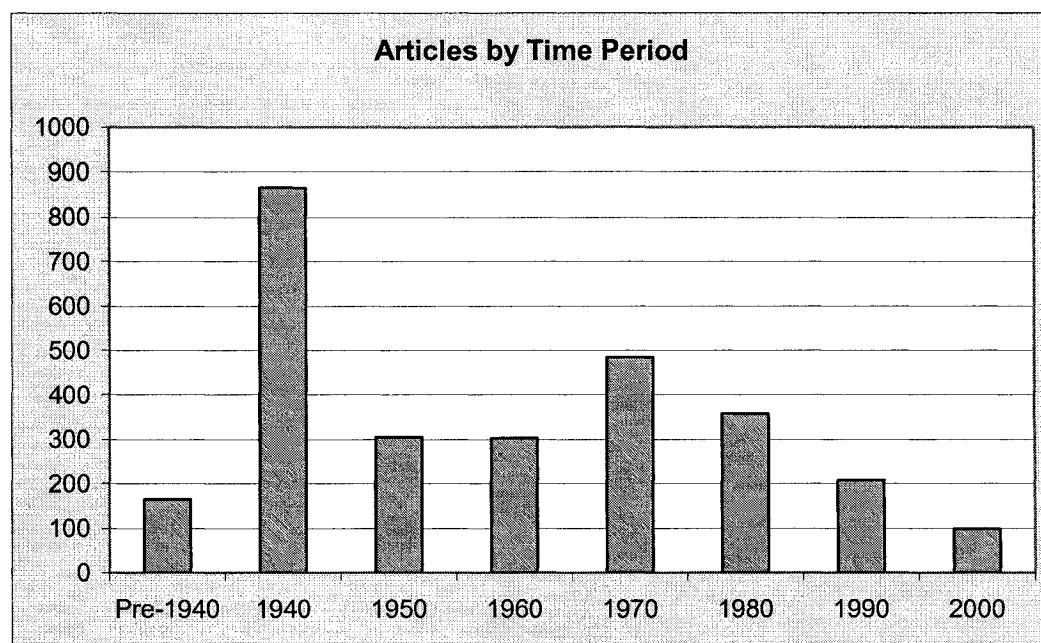
1= Illness, 2= Childcare, 3= Stress, 4= Inequity

Figure 4.8: Judgments of Responsibility by Reason by Context

V Reason :1= Illness, 2= Childcare, 3= Stress, 4= Inequity

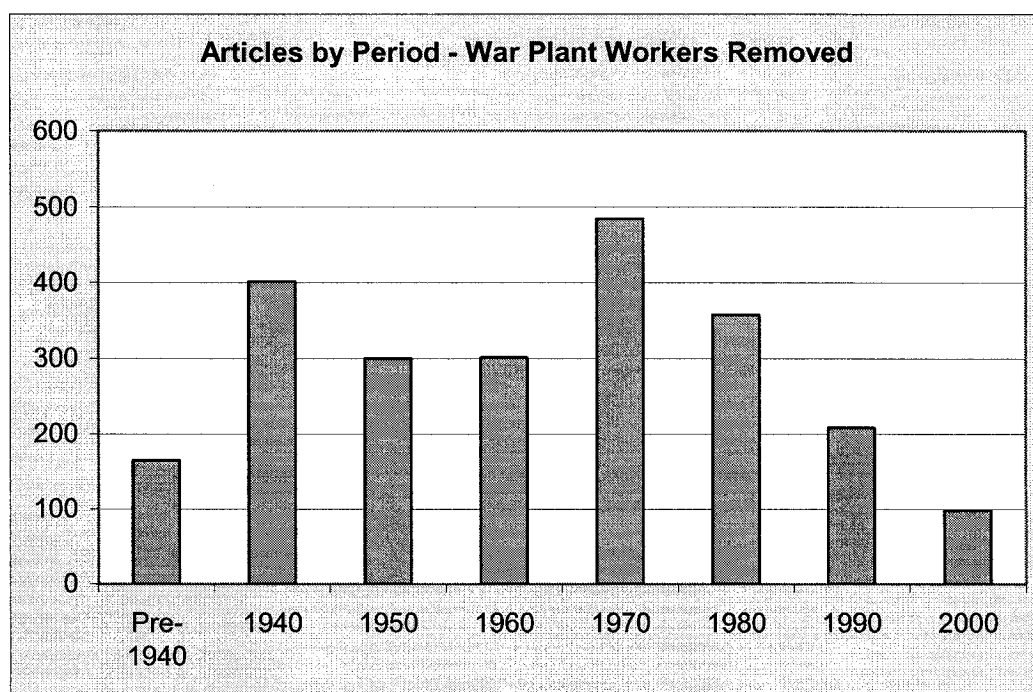
V Context: 1= Weak Context, 2= Strong Context

Figure 5.1: Articles by Time period (Full Sample)



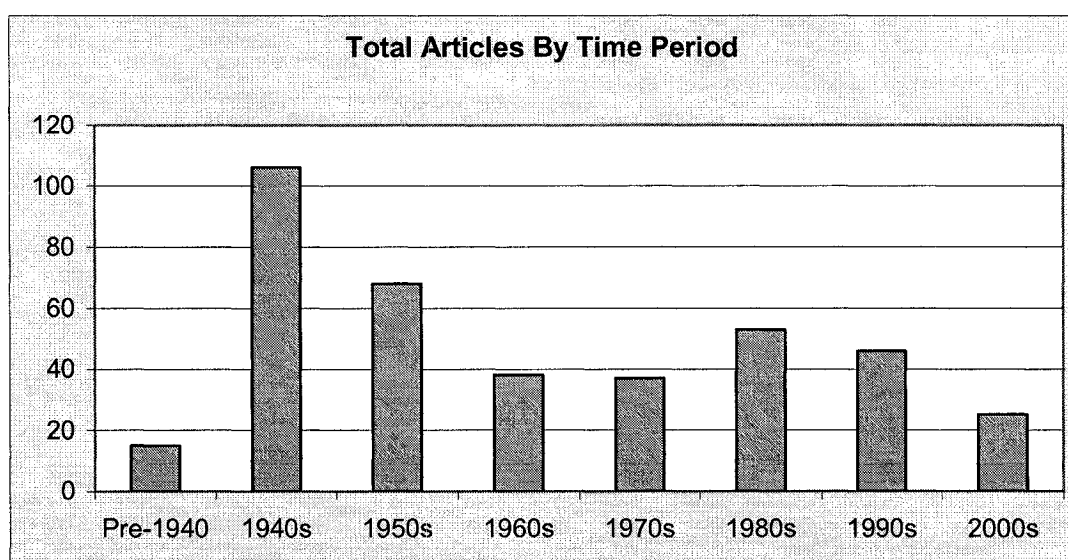
n = 2,785

Figure 5.2: Articles by Time period (War plant workers removed)



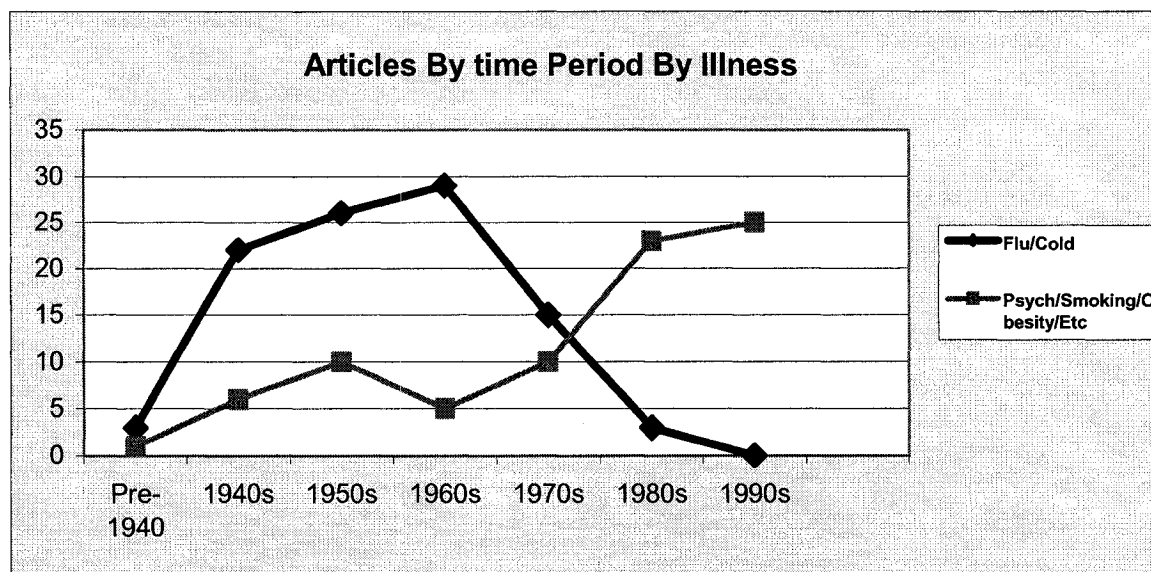
n = 2,314

Figure 5.3: Articles featuring medical reasons for absence



n = 388

Figure 5.4: Articles featuring medical reasons for Absence- Flu & Cold vs. Social/Mental illness



n = 178

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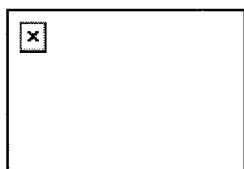
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Appendix A



Individual Section: Your Work Values and Views on Absenteeism

In this section, you will be presented with a list of statements concerning work values, personal characteristics, and general views on absenteeism. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers as these items concern your personal beliefs, so please answer as objectively as possible.

Please answer all the questions

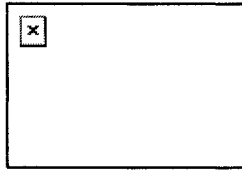
	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
If one works hard enough, one is likely to make a good life for oneself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A hard days work is very fulfilling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who is easily distracted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who is a reliable worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life without work would be very boring.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Absence from work is a legitimate work behavior	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Even if I inherited a great deal of money, I would continue to work somewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By simply working hard enough, one can achieve one's goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When employees are absent from work, they usually have a valid reason	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Hard work makes one a better person.	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who tends to be disorganized	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I experience a sense of fulfillment from working	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Any problem can be overcome with hard work	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
It is very important for me to always be able to work	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Managers should be understanding when employees are absent from work	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Anyone who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Absenteeism is simply a behavior employees cannot avoid	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who makes plans and follows through with them	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
If you work hard you will succeed	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Imposing sanctions on employees who are absent from work is not a good managerial practice	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I feel content when I have spent the day working	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who perseveres until the task is finished	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
A person should always do the best job possible	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who does things efficiently	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Even if it were possible for me to retire, I would still continue to work	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
There is nothing wrong when managers accept employees'	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>

absenteeism

I see myself as someone who does a thorough job	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Nothing is impossible if you work hard enough	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
It is unfair to penalize employees who are absent from work	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who tends to be lazy	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Even if I were financially able, I would not stop working	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Absence in the workplace can be beneficial to the overall functioning of the organization	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Working hard is the key to being successful	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
I see myself as someone who can be somewhat careless	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
An absent employee is not necessarily an unproductive worker	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
By working hard a person can overcome every obstacle that life presents	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Disciplining employees who engage in absenteeism is coercive	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>
A hard days work provides a sense of accomplishment	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>

[Next Section](#)



Vignette Section: Evaluation of an absence episode

In this section, you will be asked to react to an absence episode of a fictitious coworker. Please read the following vignette carefully and respond to all the questions that follow. If you have any additional thoughts on this absence episode, please feel free to use the comments box.

Please imagine that you are a member of a project team planning the implementation of a new software program that will integrate various organizational functions into one system. The project has faced several roadblocks and has involved very long hours, especially over the last few months.

One of the key technical experts on the team is Tom Edwards. Although you are both part of the implementation team, you work in different departments and know each other only through the project. On a personal level, you only know that Tom is married and has two young children. Tom's contributions are vital to the team's success and you personally rely on Tom's work to be able to complete your own tasks.

In three weeks, the implementation team is scheduled to give a demonstration to the organization's top management. There is a lot of work to be done from now until then, but you are confident that the team will meet the deadline.

Early this morning, Tom left a voice message on his boss's phone line that he will not be coming to work today. You learn from one of his co-workers that he is absent due to a bad cold.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

None/
Not at
all

Some/
Somewhat

A Great
Deal/
Very
Much

How much sympathy
would you feel for Tom?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Would you hope for
some form of
disciplinary action
against Tom for his
absence?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How likely is it you
would help Tom with his
work?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How blameworthy is
Tom for his absence?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How harsh a
punishment should be
given to Tom?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How much of an
obligation does Tom
have to attend in this
situation?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How certain are you
that you would help
cover for Tom?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

I would feel bad for Tom

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How irritated would you
feel by Tom?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How much concern
would you feel for Tom?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How angry would you
feel at Tom?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

How responsible is Tom
for his absence?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

I would feel aggravated
by Tom.

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

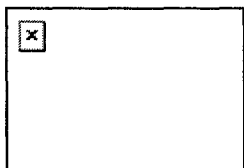
How likely is it that you
would help do Tom's
work?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

Do you believe Tom
deserves to be
punished for his
absence?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐

Do you have any additional thoughts or comments on the absence episode described in the vignette?



Demographic Information

Please answer the following few questions to allow us to obtain some background information that will help us categorize and better interpret your responses. Remember that all of the information is **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**.

Please indicate your age in years

Please indicate your gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Do You have any children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, please indicate:

- a) The number of children you have
- b) The age of your youngest child , and the age of your oldest child

What is your job title?

In your role, do you formally supervise other workers?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Finish

APPENDIX B

Definitions: Coding Sheet - New York Times & Absenteeism

Note: For many of these categorical variables, sub-categories were created for analytical purposes. The categories below represent the higher level categories. Some categories that appear on the coding sheet that are self evident are not necessarily included in the present document.

Job of Workers:

Public Sector Workers: Includes Police, firefighters, corrections officers, transit workers, municipal workers, postal workers, and state and federal civil servants.

Office Workers: Both clerks and executives

Retail Workers: Store workers, restaurant workers, etc.

Healthcare Workers: Includes doctors and nurses.

Reason for Absence

Medical Reasons: Can include everything from cold/flu, depression & psychological problems, injury, ergonomics, smoking, and others

Labor Conflict: When absence is used a tactic in labor conflict

Economic Choice: This is when a worker bases their attendance on financial considerations, or makes a rational decision to forgo work in order to participate in some other activity (does not include domestic responsibilities or leisure).

Deviance: Absence is directly attributed to deviant personality/behavior

Domestic Responsibilities: Childcare, eldercare, family problems, shopping, etc.

Non-Work Events: This represents absence due to poor weather, transportation problems, specific events such as terrorist alerts, national events, etc.

Leisure: This related to the choice to forgo work to participate/watch sports, engage in leisure activities, or participate in/extend holidays.

Stress: Involves the specific mention of stress or role conflict.

Abs. as Complex/Multiple: This is when the article specifically indicates that absenteeism is multifaceted and cannot be easily understood.

Workgroup norms: This involves collusion or social pressure within the workgroup or organization

Withdrawal from work: This refers to people not liking their jobs or not liking their work conditions.

Demographic: This is suggestion that absence behavior differs along social groups when no other reason is provided. It does not include national culture as this is included in “External/Societal Reasons”. Examples here include disabled workers, older workers, etc.

Societal Conditions: This is when absenteeism is not due to individual issues or workplace conditions, but is being caused by societal factors. Examples include social protests (not related to work), lack of adequate social services (housing, food, etc), , national work ethic, or alienation from society.

Not Specified: Articles that do not mention a reason. Usually focus only on the consequences of absenteeism

Outcomes of Absenteeism

Societal Outcomes: Absenteeism affects societal outcomes such as votes on legislation, hurts national economies/national competitiveness, or hurts/indicates something about society.

Business Outcomes: Absence as a cost or drain on productivity for businesses. Absence hurting customers or co-workers.

Absentee/Worker Outcomes: Absence leading to punishment for individuals (fired, docked pay, condemnation/attacks).

*** The next set of outcomes are more active in nature where absenteeism leads to the initiation of action

Management Action: Specific policy or managerial actions aimed at reducing absenteeism.

Government Action: Government action aimed at reducing absenteeism.

Advocacy for Products/Services: Lobby groups, researchers, or consultants recommending products, services, or actions aimed at reducing absenteeism.

Labor Conflict: Absenteeism leading to labor conflict such as workers striking over punishment for absenteeism, or managers demanding the inclusion of absenteeism as a labor negotiations issue.

Anti-Abs Campaigns: Call for public mobilization to reduce absenteeism, speeches, ad campaigns, etc.

Geographic Region

North America: USA, Can., Mex. **Australia/NZ**

Europe: Include USSR **North Africa/Middle East** (Algeria to Pakistan)

Asia: India and East **Horn and Southern Africa**

South America **Not specified/World**

Caribbean: Include Cuba

Article Type

Short Note **Commentary/Editorial**

News Story **Long Feature**

Letter to editor

Other Concepts present in the article

Turnover

Accidents

Lateness

Communism

Criminal Behavior

Strikes/Labor Conflict

Discrimination against groups

Acad. Research/Business conferences: This is any mention of research or conferences involving absenteeism.

Coding Sheet: New York Times & Absenteeism

Article ID: _____ **Date of Article:** _____

Job of Workers:

Politicians	_____	Dock Workers	_____
Factory Workers	_____	Office Workers	_____
Miners	_____	Retail Workers	_____
Teachers	_____	Healthcare Workers	_____
Public Sector Workers	_____	Other Specific	_____
		Not Specified/All	_____

Gender of Workers

Male	_____	Female	_____
Not specified/Both	_____		

Treatment of Absenteeism

Negative	_____	Positive/Potentially positive	_____
----------	-------	-------------------------------	-------

Reason for Absence

Medical Reasons	_____	Abs. as Complex/Multiple	_____
Labor Conflict	_____	Workgroup norms	_____
Economic Choice	_____	Withdrawal from work	_____
Deviance	_____	Demographic	_____
Domestic Responsibilities	_____	Alcohol/drugs	_____
Non Work Events	_____	Spousal Abuse	_____
Leisure	_____	Societal Conditions	_____
Stress	_____	Not Specified	_____

Coding Sheet: New York Times & Absenteeism (Cont.)

Outcomes of Absenteeism

Societal Outcomes _____	Advocacy for Products/Services _____
Business Outcomes _____	Management Action _____
Absentee/Worker Outcomes _____	Government Action _____
	Labor Conflict _____
	Anti-Abs Campaigns _____

Geographic Region

North America _____	Australia/NZ _____
Europe _____	North Africa/Middle East _____
Asia (India and East) _____	Horn and Southern Africa _____
South America _____	Not specified/World _____
Caribbean _____	

Article Type

Short Note _____	Commentary/Editorial _____
News Story _____	Long Feature _____
	Letter _____

Other Concepts present in the article

Turnover _____	Discrimination _____
Accidents _____	Academic Research/ Business conferences _____
Lateness _____	
Communism _____	
Criminal Behavior _____	
Strikes/Labor Conflict _____	