

Running Head: POWER, RESISTANCE, TALK AND SILENCE

**POWER AND RESISTANCE: NAVIGATING BOUNDARIES OF TALK AND
SILENCE IN THE PART-TIME WORKPLACE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores power dynamics in the part-time workplace and their relation to the creation of boundaries of acceptability of talk, especially about workplace concerns. After a review of literature on ignorance, apathy, power and resistance, I discuss how through 10 semi-structured interviews, I found that workers were encouraged or forced to cultivate apathy of workplace issues in themselves. I discuss the nature of power and structure in the workplace and deploy a conceptual framework I call ‘packaging’ to create a graspable form of a conception of how workers situate themselves in the workplace social structure. I found that workers avoided direct challenges of management in order to avoid expected repercussions and often coped in various ways by creating back regions of talk. The transitory and low-wage nature of part-time work also encouraged disengagement. I further enter a discussion of the greater implications of my findings and silencing environments and offer suggestions for future research and advice for workers.

Keywords: Power, Resistance, Talk, Silence, Apathy, Social Structure, Work

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*To all workers who want to better understand and improve their workplace social
environments*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1: Let's Get to Work...

“It could be way worse;” “what can *I* really do about it?” “I just don’t have the time or energy to deal with it.” These were common things to hear when I was involved in a unionization movement at my workplace in an attempt to make our work environment fairer, safer, healthier and more equal. They are also common things to hear from friends when they complain about their jobs and work related concerns. Denial of unfair work conditions, feelings of powerlessness, and apathy are products of an oppressive social structure in the workplace that I have experienced first-hand and that are all too *normal* in the lives of many part-time workers. I use the word normal to convey these products as not only common, but *expected*. At work, employees are *expected* not to question their manager and if they do, they can *expect* some sort of reaction that is backed by the unequal power they are *expected* to hold. I explore the power dynamics of the part-time workplace through the experiences of workers in hopes of uncovering the boundaries of talk and silence and their contribution to ignorance, apathy and oppressive social relations. Why is this important?

Most of us work; all of us need money. If we are to create a sustainable future, it is imperative that we begin to improve our social relations in a way that leads to less exploitation and instead to more cooperation, engagement and fulfillment in our lives. This includes changing how we understand and manage power, because power shapes us. We organize all social relations relative to various power dynamics and we even make it a part of our identities. A worker’s voice should not be silenced because she fears retaliation from her boss; workers should not have to choose ignorance or apathy of workplace issues that affect them over seeking their resolution. If we seek to develop a

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healthy social world, we should not continue to allow the organizations we must necessarily be a part of- like the workplace- to cultivate disengagement and complacency in our friends and family. I do not want to continue to call oppressive and unnecessarily exploitative social practices 'normal,' nor do I think we should stand for them.

To be clear, I am not necessarily suggesting that all members of the workplace should be equal or that it be wholly democratic, in fact it would seem that having positions of authority are necessary in order to get things done. However, this does not mean that the workplace has to be oppressive to workers. It does not mean we should value social environments that are silencing, which encourage disengagement from social issues that impact our lives or which demand we sacrifice bits of our integrity for a pay check. Social research is a powerful tool we have to understand our world and in bringing about progressive change (Kirby et al., 2010).

As important as it is in social research to study how human actors choose to act and make sense of their world, it is equally or if not more important to study why human actors choose *not* to act, because inaction can be just as telling as action itself. If I find that workers feel they must remain silent about workplace issues, that they would rather not talk about them or that they feel it is pointless to talk about them, then the workplace is a social organization that cultivates ignorance in its occupants and whose social structure leads us to create a culture of silence that is reproductive of oppressive social relations. My research then, stands to give a voice to workers who may not feel they have one and to improve the social conditions of the workplace for workers of the future.

In light of the above, I situate my research in pragmatic sociology as it is concerned with contributing to the academic and public understanding of the social conditions part-time workers face so as to work toward improving these conditions

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(Foster, 2012). I seek to develop a better understanding of workplace power dynamics and the experiences of part-time workers so as to take a step forward in giving workers the tools and knowledge they need, and may not have otherwise obtained in order to further their own understanding of their world and to aid in creating the meaningful change they want to see (Foster, 2012). This is the goal of pragmatic sociology; to empower human actors with the tools they need to better act in relation to their environment (Watson, 2009, p. 864), and to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and social practice (Blokker, 2011, p. 251).

My leading research questions are threefold. What effect does the social structure of the part-time workplace have on workers' ability to productively voice work-related concerns? Does the social structure of the workplace cultivate, maintain or encourage ignorance and apathy in workers? And if so, do ignorance and apathy lead to the maintenance of a oppressive power relations in the workplace? Guiding my research are the concepts of ignorance, apathy, talk and silence. I will also engage with theoretical frameworks of power, resistance, performance and social structure. Turning to the literature, I will start with what I do *not* know.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: Tell Me Something I Don't Know...

Ignorance is most commonly defined as a “lack of knowledge, information, or education; the state of being ignorant” (ignorance, n.d.). However, ignorance has been expanded in the realm of social science to include actions or conditions of being where people actively ignore information that is claimed to exist (Ungar, 2008). Following this definition, ignorance or ignoring is a ‘natural enemy’ to the stability and smooth

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functioning of our society because it has social functions like the maintenance of power and privilege and social differentiation, and the reinforcement or internalization of dominant ideology or traditions that discourage resistance necessary for progressive change (Eliasoph 1998; Moore and Tuvin, 1949; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013).

Ignorance, as a social concept, is a multifaceted and fragmentary concept with both 'negative' functions, such as those listed above and many 'positive' functions, which also promote a smooth functioning of social relations (Smithson, 1985). For example, Moore and Tuvin (1949) note that ignorance can take the form of secrecy and security. A state or group may keep information concealed that if made publicly known could aid an enemy in harming that group or state (Moore & Tuvin, 1949). Smithson (1985) shows ignorance can also take the form of privacy as it is upheld through ignoring knowledge or the talk of certain knowledge, like gender-specific sensitive knowledge for example. Gershon (2000) combines the works of other scholars with his own ethnographic fieldwork and found that Samoan peoples strategically withheld their financial information from other Samoans who asked for money. This was a strategy to sustain their Samoan identities by keeping their economic realities private and to keep Samoan cultural exchanges separate from the demands of capitalism (Gershon, 2000). In this way, Gershon (2000) notes, Samoans strategically constructed ignorance and used it as a type of symbolic capital to maintain their Samoan identity and inter-Samoan relationships.

The literature is clear that as an action rather than a state, ignorance has many advantages and disadvantages in terms its function within social relations. For the purposes of my study, I intend to use the concept of ignorance to explore when issues are actively ignored despite their negative effect upon the ignorers. What are the forces that construct and require ignorance in the part-time workplace? What are the effects of

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ignoring workplace issues and do they maintain oppressive conditions that may have led to the ignoring? Before delving into literature on power, resistance, performance and social structure to explore these questions, it will be useful to first position ignorance in relation to apathy and discuss various dynamics and boundaries of talk and silence. Ignorance is distinct from, yet related to apathy, but will help explore and describe oppressive social environments in the workplace.

2.2: A-pathetic Situation

Apathy is a form of ignoring in that it is conscious non-action and active disengagement with an issue. Apathy is also the lack of motivation, for one reason or many, to engage with an issue. Apathetic workers tend to be indifferent about their workplace and offer little support or positive contribution to their organization (Ward-Smith, 2015). These qualities are socially harmful because inaction can maintain undesirable social conditions by leaving the issues or oppressive power positions unchallenged (Eliasoph 1998; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013). For example, workers who remain silent about issues they feel need to be addressed in the workplace, or who are discouraged from becoming engaged can justify the very actions of their bosses that are causing the problem. Simply, this is because there is no resistance to bring the issue into discourse. Remaining apathetic about ones undesired work conditions or ignoring them in one form or another stands to maintain these conditions and the social relations (i.e. power) that induce them.

However, it is too easy to blame an individual for their ignorance and apathy about an issue, even if they explicitly complain about it but do not act because ignorance is not always the shortcoming of an individual. Rather, they are products of their social environment (McVeigh, 2004). McVeigh (2004) applies a theory of *structured ignorance*

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to racist organizing in the United State and suggests that if members of racist institutions like the Ku Klux Klan rarely interact with black people, or if wealthy people rarely see or interact with poor people that the members of those groups will remain ignorant of the kinds of people they are opposed to. As a result, McVeigh (2004) suggests they may continue to hold their prejudices based on very limited information and that ignorance and racist ideology are reproduced through both the structural conditions of society and organizations (McVeigh, 2004).

Instead of condemning any one individual for their ignorance or apathy, we should rather ask how ignorance and apathy are cultivated, maintained and reproduced by the dynamics of the social structures we are a part of. It is obvious that workers know about some, if not all workplace issues that bother them, yet not all voice those concerns. It seems there is an ignorance or apathy of resolving those issues through voicing their concerns, rather than an ignorance of those issues existing. It is the boundaries that prohibit the ability of a worker to voice her concerns and that foster ignorance and apathy that peak my research interests. First, I should make clear what I mean by a voice or ‘talk.’

2.3: Talk to Me...

Talk is a form of “cultural work that people do to make sense of their lives and to orient their behaviour” (Wuthnow, 2011, p.9) and is seen to be crucial to the well-being of social relations and social capital (Putnam, 1999; Reed, 2001; Shotwell, 2011; Ungar, 2008). Every organization has a system or structure of shared meaning called its ‘culture’ (Orta, 2015, p. 333). If the structure places barriers on what a worker is able to talk about, especially if it prohibits voicing her concerns, she may be detached from her workplace and become less involved. According to Reed (2001), the lack of involvement of

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members of a social group in the social group produces “atomized, apathetic citizens [i.e. workers] who would not know how to participate meaningfully if they wanted to” (p. 445). Therefore, any limitations on talk that may lead to a lack of ability or motivation to become engaged in workplace issues decreases social capital in the workplace as workers may become withdrawn and disengaged from the issues that are negatively affecting them. This creates a culture of silence where social issues cannot be heard.

A social issue (i.e. worker exploitation, mistreatment) can go unrecognized until claims-making or ‘consciousness-raising’ (Cohen, 2001, p.11) activity happens and brings attention to it (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Claims-making is simply a form of resistance to an undesirable condition, that is, it is the act of making a claim against an issue in order to bring it into discussion and ideally to a resolution. As a form of talk, claims-making can encourage new structure and thought to make a problem more visible, understood or manageable (Ungar, 2008, p. 301). The literature indicates that it is crucial for progressive change that there be opportunities for talk without restriction or reprisal and that voicing concerns (i.e. in the workplace) is a form of talk and resistance necessary for the change the speakers wish to see.

The social structure is animated, realized and reproduced by talk (Ungar, 2008, p. 312). If the power dynamics within social organizations (i.e. the workplace) or their very social structure increases ignoring by causing denial, silence or apathy (about workplace issues) it thus decreases where, how, when or if the organization’s occupants are able to engage in, or are motivated to engage in socially constructive discourse that any successful democratic relations rely upon (Putnam, 2000; Reed, 2001). This socially constructive discourse includes the ability to resist, challenge and talk about important issues needing to be resolved that are negatively impacting people, especially those

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people not in a position of power or authority. If workers cannot talk or engage with workplace issues that concern them, their silence works to reproduce the very oppressive workplace conditions they want to change by leaving them unheard and unchallenged.

Eliasoph (1998) argues that political talk amongst ordinary citizens helps to shape perceptions and responses to political events. Through ethnographic fieldwork she found that dominant ideology (i.e. national security and patriotism) plays a role in determining what is important and ‘ok’ to talk about as well as what becomes taboo (Eliasoph, 1998). Despite the ability for her participants to talk in depth about political events and their government’s action in private quarters, they did not talk about those issues while in groups or in public and were shamed or stigmatized if they did. In this way they were ‘rewarded’ socially for their silence and apathy because it protected them from social stigma (Eliasoph, 1998; Sutton & Norgaard, 2013). Taussig (1999) would call this a “public secret” (p. 5), in defining something that is known but that cannot be articulated (Sutton & Norgaard, 2013).

In this case, social relations not only produced, but they *required* ignorance even where knowledge was known. If this is the case in the workplace we may find social arenas where it is ‘ok’ and ‘not ok’ to talk about work related issues. It may not be normal for one to criticize management directly to their manager, but only to other coworkers or family. If space for constructive talk is limited to arenas where change cannot arise then the norms that have restricted this talk are oppressive and work against the interests of the those not in power. If workers are socially rewarded for their silence about workplace issues then they are encouraged to be disengaged from social politics and reproduce their own demise. But what is silence and how do I intend to use the concept?

2.4: Shhh...

Silence is talk's counterpart, but is itself not without meaning or effect. For example, Sutton and Norgaard (2013) show us that even though citizens in both democratic and dictatorship societies oppose torture, the majority do not want to know, hear or talk about its happening. People choose to ignore, deny or remain silent about these atrocities either because they are uncomfortable realities, they feel they cannot change them or because they clash with one's sense of patriotism and national pride, making ideology a factor that contributes to ignorance (Cohen, 2001; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013). In choosing to deny reality for some sort of reason, personal, political, or otherwise they justify their government's action through their silence and denial by leaving those practices unchallenged (Cohen, 2001; Hamm, 2002; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013).

Silence is especially relevant to the workplace. A worker may not feel able to talk to their employer about a work related issue because they may find it uncomfortable or awkward, feel it would be a hopeless attempt, or fear that voicing it would yield some sort of repercussion. Alternatively, they may deny there is a problem at all and be driven to be a 'good' employee by not complaining and doing their work. Whatever the reason, if there are forces that encourage this silence and that limit talk in the workplace, they also encourage an oppressive work environment where concerns cannot be heard, unfair social relations are maintained and exploitative employer practices can be silently justified. Talk is necessary for progressive social development (Eliasoph, 1998; Reed 2001); "just because workers are not directly organizing an opposition toward a management initiative does not mean they agree with it" (Fleming & Spicer, 2008, p. 303). This gap between action (talk/voicing concerns) and values (wanting the concern to

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be resolved) is not uncommon. Kennedy et al. (2009) found through quantitative survey analysis that 72.3% of respondents who indicated they have strong environmental values also self-reported a gap between these values and their environmentally supportive behavior. I seek to understand if and why workers who see value in resolving their concerns are somehow restricted in doing so by the dynamics of their workplace social structure. What are those barriers? What dynamics in the workplace place boundaries on talk necessary for progressive resistance? I turn now to literature on power, resistance and social structure.

2.5: Speaking with Authority, About Power

The workplace is a social arena imbued with power relations. How these power relations play out “has important consequences for material livelihood and dignity” (Hodson et al., 2006, p. 386). According to Orta, (2015), power generally refers to an agent’s capacity to influence a target person or groups, which could be the target person’s behavior, attitude, or both and their ability to do so by withholding resources and administering punishments. Drawing heavily on organizational ethnographies, Hodson, Roscigno and Lopez determine that ‘power’ and ‘powerless’ are relational and are defined by often subtle and assumed rights and relationships (Hodson et al., 2006, p. 385).

Authority is a form of power that derives from institutionalized roles or arrangements and stems from appointments of power or from organizational positions assumed and expected to have varying levels of authority, ability and responsibility. Authoritative positions are forms of symbolic and legitimate power whereby its holders can act and expect others to follow their directions (Orta, 2015).

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Both power and authority as a form of power are crucial in exploring boundaries for talk and silence because they are social forces that guide, restrict and require action and behaviour. If a worker is fearful her boss will take away her hours or cut her pay if she confronts them about a workplace issue, she may be discouraged or prevented altogether from approaching them about that issue. Rather, she may cultivate ignorance of workplace issues or develop an apathetic attitude toward voicing issues in order to avoid repercussion or social sanction. In doing so, she may justify that oppressive environment by leaving issues and power holders unchallenged. Thus, she may reproduce the very conditions that are oppressive to her, or which are causing the workplace issues (Eliasoph 1998; Moore and Tuvin, 1949; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013). Resistance is discouraged while ignorance and apathy are encouraged and rewarded.

2.6: I Just Couldn't Resist...

Resistance through talk and claims-making has been found to be crucial for progressive social change desired by those negatively affected by the status quo (Eliasoph 1998; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Moore and Tuvin, 1949; Sutton and Norgaard, 2013; Ungar, 2008). Important to note is that resistance travels in both top-down and bottom-up directions and is inseparable from power. Bottom-up resistance to power is an attempt to overcome or challenge the top-down resistance that is already present (Fleming & Spicer, 2008). My research interests lay in exploring both directions of resistance, top-down exercise of power in the workplace and the ability or felt ability for bottom-up resistance from the workers necessary for having their conflicts resolved and in improving their workplace environments. If workers are adhering to the behaviour demanded by the boss, they are thus performing the 'act' of 'show' that will avoid displeasing their superior. Similarly, if a boss is exercising a power that is legitimated by the organization or social

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structure, they too are performing an 'act' to convey that power. I turn now to performance theory (Lester, 2011), Goffman's (2001) dramaturgy, and Giddens' structuration theory (Craib, 1992).

2.7: Performance: It's All an Act

The workplace is a social space complete with varying regions of acceptability and normativity of talk and behaviour. From a performativity theory standpoint, Jaime Lester (2011) explored how women performed gendered roles and managed impressions in the workplace through interviews and ethnographic observations of six full-time, tenured women faculty at an urban community college (p. 156). Impression management is a performance whereby individuals form their behaviour around sensed cultural and contextual expectations in order to meet acceptable norms (p. 155). Actors step 'out' of the back region, where the audience is normally absent, and into the front region where the audience is normally present to give their performance (Goffman, 2001, p.121). Impression management is done primarily to construct a desired public social identity in order to be perceived in a certain way. How others perceive us influences how we are treated (Lester, 2011, p. 164). For example, stigmas are "wide-ranging, encompassing physical, behavioural, and emotional traits that conflict with social conventions" that are managed through performances learned in order to *pass* or *cover* his/her stigma (Lester, 2011, p. 158). The former is done to hide one's stigma or to appear as normal, while the latter is meant to draw attention away from the stigma in order to reduce tension. This is important because being seen as a "stigmatized individual can often lead to unfair and unequal treatment" (Lester, 2011, p. 158). A worker might perform or behave in a way that those in power (boss) demand in order to avoid a repercussion of some sort and in doing so, maintains the status quo that might include silence of their workplace concerns.

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The audience of the performance is always evaluating the performer (Lester, 2011, p. 158); employees evaluate gender performances of female coworkers and decide if they are ‘women’ just as managers evaluate performances of employees and decide if they are a ‘good employee’. In awareness of the evaluations, individuals attempt to perform in an appropriate and culturally specific way to prevent criticism (Lester, 2011, p. 158). For Giddens, this might be articulated as rule following. That is, action has both normative and communicative components and it is responsible for both the production and reproduction of social structures (Craib, 1992, p. 36). In this way, social structures are created and maintained through the skilled performances of actors (Craib, 1992; Goffman, 2001). If norms of performances in the workplace include disengagement and silence, they may also work to reproduce a silencing environment.

Lester (2011) for example, found that “social practices, discourse, culture, and institutions all maintain gender ideologies by evaluating constituents’ performances” (p. 158). This is important because if performances of gender perpetuate and sustain current ideological notions of gender, those performances also sustain or perpetuate gender inequalities and justify the status quo (Lester, 2011). In the same way, if performances of employees perpetuate or sustain current ideological notions of what it means to be a ‘good employee’ whereby a good employee means to be apathetic, docile and obedient even if those conditions are harmful to the employee, those performances maintain and legitimate the oppressive status quo. The same is true if workers are required or encouraged to ‘perform’ or choose action that includes a disengagement from, apathy of, or silence about workplace issues. Like any performance, if an employee chooses to resist authority and claims-make against management about any issue, they must consider the implications of that resistance. If the ‘costs’ of resisting (i.e. expected repercussions) are

weighed as ‘not worth it,’ I expect workers to ignore the issues and rather cope in some way. In light of Giddens, their disengaged action might reproduce the very social structure that caused the disengagement.

2.8: Building the Structure

The social structure is often ambiguous to define. In a general sense, the notion of ‘structure’ “refers to a set of relations between [its constituting] elements that has some measure of coherence and stability” (Bernardi et al., 2007, p. 162). In the social sciences, the notion of ‘structure’ generally refers to an ordered and organized arrangement of these elements (Smelser, 1992) and is an attempt to differentiate the fundamental, recurring and patterned elements of society from the secondary and less fundamental elements (Bernardi et al., 2007, p. 162). With this conception of ‘structure,’ we imagine a sort of form or shape that appears from, and is constituted from our organizing of elements. The structure has a rationalized nature, that is, it is created with positions, roles and responsibilities that agents will fill in order for the structure’s system to serve its greater function and become a structure at all.

Notice here, that I have indicated the structure has a system but that a system is not a structure. Structures, “do not exist external to the actor or action...they are not patterns or systems of interaction...systems have structures or at least ‘structural properties’ [but] they are not structures themselves (Craib, 1992. p. 41). Here, Craib (1992) is referring to Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration and notes a ‘duality of structure,’ referring to “the fact that structures are both produced by human action and are what Giddens calls the *medium* of human action” (p. 44). In other words, the structure does not exist without human agents and produces a sort of ‘rebound’ effect where

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human action creates the structure that will then guide, constitute and rationalize human action.

2.9: Get Ready, Get Set...

The literature shows there is a lack of research not only on the social structure of the part-time workplace, but the part-time workplace in general. As such, I have relied heavily on theoretical literature in order to clearly illustrate the various dynamics we might expect to find in an organizational setting and the importance of communication in facilitating progressive change. I have outlined the concepts of talk, silence, ignorance and apathy of which I will be using in my research. I have also provided a brief overview of some background theory on power, performance and social structure as it will strengthen the depth to which my analysis can reach for the reader. In order to explore the various boundaries and power dynamics that may limit a workers ability to voice her concerns in the workplace, I have chosen a qualitative methodology.

2. METHODOLOGY

3.1: GO! The Data

I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with part-time workers. I chose the semi-structured method because it is known to be useful in seeking emergent, rich data while being explorative yet focused. Semi-structured interviews are useful in uncovering detailed stories from participants in an attempt to see the world through their eyes (Bryman, Bell and Teevan, 2012). Interviews are narratives of people's personal lives and have been shown to be effective as a unit of analysis in studying people's work experience (Foster, 2012). In general, qualitative interviews ask for in depth meaning and are not generalizable to large populations, whereas quantitative methods may be

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generalizable but do not offer the in depth data I sought for this project (Kirby et al., 2010).

I used an interview guide to keep the conversation flowing around the specific information I was looking for (Bernard, 2006b), which were specific experiences of part-time workers when they felt they had to remain silent about a workplace concern. I also asked workers to describe the ideal employee, co-worker, boss and workplace in order to compare the work environments they wanted and were currently a part of. My questions (see Appendix A) were meant to be both descriptive and exploratory (Kirby et al., 2010, p. 69) of relationships, positions, roles, duties and power dynamics in the workplace. My aim was to get participants to paint me a picture of the social structure and boundaries of talk and silence in their workplaces through recounting their experiences with power relations and work-related issues.

Ten interviews were adequate in acquiring meaningful data in the limited time I had for the honours thesis. I interviewed five men and five women to achieve a gender balance. Although I did not limit my population to students, all of my participants were or had recently been students at a post-secondary institution. I acknowledge this as a potential limitation to my study, but also a strength because a large portion of the part-time workforce in Halifax is composed of future, current and past students.

3.2: Recruitment: Calling all Workers!

I recruited participants through social media and snowball sampling. Individuals interested in participating in my study were able to contact me via the e-mail address that was displayed in the social media post (See appendix B) and by phone if they were recruited through an intermediary (snowball sampling). Upon contacting me via e-mail I informed the interested person about who I am, my position as a student researcher, my

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research and the areas of interest I would be asking them to talk about. I informed them of the duration and location of the interview and their right to skip questions, stop participating in the interview at any time, or withdraw completely up until March 1, 2015. I also gave them the option of asking further questions. For those who made contact with me via phone, I explained the same information above to them or offered to e-mail the information. Upon meeting the participant at the time of interview at the agreed upon location I reviewed the this information and went over the consent form with them to ensure informed consent and an understanding in what my project was and what I would be asking (See Appendix C).

3.3: Collection and Analysis

Interviews were recorded with my own digital audio recording device and the audio file was transferred to my personal computer. I transcribed the audio files of the interviews into Microsoft Word for analysis and used pseudonyms to anonymize the data. I kept a codebook for the pseudonyms separate from the transcripts (Bernard, 2006a) until March 1, 2015 in case I was required to identify a participant to contact them or to delete information they could choose to withdrawal up until that date. Anonymized data ensured confidentiality and transcripts had no data that could identify the individual or their workplace.

I used indexing codes to analyse the transcripts as a strategy to compile and synthesize relevant and emergent data (Bernard, 2006a). With these combined methods I looked for oppressive social dynamics that cause workers to ignore or deny the workplace issues they profess to be important. I explored the social forces that create boundaries of talk and silence for workers in their workplace environments.

3.4: Risks, Benefits and Risk Mitigation

At times participants might have felt uncomfortable talking about their employers, other employees and negative experiences at work. However, this risk was no greater than the risk they face talking about their work in their everyday lives. Participants were aware that they could choose not to respond to a question, to stop the interview, or withdraw their interviews before March 1, 2015. Measures to protect anonymity (i.e. use of pseudonyms) and confidentiality of data mitigated the risk of discomfort and reassured participants that their employers would not discover that they took part in my interview. Finally, since “ignorance” can have a judgemental or critical tone, I did not include this word in my recruitment strategies or interview guide so that it did not shape or limit the information participants shared with me.

3. FINDINGS

4.1: Packaging, a Conceptual Framework

Boundaries of talk and silence, as well as action and behaviour were produced, constructed and negotiated in relation to what is most intuitive to call ‘packages’ or ‘packaging.’ In the same way a box holds a bunch of contents sealed up in a nice package, so too do the positions of workers, supervisors and managers have their own box of specific contents that we could expect to find if we were to open their package. Just as we put things in packages, we also take things out, and some have contents already in them. Consider the question, what does it mean to be a manager? A boss? Part-time employee? In response, one might begin to list off traits, duties, relationships and types of authority or power each has in the workplace. This is what a package is, they are the conceptual bundles that employees create of themselves, their coworkers and their bosses and which, their coworkers and bosses create of them. They are bundles of

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expectations of behaviour, abilities, roles, levels of power or authority, rights, privileges and they are ideological, structural (embedded in objective positions of the organization) and socially constructed and negotiated.

For example, participants (workers) would often tell me about ‘feeling-out’ the boundaries of the workplace. They felt the need to know who had power, who didn’t, who was close to the boss and who wasn’t and generally how they ‘fit’ within the structure. Christina stressed the importance of learning these dynamics and said, “[if you don’t have time to] feel them out you can make some pretty drastic mistakes off the bat, you can say something to the wrong person and it go up the chain and be miscommunicated”. Additionally, all of my participants were able to offer descriptions of their relationships *with* their superiors or coworkers, as well as the relationships *between* superiors, coworkers and superiors and coworkers. They all offered descriptions of the varying duties, roles, authority, privilege and expectations of behavior their coworkers and bosses had been given or held inherently due to their structural or ‘technical’ position in the organization.

In this way, employees used packaging to situate themselves in relation to others, and others in relation to themselves. Knowing where each person ‘fit’ in the workplace social structure was crucial in choosing action, behaviour or knowing whom one could talk to and about what. The expectations that employees had of their bosses, their ‘packaging’ had a great deal of impact on their felt sense of ability to voice workplace concerns. For the purposes of my research, I have broken ‘packaging’ into three types or parts that contribute to packaging as a whole. Those types are, ideological packaging, structural packaging and non-structural packaging.

4.2: Ideological Packaging

Ideological packaging includes expectations that stem from hegemonic or ‘traditional’ elements of what it means to be an ‘employee’ or a ‘boss’. By this I mean, packaging is partly normative and commonsensical. Workers were able to talk about what the ‘ideal employee’ is, as well as the sorts of abilities, power and expectations of others that bosses *usually* or *generally* have. For example, when asked about who has the power in their workplace, participants explicitly indicated that managers, owners and supervisors always had the power. This was also indicated implicitly in discussion of workplace experiences. Lucy said, “When you think of a supervisor you think of someone who’s in charge of everything whereas at our workplace they aren’t in charge of anything they just need to make sure things get done.” She identifies an existing ‘traditional’ and normal definition of what a supervisor is and recognizes a deviation from that package of expectations. She has also created a new package for her supervisors, telling me the duties they have that are different from her own, the similarities and the authority they have.

When I asked participants what the ideal employee is, some made explicit distinctions or asked for clarification as to which perspective I was looking for. Lucy first asked, “If I were an employer?” And Ben started by saying, “an ideal employee? Well, if I was the boss I would probably...” After I noticing a distinction participants were making between their own perspective of the ideal employee and an employer’s perspective, I began to ask all other participants how their response might change if they answered the question from the employer’s perspective. All were able to make distinctions, or had already done so without prompting. This finding indicates that various positions in the social structure are seen to have varying interests, all which

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would be added to the package of that position. A ‘manager’ or ‘employer’ is assumed to desire efficient and obedient *employees* who show initiative, while workers sought *coworkers* who were supportive, friendly and did an even amount of work. These interests were depicted as ‘in general’ rather than actual, making them assumed to be common.

The ideological element of packaging describes how positions in the workplace social structure like ‘employee,’ ‘supervisor’ or ‘manager’ are normally situated in relation to one another. Supervisors and managers for example, are always assumed to have authority or power over lower positions like an ‘employee.’ There are both internal and external applications of ideological packaging, just as there are for structural and non-structural packaging. By external, I mean that one person situates another in the social structure and expects that their behavior, action and composure be aligned with their ‘package.’ For example, a manager should act like a manager and should have more power than an employee. By internal, I mean that one situates themselves in relation to others as per their own package’s contents, aiming to conduct themselves as someone of that package *should*. For example, an employee should follow the orders of their manager because as an employee they have less authority. External packaging is an expectation of *other’s* conduct and ability based on their position in the social structure, while internal is a self-governing expectation of one’s *own* conduct and ability based on one’s own position in the structure.

Jarret demonstrates the external application when he mentions bosses tend to ‘put on the suit,’ that is, to step into the role of what a boss ‘is’ and to live up to the expectations of behavior and action common for someone in that role. In Seth’s description, he points out the internal and external ideological packaging at work:

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“I feel like some people get in these positions [of power] and feel they should be treated a certain way, or if you, speak up you’re threatening their authority and they have to do something about that ... it’s like, oh I’m the manager, I’m supposed to have more power than you, and you’re threatening that so I’m going to do something about that.”

Notice here that as an outsider external to that position, he expects managers to have more power than employees (situating in structure) and further expects that authority to be exercised (expectation of behaviour). He also indicates that people who step into that role of ‘manager’ align their behavior to match the package as they manage expectations of themselves. For example, as a manager I am supposed have power over you and so my performance, in a Goffmanian or performativity sense, has to match what is expected of me, which is to exercise authority over you, the employee.

As a conclusion, ideological packages are the expectations of positions that are considered the norm, commonsensical and are expected to be inherent in that role or position. They are the answers to questions like, ‘what does it mean to be a manager?’ ‘What does it mean to be a part-time employee?’ ‘What does it mean to be a *good* employee?’ Ideological packages are the hegemonic conceptual bundles of expected traits, behaviour, roles, power, authority and situation in the social structure. The contents of ideological packages are what we generally expect of others in a specific position (external) and what we generally feel is expected of us if we were in a position (internal).

4.3: Structural Packaging

In addition to the commonsensical or traditional packages that give us expectations of others and ourselves, emergent in my data is an element of what I call *structural packaging*. Structural packages are the conceptual bundles of *actual*

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responsibilities, relationships, abilities, roles, duties and position in the workplace's organizational structure. They are 'technical' and often literally embedded in job descriptions. Structural packages emerged from all participants through responses to questions like "what does your job entail?" And, through the various ways workers described the responsibilities of members in their workplace. For example, as Jen and the other 9 participants indicated in some way, a manager has the 'technical' ability to hire and fire, to decide hours and has authority over workers. Workers do not have those abilities. Rather, their duties include completing tasks the manager has asked of them or fulfilling their job description with limited to no authority.

Structural packages are the actual and organizational positioning of each member of the organization in the hierarchical structure. They describe the real distributions of power at their most technical level and are descriptions of functional roles, which are part of a 'rationalized' structure that must be followed if the workplace is to run as it is meant to. A worker could order their manager to go and do something but the manager does not have to comply because structurally, they have authority over that employee, not the other way around. Management and ensuring adherence to the management system is structurally designed to serve a functional purpose. Functionally, a manager has full authority over a worker and the responsibility to manage employees in order to ensure the organization functions correctly. These technical positions with functional responsibilities and abilities are the positions from which structural packages are formed.

In some cases however, a worker might be able to exercise authority over their manager for one reason or another, or avoid boss-employee discipline. For example a manager's son, who happens to be a regular employee might be able to order their manager to do something, or refuse to follow the structural authority of their manager

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because of their parent and son relationship. In Jen's case, one employee was able to drink while on shift at a restaurant, "but because his family is friends with the owners family that problem was never addressed." These are examples of *non-structural packaging* (familial relations or friendships) overriding the structural packages (structural authority) of their workplace.

4.4: Non-Structural Packaging

While ideological packaging includes generalized conceptual bundles of what it means to be a manager or employee and where structural packaging includes bundles of actual or 'technical' aspects of those positions, *non-structural* packaging is essentially everything else. Non-structural packages are the conceptual bundles of all factors that have 'weight' in choosing action or are that contribute to positioning oneself in relation to others. Non-structural packages are constantly negotiated as they include elements like personality, friendships, family relationships, informal seniority, and cultural and social norms that all contribute to a perception of someone.

For example, Allie told me, "there were people that were close friends to our manager that I wouldn't complain about, anything pertaining to her as a person because I didn't want them to tell her and then be on her bad side sort of thing." Allie is using non-structural packaging to situate her coworker in relation to the boss (as the boss's friend) and herself (as a coworker) and uses this packaging to gauge who she can talk to and about what. In this case, Allie did not feel comfortable talking to her coworker about anything personal about the boss because she feared that relationship might expose her voiced concerns to her manager, resulting in being on the boss's 'bad side.' For Allie, that coworker came with a region of silence.

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Workers used non-structural packaging in order to assess their own ‘weight’ or ‘credentials’ in the workplace structure in relation to other members. They knew which members of the workplace were to be avoided, which were friendly and supportive, who had privilege and who did not and depicted this process as discovering unwritten boundaries that would inform action and define regions of talk and silence. Mike said,

You don’t go right in [to a new job] and talk about whatever comes to mind, you kind of like get your footing right and you find out exactly where you stand and where everyone else stands and who’s like the leader, and when you kind of find that, that’s when you get the ball rolling and then I guess it just works better after a while.

4.5: Packaging in General

Ideological, structural and non-structural packaging are all factors of a general packaging process. All contribute to how a worker perceives their bosses and coworkers, how they expect the other to act toward them as well as how they should act toward the other. Packaging is action-guiding, situating, and determines to whom one could talk to and about what. It is the process workers take in determining where they ‘stand’ or ‘fit’ in the social structure. They consider popular or commonsensical definitions about what they *are* as an ‘employee’ and therefore what their relationship *should* look like with their ‘bosses’ and ‘coworkers’; they consider their structural or ‘technical’ abilities and authority each member has in relation to one another; and they consider various non-structural factors like personality, social relationships and cultural norms of behavior when situating themselves in relation to others and other in relation to themselves.

Packaging in all forms is both internal and external. Internally, workers consider what they feel their ‘package’ is, and attempt to align their behavior and their

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expectations of other's behavior toward them, to that packages definition. It can be characterized in the statement, "I am this, therefore I should act like this toward you and you should act like that toward me." Externally, workers package others and expect or justify behavior from them, as well as tailor their behavior toward the other's package. It can be characterized by the statement, "You are that, therefore I expect you to act like that and I should act like this toward you." In the workplace it would generally sound like, "I am a part-time employee and you are my boss, therefore I am expected to act like a worker toward or in front of you and you are expected to act like a boss toward or in front of me."

Packaging is a conceptual framework that I developed from my emergent data to offer a sort of objective or at least 'graspable' view of the complex processes in which workers situate and conduct themselves in the workplace. As a framework, packaging may be applicable to other organizations, but I leave that for future research. I turn now to some examples of how packaging was both descriptive of and conducive of boundaries of talk and silence, which led to an increase in apathy and ignorance of workplace issues. Packages are descriptive of the relationships and power dynamics that place limits on workers felt and actual abilities to voice their workplace concerns.

4.6: Who's Got the Power?

Who has the power? Jarret told me, "managers, general managers, supervisors, those three have the power, everyone else is equal playing ground." Power holders and the powerless were generally lumped together like Jarret's description. Either a member has power and may thus be viewed as threatening, or they have equal or less power and are not seen as a threat. Although distinctions could be made as to which positions had more power than others- supervisors have less structural authority than a manager- they

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were seen as equally intimidating to part-time workers because of their inherent ability to threaten one's job or status in the workplace. The boss's 'package' was always seen as threatening to some degree or at least to require strategic behaviour in order to stay on their 'good side' and therefore 'safe' from perceived threats.

Not only were bosses expected to have power, they were also expected to perform and exercise their power in some way. Power was viewed as coming with a choice. Jarret notes that a boss can, "be your saving graces or let you fall to the dogs," while Lucy explained the difference between her past bad coffee shop boss and her current good coffee shop boss was that, "that even though they have the same power they're two different businesses, they use the power different." Ben and Seth also noted this choice in saying some bosses have something to 'prove' or that power positions were expected to perform or 'live up to their expectations' in specific ways (ideological and structural packaging). Because workers wanted to avoid harmful uses of power, there were boundaries as to what one could talk about with their boss. Even Lucas, who has a good relationship with his boss noted:

I would never want to like leave a work day on bad terms with him [his boss] or anything like that, yeah I would like restrict my choice of words because like I like the guy and like... I wouldn't want to cross that line.

What are those boundaries? What do workers generally not feel comfortable talking about to their boss, and what effects do those limits have?

4.7: Boundaries of Talk

Workers generally avoided voicing concerns that may be taken as personal by the manager, which included commenting on their management style in some way. Lucy explained, "I don't know if I could confront their management style because a lot of the

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time people can take that personally, or maybe I'd have to really think about how I would word it." Seth noted the same concern, but added he would be ok talking about another employee.

Seth: I feel like a lot of companies seem to be set up this way, you almost feel like you'll go talk to your manager about another employee or the assistant manager or something like that but you won't actually tell the manager about themselves, do you know what I mean, I don't think you can be like, ok I think you can do this better and as like open as I feel with my manager I don't think I would ever say oh wow that's not right...

Jake: So why wouldn't you?

Seth: I don't know, you don't want to get on their bad side, you still want to be employed, you don't want them to think badly of you, because then they'll think differently about you, they might feel differently about you...

Other participants mentioned they were comfortable voicing impersonal concerns like job safety, a justified pay raise and defending one's own position. Issues that may be taken as personal were always excluded and paired with an indication of a risk of repercussion. Half of my participants used the expression 'rock the boat' to describe upsetting a work environment by making a complaint about a manager to the manager. With this is the sense that a comfortable work environment is temporarily 'afloat' so long as it is not disrupted by someone speaking out against the manager. In this way, workers were encouraged and even desired to ignore workplace issues that met these criteria and were rewarded for their apathy by avoiding social sanctions.

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‘Rocking the boat’- voicing workplace concerns or challenging authority- was always depicted as something radical, risky and abnormal. It was rather normal and preferred that one keep quiet in order to stay on the good side of the boss and to avoid repercussions. Jarret told me:

If you’re not tiptoeing or if you’re not doing it their way- there is no alternative method, it’s their way or, get the fuck out. Or they’ll just treat you like garbage right? Or they’ll hire someone else right? Or you won’t get the shifts which you need to pay the rent.

4.8: Vulnerable to Repercussion

Inherent in the boss’s power was their ability to react adversely to an employee voicing concerns that might be taken as personal. Feared repercussions included the loss of hours, a pay cut, a loss of current privileges or good standing with superiors, mistreatment, being given extra duties and firing. Noted in Jarret’s quote above, was a fear of losing one’s job if they do not ‘tip toe.’ When I asked Christina to clarify where her fear of voicing her concerns came from she replied:

It stems from beyond them taking my hours, it’s them taking away my fucking quality of life. And them removing me from my apartment and making it so that I’m not able to eat and basically forcing me back into my parents’ house. I have that privilege of going home and some people don’t.

This sense of vulnerability is a sheer reality for many part-time workers, and worrying about job security in an over-saturated job market when they are dependent on it for income encourages if not forces workers to keep quiet and cope with bad work conditions rather than to have them heard and resolved. Unlike many, Christina was lucky enough to have her parents to rely on, and having that security allowed her to voice

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her concerns to her employer. However, that employer would soon after force her out of the workplace by intentionally cutting her hours, a common theme among my participants. When I asked Christina what she would have done had she not had her parents to rely on she replied, “I might not have said shit because you know, my rent and food and me keeping my life together is probably worth a lot more than my goddamn self-respect”

4.9: Alternatives to Talk

As mentioned, the concern all my participants noted was the fear of coming across as ‘personal’ when voicing a concern to their boss. In order to avoid expected repercussions from power holders, workers avoided direct resistance to management. Mike told me, “I feel like a lot of jobs here are all about how they feel about somebody, if they don't like them they'll get rid of them,” which is precisely what happened to Christina. But is voicing a concern about a manager who is unnecessarily exploitative, mistreating employees or generally causing a problem ever *not* personal? Not usually. In larger businesses like a grocery store there are options like human resources or positions above an employee’s manager to go to if needed. In small businesses however, the power rests solely in the owner or manager, leaving workers no alternative but to cope with oppressive conditions or to organize against them. However, only two participants had ever been part of organizing resistance (in some fashion) to management, but all had chosen some route of coping with the undesired conditions.

Coping generally took place in ‘back regions’ (Goffman, 2001) of talk where workers could safely, and out of earshot of the employer, complain about their work conditions. In Mike’s grocery store for example, almost every department was aware of issues with the store manager and had their own complaints about him, yet the store

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manager himself had no idea. Channels of communications were constructed that include only specific members of the workplace and which intentionally left out others. In some cases, meeting in the back regions led to an eventual resistance of management by teaming up with a coworker to approach the boss. Mike explained:

I sort of had like that group of people that were on my level like the other produce clerks or cashier they all had the same problem and same boss so we could all get together and be like fuck this and talk shit, and we'd kind of be like ok dude like we need to talk to him about something or do something and sometimes we'd go together.

Similarly, when asked if she would go directly to management about an issue with management, Kim told me “I would probably talk to my other coworkers to see if their opinion is the same.” All participants noted they valued a cohesive, equal and supportive staff. Seth told me, “No matter what you’re doing, as long as you have a good team of people that like to be with each other and its light hearted I think that’s really good no matter what situation”

Other resistance strategies were to joke with a boss indirectly about the issue or to use an employee who was close to boss as a medium of communication to make a concern heard. Jarret told me:

I didn’t address [the issue] to him [manager] but I mentioned it to others, workers to say, in case they pass the word along... sometimes you’ll intentionally say something because you know it will get back to the person without having to address them.

Similarly, Mike and Christina both valued having a coworker who is close to the boss to act as a medium or mediator. Christina told me:

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I think it's so important to have a middle person because I've been able to express my concerns as a real person when... there's another person who's basically a mediator and that is holding both parties accountable for being respectful for saying your concerns but also for something to be done about those concerns.

The above accounts indicate that although formal lines of communication to the boss and about the boss were restricted or off-limits, some workers constructed informal lines and regions of communication in order to either make concerns heard indirectly or to otherwise cope with equals. Coworkers' packages are assessed to determine which regions of communication they can be a part of, as noted in a few different accounts above. If coworkers are known or assumed to have a close relationship with the boss, they will likely be excluded from complaints about the boss unless workers seek to use them as a medium of communication.

Up to this point we have looked at various factors in the social structure of the workplace that place barriers on what workers are willing to talk about with their boss. These barriers have been shown to exclude anything that could be taken as personal, which means no addressing of a boss's management style directly to the boss, even if it is causing problems. But what other factors lead to disengagement and apathy, aside from the obvious power dynamics we have looked at?

4.10: Disengagement

Workers were motivated to remain apathetic at their job when there was a lack of mutual respect, recognition and sense of value. Mike felt his workplace could care less about hearing his concerns and added, "The feeling I got from [grocery store] is that they're just in it for the money, like everybody that was working was basically part-time

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so yeah they're students so we'll just hire new ones.” Christina echoed this sense of dispensability, “Like they could easily get another person or one of those people who need more hours to cover like it’s not worth their time to fight with someone who feels like they have a right to their job security.” My participants often expressed that if a workplace environment was silencing or if superiors abused their power that they developed resentment toward them and their engagement decreased. Seth said, “I just don’t think companies care about their workers at the end of the day so, I really don’t want to give 110% to them.”

For all of my participants, part-time work was primarily for a source of income rather than for an interest in the job itself and was not a main priority in their life. Extra effort to deal with issues at work was generally not desired. Workers often depicted part-time work as something temporary, transitory and done in small increments. Lucy explained,

I can definitely see how if you work somewhere full time how it can become more a part of your life and you want to contribute more to it. But as a part-time worker, especially as a part-time minimum wage worker I don't feel like giving more than I have to because it's a minimum wage job, where as if I were paid more I might try and contribute more.

As Lucy’s account demonstrates, she does not feel motivated to be engaged because for her, work is temporary and non-prioritized, and also because she is paid minimum wage, she does not feel motivated to be engaged or contribute. On the other hand, despite only working two shifts a week, Lucas noted, “because I know I make a little bit more than minimum wage I think I should be giving him a little bit more up and beyond,” indicating that wage was a motivating factor for him to be engaged in his workplace. Notable is that

of all ten of my participants he shared the closest relationship to his employer and was much more comfortable speaking to his boss about an issue than the others.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

5.1: Conclusions

My research questions were threefold; what effect does the social structure of the part-time workplace have on workers' ability to productively voice work-related concerns? Does the social structure of the workplace cultivate, maintain or encourage ignorance and apathy in workers? And if so, do ignorance and apathy lead to the maintenance of oppressive power relations in the workplace? In conducting exploratory qualitative research, I found the answer to those questions is extremely complex.

Workers tended to position themselves in the social structure through 'packaging' various traits and expectations of each member of the workplace. Packaging is a conceptual framework I developed in order to have an objective, 'graspable' conception of the complex process through which workers situate themselves in relation to others and others in relation to themselves. Ideological, structural and non-structural packages are all factors of a general packaging process. Packaging of various elements contributes to how a worker perceives their bosses and coworkers, how they expect each other to act toward them as well as how they should act toward each other. Packaging is action-guiding, situating, and is used to determine whom one could talk to and about what. It is the process workers take in determining where they 'stand' or 'fit' in the social structure.

A combination of elements of these packages created boundaries of talk and silence and regions where specific content and people were allowed and others not. Despite their varying formal statuses and abilities, power holders were generally packaged as equally intimidating to workers because of their inherent authority to

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threaten job security or status in the workplace. Bosses were expected to hold and exercise power, but in a manner they choose. Due to this expectation of power and the performance or exercise of it, workers avoided voicing concerns that may be taken as 'personal' by the boss in order to avoid potential repercussion like the loss of hours, a pay cut, loss of privilege, earning of extra duties, mistreatment and firing. As a result, workers were not only encouraged but rewarded for their ignorance and apathy of workplace issues because avoiding them meant both avoiding repercussions and social sanctions. Thus, active disengagement from workplace issues was cultivated as a way of managing impressions with the boss (staying on their 'good side') in order to avoid repercussions like stigma, (see section 2.7) or job loss. Additionally, these norms of silence maintain the very power dynamics that workers find oppressive as they leave them unchallenged and rather cope with their existence.

Workers generally found ways to cope with silencing environments by becoming complacent and creating back regions or alternative channels of talk with coworkers. Members of these channels and back regions were determined by packaging, where workers assessed how connected each coworker was to power holders or how much power or authority they had themselves. Some workers found ways to voice their concerns indirectly by using coworkers who were close to the boss to act as a medium of communication for that concern.

Although the power dynamics in the workplace were the main source of disengagement from workplace issues and a silencing environment, other factors were found to encourage disengagement. Low wage, a lack of recognition and a lack of mutual respect often demotivated workers from exerting effort and care into their workplace. The

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transitory or temporary nature of part-time work, as well as how long one has been there (seniority) also contributed to workplace apathy.

5.2: Discussion

My research demonstrates the ability of the social structure to shape individuals, their behaviour and thought. Workers assessed their position in their workplace by referring to various power dynamics and ‘packaging’ various elements to determine where they fit in the structure, thus guiding action, performance and creating boundaries of talk and silence. As mentioned in the introduction, the workplace is inherently exploitative, but it need not be oppressive to the voice of workers. My research has found that this *is* the case however. Because part-time workers feel vulnerable in their positions and because bosses tend to have the power, structurally and by tradition, to exert job-threatening repercussions, workers tended to cultivate disengagement, apathy and ignorance in themselves in order to stay ‘safe’. Voicing concerns that may be taken as personal, which includes anything related to challenging management for their exploitation, mistreatment or other issues, was always depicted as radical, problematic and something to avoid. As such, the workplace is not only inherently exploitative, but also oppressive.

The current social structure of the workplace allows the ‘boss’ or power holders to choose how to exert their power, creating an environment where workers remain docile, complacent and otherwise ignore concerns that are affecting them to avoid the ‘bad side’ of this power. Despite all participants indicating that their ideal workplace included a transparent, open and democratic environment, the majority did not experience these conditions and all noted harmful limitations.

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Future research and assessments of workplace relations should consider how the general structure, tradition and functioning of the workplace can be silencing. Researchers should consider how members of any social structure or organization 'package' all other members in a way that shapes their behaviour, engagement, composure and even affects their identities. It should further consider how we can rearrange or restructure our power relations in a way that avoids oppression, fear and apathy from social issues. We should rather aim to structure our organizations so that they lead to engaged citizens who care about their social environments and in achieving fairness within them. All workers explicitly desired an equalized and balanced social structure, yet none felt they had it or could easily attain it.

Jamie Lester (2011) found that female employees managed gender stigmas in the workplace and unintentionally integrated those performances into their home life. We should consider how the social organizations we are a part of shape us beyond the organization. For example, if workers cultivate ignorance, apathy and political disengagement in the workplace, do they also fear challenging oppressive authority in their everyday lives? If so the workplace cultivates and maintains norms of apathy and silence that could have harmful effects beyond their workplace. Our social organizations may cultivate, maintain and reproduce social norms that do not lead to healthier social conditions but to a docile and disengaged citizenship.

5.3: For Workers

If I had advice to offer workers, it would be that first you should recognize that you are not alone in saying you have felt silenced or that you could care less about a part-time job. These conditions are all too normal and are a product of ideological traditions of both workplace dynamics and power relations. I encourage you to engage yourself in

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your workplace politics and seek to understand the dynamics you find undesirable so we can work toward improving them. Together, we can transcend norms of silence and oppressive social relations by restructuring the organizations that mean something in our lives to really *mean* something in our lives. There are alternatives, we just need to cooperate to find them.

Another piece of advice would be that, based on my research and life experience, formal work relations are highly individualised. Workers seek to earn promotions for themselves, to earn more money for themselves or to earn privileges for themselves. Employers aim to single out employees by exerting power over them as individuals and through assessing their work ethic as an individual. The workplace is a team environment, and we create informal bonds with our coworkers all the time. We value connection and we are always connected. When our coworkers are behind us, we feel stronger, more capable and a sense of unity because we belong to something. In this unity we find the strength of cooperation. We should cultivate that. Social change has always come from cooperation and collective organizing. If you dread your workplace environment and feel that it is unfair, as my participants also indicated, then be the change you want to see. I leave my research as a tool for you, but I encourage you to engage with your coworkers, friends or otherwise to start considering how we can progressively reshape the dynamics of our workplaces to be enjoyable, equal, fair and generally more healthy. Good luck!

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Appendix A – Semi-structured Interview Question Guide:

Demographic

1. How old are you?
2. What gender do you identify with?
3. What sort of education do you have?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your previous work experience? (i.e. where you have worked and for how long?)
5. Aside from work, what else do you have going on in your life? Is work a priority?

Values

1. What does a perfect job look like?
2. What does your job mean to you?
3. What does the ideal boss look like?
 - a. What do you expect from your boss? Do they meet those expectations?
4. What does it mean to be the boss at your workplace?
5. What do you think is the ideal employee?
 - a. What about from an employer's perspective?
 - b. What is your work ethic like?
6. What is your ideal co-worker?
 - a. What do you like about the people you work with?
7. What would the perfect workplace look like?

At the Job

Duties + Relationships

1. What does your job entail?
 - a. What are your duties?
 - b. Who do you work with?
 - c. Is it busy?
2. Who has power at your workplace? Do some people have more than others?
 - a. Do you find some employees have special treatment or privilege?
3. What is your relationship like with your boss?
 - a. Is that relationship the way you want it to be? If yes, how so? If not, how would you change it?
4. What is your relationship like with your coworkers?
 - a. Is that relationship the way you want it to be? If not, how so?
5. Who do you answer to at your job?
 - a. Are there different roles or positions at your job?
 - b. Is there anyone you think has too much power or authority? Why or why not?
6. What do you like about your job?
7. Can you tell me about something you don't like about your job?
 - a. Could it be run better than it is now? How?

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- b. Is there anything you don't like about your boss?
- c. Is there anything you don't like about a co-worker?
8. What would happen if you challenged your boss? Would you ever?

Talk and Silence

1. Who do you talk to when you have a work related concern?
 - a. Do you talk about problems at work with other employees?
 - b. Are you comfortable talking to your boss? Why or why not?
2. Can you tell me about some workplace problems you have faced?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. What did you do?
 - c. Did anyone else do something?
3. Have you ever felt you could not talk to your **boss** about something important related to your job?
 - a. Have you ever felt you could not talk to certain **coworkers** about something important related to your job?
4. Have you ever been treated unfairly or unequally at work?
 - a. What happened and why did it happen that way?
 - b. Did you do anything? Why or why not?
 - c. What do you think should have happened
 - i. Why didn't it happen that way?
5. Have you ever witnessed another employee treated wrongly or unfairly?
 - a. What happened and why did it happen that way?
 - b. Did you do anything? Why or why not?
 - c. What do you think should have happened
 - i. Why didn't it happen that way?
6. Is there anything you would not feel comfortable talking to your boss about?
7. Can you tell me about a time when you've felt uncomfortable for some reason at work?
 - a. What did you do?
8. If you ever had a problem at work, who would you talk to first?
9. What can you talk about at work?
 - a. What sorts of things can you talk about with some people at work that you can't with others?

Extra: What would make it easier for you to solve problems at work?

Appendix B: Social Media Recruitment Posting

Hey guys! I'm starting my research for my honours thesis and I am looking for some volunteer interviews from people who have recently worked or are working part time! In the interviews I will ask you questions about your experiences at work, the good and the bad, what is expected of you and what you expect of others, and about times when you've felt somewhat powerless or like you couldn't talk about a work related problem that you felt needed to be addressed. The interview will only take about 45 minutes to an hour and can be done anywhere you like! Although there are no direct benefits to you as a participant, you will help contribute to research that will aim to improve work conditions for part time workers in the future. All interviews are anonymized and 100% voluntary, you can stop the interview at any point. If you are interested in being interviewed and contributing to my research you can either message me on Facebook or send me an e-mail at hublej@gmail.com. Feel free to text me as well if you already have my number!

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APPENDIX C – Consent form – see overleaf

CONSENT FORM

Power, Talk, Silence and Resistance in the Workplace

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Jake Hubley, an undergraduate student in Sociology, as part of my honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to interview part-time workers about their workplace conditions and work-related issues they experience, or if they experience any problems at all. I'd like to know how workers feel about their jobs and what they feel is expected of them as well as what they expect of others. I am particularly interested in the experiences of workers when they have felt powerless or forced to keep quiet about something they felt needed to be addressed at work. I will write up the results of this research in a paper for my class, called the honours thesis.

As a participant in the research you will be asked to talk about your work place experiences and your views on your work, your employers and your coworkers and what you like(d) and do/did not like about your job(s). The interview should take about an hour and will be conducted in a quiet location of your choice. The interview will be audio-recorded but I will be the only person who hears the recording as I only record it to help me listen back to your responses. If I quote any part of it in my honours thesis, I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you from the quote (for example, the name of your workplace).

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until March 1. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only the honours class supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and in my honours thesis. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. I will destroy the audio recordings once I have transcribed them. I will keep anonymized information so that I can learn more from it as I continue with my studies.

The risks associated with this study are no greater than those you encounter in your everyday life. One concern you might have is that your employer or coworkers might find out about what you say about them or your workplace. However, everything you say to me

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will be anonymized and no one will ever know your identity or your workplace, nor have access to the original audio files or the anonymized transcript of your interview.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on how part-time workers feel about their jobs. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my honours thesis after April 30.

If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is hublej@dal.ca. You can contact the honours class supervisor, Dr Martha Radice, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6747, or email martha.radice@dal.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email ethics@dal.ca.

Participant's consent:

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____