

# THE “DETACHMENT PARADOX”:

Employers recognize the benefits of detachment for productivity, yet penalize it in employee evaluations

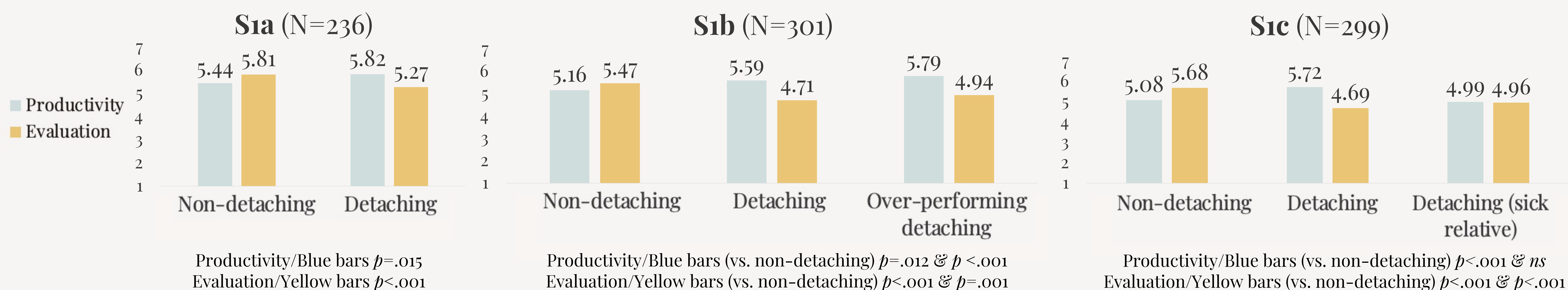
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Americans work a lot, often at the expense of their own well-being, and the Covid-19 pandemic further blurred the line between work and private life. It is not surprising then that conversations around work-life balance is at an all-time high. Mental health advocates, academics, and managers are encouraging workers to take breaks. But what are the consequences for employees who heed this advice?

This project establishes what we call the ‘**Detachment Paradox**’: **Managers acknowledge the benefits of detaching from work for worker productivity, yet those same individuals also penalize detaching workers in worker-evaluations.** A first set of studies tests the existence and the robustness of this paradox. A second set of studies shows how the detachment penalty associated with the paradox fuels a culture of non-detachment among workers. A final study tests potential interventions aimed at debiasing evaluators and reducing the detachment penalty.

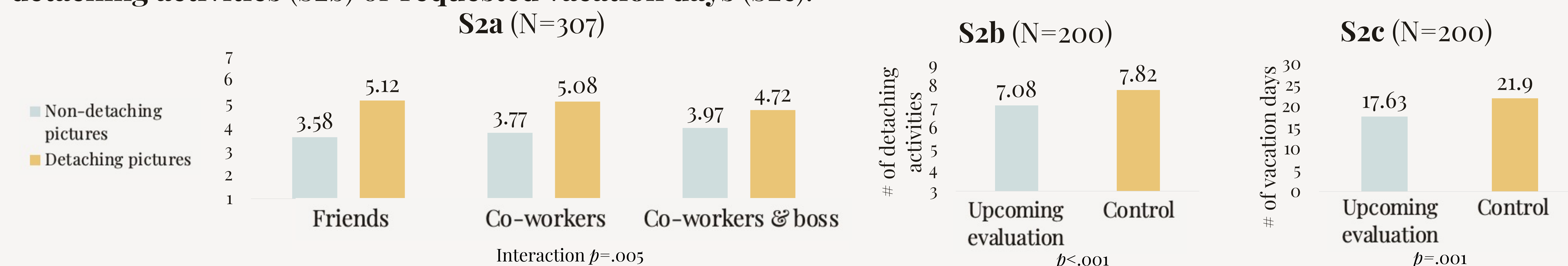
**Lay people and managers alike exhibit the ‘Detachment Paradox’:** recognize detachment benefits for productivity but penalize workers who detach. Diagnostic information on worker’s performance or the justifiability of the worker’s detachment did not eliminate the penalty.

**Method & Results**  
Participants **evaluated a worker who either detached** (left work devices at home) **or not** (brought work devices along) over the weekend on two indexes: **Productivity** upon return (4-items  $\alpha > .89$ ) and employee **Evaluation** (5-items  $\alpha > .92$ ). We tested if performance information or justifiability of detachment played a role.



Employees are aware of the negative consequences of detaching. Thus, not only do they **flaunt non-detaching activities** and **hide detaching activities** from work-related others, but also **engage in less detaching activities** and **request fewer vacation days** when under scrutiny.

**Method & Results**  
**S2a:** Participants imagined having either friends, co-workers, or both co-workers and supervisor among their Instagram followers and reported the **likelihood to post each of 4 pictures (2 detaching & 2 non-detaching).**  
**S2b & S2c:** Participants imagined having an upcoming work evaluation or not and either **chose among more or less detaching activities (S2b)** or **requested vacation days (S2c).**



**Debiasing: Company policies can attenuate the “Detachment Paradox”.** We hope these results add nuance to the ongoing mental health discussion, encouraging further research on the topic, but also expediting the necessary cultural shift.

**Method & Results**  
Participants evaluated a worker who either detached or not on the Evaluation index from studies 1a-1c. In two intervention conditions, **participants saw a message shared by the company before evaluating the worker** (pic below).

