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## **Too Illegit to Quit: The Impact of Illegitimate Tasks on Turnover Intentions and Well-Being**

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Too illegit to quit: The impact of illegitimate tasks on turnover intentions and well-being

By

Jacob Wessels

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

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Too illegit to quit: The impact of illegitimate tasks on turnover intentions and well-being

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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### ABSTRACT

Illegitimate tasks are a contemporary workplace stressor characterized by perceived violations of norms about what can reasonably be expected to do in the workplace. Based on the “Stress-as-Offense-to-Self” (SOS) theory, the assignment of illegitimate tasks lead to feelings of disrespect and threatening to one’s professional identity, which is inherently stressful. The stressor has been linked to numerous strain outcomes, but the underlying mechanisms explaining how or why these relationships occur has seldomly been addressed in the literature. The present study examined whether illegitimate tasks were positively related to intentions to quit via organizational identity, negatively related to work engagement via meaningfulness of work, and if gender impacted the strength of both main effects relationships. Self-report data was collected from a total of 250 employees of mixed occupations using a cross-sectional research design. Results indicated that organizational identity partially mediated the relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit. This finding further expands upon the conceptualization of illegitimate tasks as an “identity-relevant” stressor. However, results did not suggest that meaningfulness of work mediated the illegitimate tasks and work engagement relationship, nor did gender moderate either main effects relationship. Theoretical and practical implications discussed.

In the last two decades, turnover of personnel has been a persistent challenge for many organizations and continues to command widespread attention among researchers (Hom et al., 2012). The cost of recruiting and training new highly skilled employees is a major financial burden incurred by organizations due to turnover (D. G. Allen et al., 2010). In addition, turnover has been shown to disrupt operations (Ton & Huckman, 2008) increase accident rates (Shaw et al., 2005), and decrease customer service and quality ratings (Hancock et al., 2013). Given the financial and productivity concerns caused by turnover, it is in many companies' best interest to examine predictors of turnover intentions and avoid actual turnover. One such predictor is work engagement. Defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, work engagement represents a desirable work-relevant psychological state that has been shown to relate negatively with turnover intentions (W. B. Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and other work-relevant outcomes (Simpson, 2009). Work engagement has been linked with increased job satisfaction (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015), and decreased burnout (Korunka et al., 2009). Also, highly engaged employees tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment (Christian et al., 2011), organizational citizenship behaviors (Saks, 2006), and productivity (Hanaysha, 2016). Given their importance to predicting organizational-level success, improved job attitudes, and employee well-being, continued efforts are necessary to understand better how work conditions predict turnover intentions and work engagement.

Many researchers focus on the emotional or cognitive states of employees when examining this question (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). In this study, an occupational stress theory perspective will be used in examining the stressor – intentions to quit and stressor - work engagement relationships. The majority of occupational health psychology research focuses on

how high job demands or low levels of resources available to cope with demands impact an employee's decision to leave or their psychological state (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Fila et al., 2014). However, a relatively new stressor has drawn attention from many researchers over the past decade. Illegitimate tasks have been recently introduced to the occupational health psychology literature and have been empirically tied to intentions to quit (Apostel et al., 2018) and work engagement (van Schie et al., 2014). By definition, tasks are illegitimate when their assignment violates work role norms about what can reasonably be expected from a person in a given position (Semmer et al., 2010). An example includes expecting a doctor to change a patient's bedpan, a task that would normally be performed by a nurse. Illegitimate tasks are becoming a bigger issue for employees and organizations. The changing nature of the workplace and growing perceptions among companies that organizational citizenship behaviors should be mandatory (Haworth & Levy, 2001) represent the importance of examining how this stressor impacts work-relevant outcomes, such as turnover intentions and work engagement.

Semmer and colleagues (2010, 2015) demonstrated that illegitimate tasks are a distinct form of more established work demand stressors. For example, illegitimate tasks account for strain beyond the predictive ability of role overload, role conflict, and justice constructs (i.e., distributive, procedural, and interactional justice). Illegitimate tasks are theoretically related to all three of these constructs. Both role overload (Karasek, 1979) and illegitimate tasks require employees to carry out tasks that are out of context for the role, and the specific individual (Semmer et al., 2007). Similarly, role conflict refers to a conflict between the focal person's internal standards and the defined role behavior (Rizzo et al., 1970), while illegitimate tasks refer to conflict between the task's extrinsic qualities and one's role expectations (Semmer et al., 2015). Lastly, illegitimate tasks are similar to justice constructs as both relate to fairness

perceptions. While fairness in terms of the justice constructs focuses on allotment of positions, resources, and rewards, illegitimate tasks focus on fairness perceptions related to task assignment (Semmer et al., 2010).

Previous research on this new stressor has primarily focused on associations between illegitimate tasks and various work-relevant outcomes (Semmer et al., 2019). Some attention has been paid toward examining the linking mechanisms and boundary conditions that impact why and how particular relationships manifest. However, only a limited number of illegitimate task studies have examined mediation and moderation analyses on the specific work outcomes of turnover intentions and work engagement. As such, I address these concerns by proposing three analyses that will contribute to the current understanding of illegitimate tasks and their relationship with intentions to quit and work engagement.

The notion of illegitimate tasks is grounded in Stress-As-Offense-to-Self (SOS) theory. After discussing research on illegitimate tasks and SOS theory, I will examine perceptions of organizational identification as a possible mediator of the illegitimate tasks and turnover intentions relationship and perceptions of meaningfulness of work as a possible mediator of the illegitimate tasks and work engagement relationship. Finally, I will examine the moderating role of gender in the relationships between illegitimate tasks and both turnover intentions and work engagement.

### **Illegitimate Tasks and Stress as Offense to Self (SOS) Theory**

SOS theory stems from the notion that most people strive to protect and enhance their self-esteem (Baumeister 1996), and thus any perceived threat towards one's self-esteem is considered stressful. Illegitimate tasks are rooted in SOS theory and its framework (Semmer et al., 2007, 2015). Their assignment indirectly sends a social message that signals disrespect and

thereby threatens the recipient's self-esteem (Semmer et al., 2015). Individuals can maintain a positive self-view through personal self-esteem (i.e., positive self-evaluation; Epstein, 1998) or social esteem (i.e., positive self-evaluations by others; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). When self-esteem is threatened, individuals show increased stress and behavioral changes designed to protect and enhance their own self-esteem (Steele, 1988). In the workplace, boosts and threats to self-esteem may manifest in multiple ways including obvious forms of disrespectful behavior (e.g., aggression) or more subtle instances of disrespect (e.g., illegitimate tasks).

A central aspect of the SOS theory is the relationship between one's occupational identity and boosts/threats to self-esteem. Researchers find that occupational roles tend to become part of one's identity and therefore part of the self as well (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). The occupation of a particular social role and subsequent identification with this role serve as the motivation for defenses against threats to one's profession and provide a sense of meaning and purpose (Thoits, 1991). These roles are defined by norms and organizational cultures regarding what can and cannot be expected from occupants of a given occupational role (Semmer et al., 2015) As such, task assignments that defy these norms may be perceived as illegitimate (Semmer et al., 2007).

Researchers describe two forms of illegitimate tasks; unnecessary tasks and unreasonable tasks (Semmer et al., 2007). Unnecessary tasks are tasks that should not have to be performed at all. These tasks should not exist either due to the perceived uselessness of the task, such as reorganizing a set of documents that no one ever reads, or because the task could have been avoided through more careful planning, such as having to transfer data to a separate computer due to incompatible systems. It is clear that these tasks refer to a lack of justification for the task's existence and are usually thought of as a waste of time by employees (Semmer et al.,

2019). As a result, the task becomes an insult to the employee's level of skill, training, or seniority, and diminishes one's sense of occupational accomplishment (Fila & Eatough, 2018).

While unnecessary tasks refer to tasks that should not exist at all, unreasonable tasks are only illegitimate under specific circumstances related to one's job. The very same task may be regarded as reasonable in one situation, but not another depending upon organizationally derived norms and roles. Unreasonable tasks are not part of the role of specific employees and should be done by someone else. A task may fall outside the range of one's occupation, such as a waiter being asked to cook food or a nurse performing "non-nursing" activities (Semmer et al., 2010). The task may also be incompatible with the status of a specific employee, such as assigning a newly hired consultant to lead a meeting with a high-stakes client. The appraisal of whether the task falls outside of one's level of skill, expertise, or experience is crucial for determining the task's (il)legitimacy. Both forms of illegitimate tasks threaten one's occupational role identity by communicating disrespect, lack of appreciation, or negative evaluation by others (Semmer et al., 2015). Threats to one's occupational role identity can threaten one's positive self-view, which is stressful (Stets, 2005). Thus, illegitimate tasks are considered "identity-relevant stressors" (Thoits, 1991).

Although the illegitimate tasks literature has only spanned across the last decade, research suggests that task illegitimacy has several negative implications for employee well-being and organizational-level outcomes. For instance, illegitimate tasks have been shown to relate positively with employee stress (Björk et al., 2013), burnout, irritation, and feelings of resentment towards one's organization (Semmer et al., 2015), counterproductive work behaviors (Semmer et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2018), and sickness presenteeism (Thun et al., 2018). Negative relationships were found between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit (Apostel et al., 2018),

inadequate sleep recovery (Pereira et al., 2014), psychological detachment (Sonnentag & Lischetzke, 2018), self-esteem (Eatough et al., 2016; Schulte-Braucks et al., 2019; Semmer et al., 2015), and decreased performance and performance ratings (Elfering et al., 2018; Ma & Peng, 2019).

Based on SOS theory, one would expect stronger associations between unreasonable tasks and strain. These tasks directly relate to an individual's occupational role, while unnecessary tasks are unnecessary for everyone. Studies that separately analyze unnecessary and unreasonable tasks do tend to find stronger effects for unreasonable tasks (Pindek et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2015; Semmer et al., 2015). However, some studies found no difference between the two types of tasks (Meier & Semmer, 2018). Overall, these studies highlight the association of illegitimate tasks with several different strain outcomes, thereby supporting the uniqueness of the stressor.

The relationship between illegitimate tasks and strain is not entirely straightforward. Kottwitz et al. (2013) found that the effects of illegitimate tasks were exacerbated among those who had lower perceived health and Zhou and colleagues (2018) found more feelings of anger and counterproductive work behaviors when employees were experiencing high time pressure. On the other hand, several factors have been found to buffer the illegitimate task – strain relationship. These include appreciative leadership (Apostel et al., 2018) and flexible role orientation (Ma & Peng, 2019). In addition, Schmitt et al. (2015) found evidence of a curvilinear relationship between time pressure and work engagement with illegitimate tasks acting as the moderator. Employees perceiving low amounts of unreasonable tasks perceived time pressure as a challenge stressor and therefore saw increases in work engagement until a specific threshold of time pressure was reached. After this threshold, increases in time pressure predicted declining

work engagement. However, the curvilinear relationship was not found among employees reporting high amounts of unreasonable tasks. If most of one's tasks are perceived as unreasonable, increases in time pressure were perceived as a hindrance stressor and therefore a negative linear relationship between time pressure and work engagement was found.

Given these findings of complex relationships between illegitimate tasks and organizational outcomes, it is worthwhile to examine additional mediating and moderating mechanisms.

### **Illegitimate Tasks, Organizational Identification and Turnover Intentions**

Organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) is an extension of social identity theory applied to the context of work organizations. It can be defined as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization in which he or she is a member” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). In the following sections, I argue that employees assigned illegitimate tasks will ponder seeking alternative employment because the perceived disrespect and devaluation will negatively impact their identification with their organization. This threat towards one's organizational identity, and therefore self-concept, will be inherently stressful, thereby motivating employees to avoid the situation through increased intentions to quit.

Previous research examining the relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit found a positive relationship between the variables, even after controlling for other workplace stressors (Apostel et al., 2018; van Schie et al., 2014). Thinking about job alternatives is described as a form of cognitive coping, where people perceiving task assignments as illegitimate may attempt to avoid such stressors in the future (Apostel et al., 2018). However, the mechanisms by which illegitimate tasks foster turnover intentions are largely unknown. van

Schie and colleagues (2014) examined self-determined motivation as a mediating process between illegitimate tasks and intentions to stay among volunteers at a nonprofit organization. A negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and self-determined motivation was found, as well as a positive relationship among self-determined motivation and intentions to stay. The relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to stay was also found, thereby establishing self-determined motivation as a mediator between the stressor - strain relationship. While this finding is important for building on SOS theory, the motives and processes for leaving an organization are different than from those of staying (Holtom et al., 2008).

Previous research highlights the conceptualization of illegitimate tasks as identity-relevant stressors with self-esteem explaining the relationship between illegitimate tasks and decreased employee well-being (e.g., increased anger, depression, and fatigue; Eatough, 2014). This supports the notion that illegitimate tasks threaten one's self-image (Eatough et al., 2016). However, self-esteem in this study was measured as a personal characteristic rather than a social identification with one's role as described in SOS theory. To examine this gap in the literature, Ma and Peng (2019) hypothesized job identity as a mediator between illegitimate tasks and performance ratings. This assumption was empirically supported, as illegitimate tasks negatively impacted both task performance and proactive work behavior because of the threats perceived towards one's job identity. Job identity is defined as the internalized job role expectations a job incumbent attaches to his or her self-concept (Welbourne & Paterson, 2017). Put another way, employees high in job identity define themselves by what they do at work (Pratt et al., 2006). This finding further supports the threat-to-identity effect of illegitimate tasks by relating it to the performance costs of the stressor (Ma & Peng, 2019).

However, there are various types of identity at work (Welbourne & Paterson, 2017) and it is recommended to specify which identity is at risk when examining the effects of illegitimate tasks (Ma & Peng, 2019). This study posits that organizational identification will act as the mediating mechanism that links illegitimate tasks to turnover intentions. While job identity refers to the specific job-related tasks and role responsibilities held by an employee, organizational identity is concerned with group membership with an organization as a whole (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). According to social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social identification with a group involves the incorporation of the groups' norms and values into the individual's self-concept. Organizational identification stems from SIT, whereby employees define themselves with the organization as a social entity (Edwards & Peccei, 2007). Employees develop an emotional and cognitive bond between the organization and themselves, leading to increased compliance with and admiration for the organization's goals and expectations (Dutton et al., 1994). From an employee's perspective, illegitimate tasks represent a form of perceived discrimination that threatens their self-esteem and social identity when tasks that are assigned fall outside of their job description, occupational role, and group membership (Omansky et al., 2016). Thus, assignment of illegitimate tasks is expected to negatively predict employee organizational identity.

- *Hypothesis 1a: Illegitimate tasks will be negatively related to organizational identification.*

Literature surrounding the relationship between organizational identification and turnover intentions suggest three primary reasons for why employees choose stay at or leave an organization (Dick et al., 2004; Karanika-Murray et al., 2015). First, one of the main human resource management goals of many organizations is staff retention (Davies et al., 2001). As

employees begin to act in accordance with their organization's norms and values, they will exhibit behaviors that adhere to staff retention goals (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Second, organizational identification should be associated with a stronger support of the organization and for in-group members, resulting in stronger intentions to stay due to strong interpersonal relationships and commitment (Dick et al., 2004). Third, organizational identification contributes to self-enhancement (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), self-continuity, and reductions of uncertainty (Pratt, 1998). Employees high in organizational identification begin to associate the future of their organization (e.g., its successes and failures) with their own future. Leaving the organization would be considered a loss of part of the self and thereby detrimental to one's self-concept (Haslam et al., 2001). Thus, I hypothesize that the stronger (weaker) the identification with their organization, the more likely it is that employees will be willing to stay (leave) with the organization.

- *Hypothesis 1b: Organizational identification will be negatively related with turnover intentions.*

According to SOS theory, the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intentions can be explained by people's striving to maintain a positive self-image (Semmer et al., 2015).

With the preceding two arguments taken together, I further posit that organizational identification should mediate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intentions.

As illegitimate tasks threaten employee organizational identity, individuals will begin to feel offended and unfairly treated (Eatough, 2014). No longer wishing to endure such disrespect, employees are expected to want to leave the organization to protect their occupational identity.

- *Hypothesis 1c: Organizational identification will mediate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intentions. Assignment of illegitimate tasks will be*

*associated with lower organizational identity, which will be linked to higher turnover intentions.*

### **Illegitimate Tasks, Work Engagement, and Meaningfulness of Work**

A second possible mechanism to explain the impact of illegitimate tasks is perceived meaningfulness of work. Meaningfulness is defined as one's perception of the significance of goals and activities that they carry out at their organization in relation to one's self and life (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). In this study, meaningfulness refers to meaningfulness of work, or the extent to which employees feel work is important and worthwhile (Khan, 1990). The mandatory completion of tasks that fall outside one's job role or that are entirely unnecessary can be considered meaningless in specific contexts (Semmer et al., 2015). The positive relationship between meaningfulness of work and work engagement is well known (Han et al., 2020). Thus, I argue that employee perceptions of illegitimate tasks will lead to decreased work engagement because they perceive that the tasks they are assigned are – by nature of their illegitimacy - meaningless.

Work engagement is described as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, absorption, and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Previous research supports the negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement among volunteer employees (van Schie et al., 2014). While the volunteer sample resembles a typical working environment, it can be expected that different experiences and perceptions may arise within a paid-work context (Luoh & Herzog, 2002). Similar constructs, such as job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, have also been empirically shown to be negatively related to illegitimate tasks (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Omansky et al., 2016). The present study seeks

to examine possible mechanisms that explain why illegitimate tasks may be detrimental to a desirable employee psychological state.

A theoretical examination of illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness leads to three primary reasons why illegitimate tasks may be associated with meaningfulness of work. First, by definition, unnecessary tasks may be viewed as meaningless work as they represent useless work that should not exist or should be done by someone else (Semmer et al., 2010). Because there is no situation in which unnecessary tasks can support core organizational goals and procedures, they are expected to not produce feelings of meaningfulness. Second, meaningfulness of work signifies a desirable psychological state in which the alignment of employee needs for complex work and their job duties are met by the works' characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Work that is unnecessary does not satisfy the need for complex work (e.g., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) and therefore it will not be perceived as worthwhile and meaningful in the skill development of the employee.

Third, studies examining workplace aggression (e.g., workplace bullying) have found negative relationships with meaningfulness of work (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004). According to SOS theory, workplace aggression represents another form of stress in which the direct (as opposed to indirect) message of disrespect negatively impacts an individual's self-esteem and occupational identity. A person who is being bullied in the workplace may see their work as less important, especially when stress is high (Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013). As the individual attempts to divert resources towards dealing with the stressor, his or her attention is taken away from their work, thereby negatively influencing the meaningfulness they perceive from their work (Colligan & Higgins, 2006) Altogether, I posit that illegitimate tasks will be negatively related to meaningfulness of work.

- *Hypothesis 2a: Illegitimate tasks will negatively predict meaningfulness of work.*

Previous research consistently indicates a strong, positive relationship between meaningfulness and work engagement (Demirtas et al., 2017). The link between the two constructs can be supported by the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2004). This theory posits that positive emotions broaden peoples' momentary thought-action repertoires, widening the array of thoughts and actions that come to mind. For example, feelings of joy or interest urge people to be creative and to take in new information and experiences. The exploration prompted by positive emotions creates knowledge and intellectual complexity, thereby serving as personal and psychological resources for the individual (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Meaningfulness of work broadens an employee's urge to actively seek information and experiences helpful for their work. It is through this urge and subsequent learning experiences that an employee begins to build an attachment to their work (i.e., work engagement; Han, Sung, & Suh, 2020). Thus, meaningfulness of work will be related positively with work engagement.

- *Hypothesis 2b: Meaningfulness of work will positively predict work engagement.*

Based on these theoretical and empirical arguments, I contend that because illegitimate tasks are often unnecessary, do not satisfy needs for complex work, send messages of disrespect, and cause stress, they will correlate with a decrease in meaningfulness of work. In turn, the lack of positive emotions experienced through meaningless work will predict decreases in work engagement. The multifaceted nature of work engagement suggests that all three facets (e.g., vigor, dedication, and absorption) will be negatively impacted through illegitimate tasks as well.

*Hypothesis 2c: Meaningfulness of work will mediate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement. Assignment of illegitimate tasks will be associated with lower organizational identity, which will be linked to higher turnover intentions.*

### **Gender as a moderator**

This study will also explore the moderating role of gender on illegitimate tasks and both main effect relationships with intentions to quit and work engagement. It is now widely accepted among researchers that males and females perceive stress, and cope with stressors differently (Niedhammer et al., 1998). The research on illegitimate tasks is consistent with this idea. Previous research found stronger negative effects of illegitimate tasks among males than females on employee well-being measures (e.g. job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation; Omansky et al., 2016). Given this understanding of how gender influences task illegitimacy perceptions, I contend that the relationship will extend in a similar fashion to my chosen outcome measures.

This hypothesis stems from gender role theory, positing that men and women display different behaviors due to different social roles and expectations of conformity from others in society (Eagly, 1987). Specifically, men are believed to be more agentic (assertive, ambitious, and dominant) while women are believed to be more communal (concerned with the welfare of others; Eagly & Wood, 2012). These behavioral differences between men and women are further showcased in occupational settings. Historically, women have been disadvantaged in the workplace due to assumptions and stereotypes about their characteristics and capabilities that are still present to this day (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). It is critical that research on occupational stress be mindful of these behavioral differences as subsequent strain outcomes could also be different among men and women.

Based on gender role theory, men and women may perceive and respond differently to being assigned illegitimate tasks. Because social norms create expectations for women to be communal, the experience of illegitimate tasks may be less detrimental, as women are accustomed to carrying out these tasks for the sake of the organization. In addition, research

suggests that women are more likely to be penalized in performance evaluations if they do not perform these extra-role tasks, adding to their motivation to fulfill tasks that are unreasonable or unnecessary (Allen & Rush, 1998). In contrast, the perception of illegitimate tasks by men would induce a heightened sense of unfairness and disrespect that is inconsistent to the dominant male gender norm.

Thus, this study predicts that women will be less threatened by illegitimate tasks than men and will react differently based on measurable individual- and organizational-level outcome variables. To be clear, the perception of illegitimate tasks is stressful for everyone, regardless of gender, due to the inherent disrespect one feels towards their professional role. However, men will simultaneously experience this professional disrespect with the additional societal disrespect posited by gender role theory, thereby intensifying the relationship between stressor and strain variables. In line with this assertion, previous research examining the interaction between gender and illegitimate tasks found that gender moderated the indirect relationship between illegitimate tasks and job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation through effort-reward imbalance (ERI). Males were, on average, more reactive to illegitimate tasks than females.

- *Hypothesis 3a: Gender will moderate the direct relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit such that the link between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit will be stronger for males than for females.*
- *Hypothesis 3b: Gender will moderate the direct relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement such that the link between illegitimate tasks and work engagement will be stronger for males than for females.*

To sum up, I aim to further investigate the mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions that impact the relationship between illegitimate tasks, intentions to quit, and work engagement. Specifically, we examine how organizational identification mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and turnover intentions, how meaningfulness of work mediates the relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement, and how gender acts as a moderator on both main effect relationships.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 250 employees in various industries and settings located around the world. The majority of participants were male (64 percent) and have been working at their current company for one or more years (73 percent). Ages ranged from 18 to 62 ( $M = 30.18$ ,  $SD = 8.81$ ). Participants were at varying career levels, with most employees working in non-management roles (71 percent). Table 1 further displays the breakdown of demographic variables included in the study.

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited through the academic survey distributor site, Prolific. Surveys were administered using an anonymous online data collection server. All surveys were administered at a single time point. A compensation fee of \$1.88 was awarded to each participant upon the successful completion of the survey. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were notified that their identity and responses were anonymous within the dataset.

### **Measures**

Illegitimate tasks were assessed using the ten item Bern Illegitimate Task Scale (BITS; Semmer et al., 2010). The BITS consisted of two facets: a) unreasonable tasks (sample item: “Do you have work tasks to take care of, which keep you wonder if they have to be done at all?”) and

b) unnecessary tasks (sample item: “Do you have work tasks to take care of, which you believe should be done by someone else?”). Participants responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (frequently). The internal consistency for the total scale was good ( $\alpha = .86$ ), while the subscales were also acceptable ( $\alpha = .83$  unreasonable;  $\alpha = .78$  unnecessary). The correlation between the two subscales was moderate ( $r = .55, p < .01$ )

Intentions to quit was measured using a brief three-item scale (Ballinger et al., 2010). An example of a sample item was “I am actively looking for a job outside my current company.” Responses were on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale has acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

Work engagement was assessed using the short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The items of the UWES-9 are grouped into three subscales, each comprising three items. Sample items are as follows: a) vigor: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”; b) dedication: “I am enthusiastic about my job”; and c) absorption: I feel happy when I am working intensely.” Responses ranged on a seven-point rating scale from 0 (never) to 6 (frequently) asking participants to indicate whether they had every felt this way about their work. The overall measure had good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Each of the subscales (i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption) were shown to have acceptable reliability as well ( $\alpha = .86, .89, \text{ and } .83$ , respectively).

Six items were used to measure three subcomponents of organizational identification, two items for each subcomponent (Edwards & Peccei, 2007). Sample items for each of the subscales are as follows: a) self-categorization and labelling: “My employment at my company is a big part of who I am”; b) sharing organizational goals and values: “What my company stands for is important to me”; and c) sense of attachment, belonging, and membership to the organization “I

feel strong ties with my company”. Responses ranged from a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on a five-point Likert scale. Internal consistency for the overall measure was good ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The three subscales (i.e., self-categorization and labelling, shared values and goals, and belonging and membership) also possessed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .80, .86, \text{ and } .85$ , respectively).

Meaningfulness was measured using a three-item scale designed to measure the degree of meaning that individuals discovered in their work-related activities (Spreitzer, 1995). An example of a sample item is “The work I do is very important to me.” Participants responded to each item on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Internal consistency for the scale was good ( $\alpha = .94$ )

Based on previous literature, I decided to control for role stressor variables to ensure that illegitimate tasks can predict turnover intentions and work engagement over and above these workplace stressors. Role conflict is defined as incompatible demands within a person’s job role, while role ambiguity is defined as a lack of clarity in these job demands and responsibilities (Schuler et al., 1977). A fourteen-item scale was used to measure both variables (8 role conflict; 6 role ambiguity) where participants responded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very inaccurate) to 7 (very accurate). A sample item from the role conflict scale is “I receive incompatible requests from two or more people.” and from the role ambiguity scale “I know what my responsibilities are.” Both scales had acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .86 \text{ and } .80$ , respectively) and were slightly related ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ).

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Results**

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and the intercorrelation matrix for all the measures in the study. Age was negatively related to intentions to quit ( $r = -.14, p < .05$ ), role

conflict ( $r = -.15, p < .05$ ), and workload ( $r = -.13, p < .05$ ). There were no significant correlations between other demographic variables and any other outcome variables. Gender did not relate to any outcome variable included in the study. The significant positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ) was in line with the assumed relationship in  $H_1$ . Organizational identity related negatively with intentions to quit ( $r = -.44, p < .01$ ), also aligning with assumptions in  $H_1$ . Illegitimate tasks were negatively related to work engagement ( $r = -.18, p < .05$ ), aligning with the assumed relationship in  $H_2$ . Meaningfulness of work was positively related to work engagement ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ), again aligning with assumptions in  $H_2$ . Illegitimate tasks were positively related to both control variables, role ambiguity ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ) and role conflict ( $r = .67, p < .01$ ).

### **Testing of Hypotheses**

As noted by Barron and Kenny (1986), for mediation to occur, all pathways must be significant, and the path between illegitimate tasks and the dependent variable must be non-significant when the mediator variable is included in the model. A series of simple and hierarchical multiple regression were run to determine if organizational identity and meaningfulness of work mediates the relationship between the illegitimate tasks - intentions to quit relationship and the illegitimate tasks - work engagement relationship, respectively.

There was linearity as assessed by partial regression plots and plots of studentized residuals against the predicted values. There was independence of residuals, as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic (1.81 to 2.13). There was homoscedasticity, as assessed by visual inspection of plots of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values. There was no evidence of multicollinearity, as assessed by tolerance values greater than 0.1. There was two studentized deleted residuals values greater than  $\pm 3$  standard deviations. However, it did not

have a large leverage value nor influence and therefore was not deleted from the dataset. There were no leverage values greater than 0.2 and values for Cook's distance above 1. The assumption of normality was met, as assessed by a Q-Q Plot.

One participant was an outlier in the meaningfulness of work and work engagement linear regression analysis, with a work engagement score of 1.67. One linear regression with and one without the outlier was conducted to examine if there was an appreciable difference in the results. Both analyses yielded a statistically significant result and confidence intervals were not appreciably different. The participant remained in the final analyses based on these results.

### ***Hypothesis 1***

Hypothesis 1 predicted that organizational identity would mediate the positive relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit. Results support a finding of partial mediation. Pathway A (from illegitimate tasks to organizational identity) demonstrated a significant association ( $\beta = -.15, p < .05$ ). This model explained 2.1% of the variance in organizational identity ( $F(1, 248) = 5.35, p < .05$ ). Pathway B (from organizational identity to intentions to quit) also demonstrated a significant association ( $\beta = -.44, p < .001$ ). This model explained 19.6% of the variance in intention to quit ( $F(1, 248) = 60.29, p < .001$ ). Table 3 shows the combined impact of illegitimate tasks and organizational identity on intentions to quit. In Model 1, the  $R^2$  value of .18 revealed that illegitimate tasks explained 18.2% of the variance in intentions to quit ( $F(1, 248) = 55.02, p < .001$ ). In Model 2, the  $R^2$  value of .33 revealed that illegitimate tasks and organizational identity explained 32.9% variance in intentions to quit ( $F(2, 247) = 60.65, p < .001$ ). The findings revealed that illegitimate tasks ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ) and organizational identity ( $\beta = -.39, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted intentions to quit. The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .15 revealed a 14.8% change in the variance over Model 1 ( $\Delta F(1, 247) = 54.42, p <$

.001). The regression weights for illegitimate tasks subsequently decreased from Model 1 to Model 2 (.43 to .37) but remained significant which confirmed the partial mediation.

### ***Hypothesis 2***

In Hypothesis 2, I predicted that meaningfulness of work would mediate the negative relationship between illegitimate tasks and work engagement. This hypothesis was not supported. Pathway A (from illegitimate tasks to meaningfulness) did not reveal a significant association ( $\beta = -.09, p = .14$ ) and only explained 0.9% of the variance in meaningfulness of work ( $F(1, 248) = 2.18, p = .14$ ). This finding restricted the ability to establish a mediating relationship between the independent and dependent variable. If the analysis was carried out further, Pathway B (from meaningfulness to engagement) demonstrated a significant association ( $\beta = .68, p < .001$ ). This model explained 45.9% of the variance in engagement ( $F(1, 248) = 210.22, p < .001$ ). Table 4 shows the combined impact of illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness on engagement. In Model 1, the  $R^2$  value of .03 revealed that illegitimate tasks explained 3.2% of the variance in engagement ( $F(1, 248) = 8.21, p < .01$ ). In Model 2, the  $R^2$  value of .47 revealed that illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness explained 47.2% variance in engagement ( $F(2, 247) = 110.53, p < .001$ ). The findings revealed that illegitimate tasks ( $\beta = -.12, p < .05$ ) and meaningfulness ( $\beta = .67, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted engagement. The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .44 revealed a 44% change in the variance over Model 1 ( $\Delta F(1, 247) = 206.08, p < .001$ ). The regression weights for illegitimate tasks subsequently changed from Model 1 to Model 2 (-.18 to -.12). Again, the inability to support Pathway A at the onset of this analysis restricts any suggestions of establishing meaningfulness as a mediator of the illegitimate tasks – engagement relationship.

### ***Hypothesis 3***

In Hypothesis 3, I predicted that gender would moderate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit and work engagement. This hypothesis was not supported. A hierarchical multiple regression was run to assess the statistical significance of the interaction term between illegitimate tasks and gender. Gender did not moderate the effect of illegitimate tasks on intentions to quit, as evidenced by an increase in total variation explained of 0.5%, which was not statistically significant ( $\Delta F(1, 244) = 1.63, p = .20$ ). Table 5 summarizes these findings. As such, the interaction term was dropped from the model. This new model revealed that there was a statistically significant positive linear relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit ( $\beta = .43, p < .05$ ). However, there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and intentions to quit ( $\beta = -.01, p = .86$ ).

A second hierarchical multiple regression was run to assess the statistical significance of the interaction term between illegitimate tasks and gender on engagement. Again, gender did not moderate the effect of illegitimate tasks on engagement, only improving the total variation explained by 0.7% ( $\Delta F(1, 246) = 1.71, p = .19$ ). Table 6 summarizes these findings. A new model was created dropping the interaction term from the analysis. A statistically significant negative linear relationship between illegitimate tasks and engagement was revealed ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ). However, there was not statistically significant relationship between gender and engagement ( $\beta = -.03, p = .64$ ).

### ***Exploratory Analyses***

Although not hypothesized, previous findings suggest illegitimate tasks should be able to statistically significantly predict both intentions to quit and engagement after controlling for role stressors, namely both role conflict and role ambiguity. Two hierarchical regressions were conducted to examine this assumption and the results of the analyses are provided in Table 7 and

Table 8 respectfully. When predicting intentions to quit, the full model of role conflict, role ambiguity, and illegitimate tasks was statistically significant  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(3,246) = 30.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . The addition of illegitimate tasks to the prediction of intentions to quit led to a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$  of .02,  $\Delta F(1, 246) = 5.62$ ,  $p < .05$ . When predicting engagement, the full model of role conflict, role ambiguity, and illegitimate tasks was statistically significant  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(3,246) = 23.91$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, the addition of illegitimate tasks to the prediction of engagement did not lead to a statistically significant increase in  $R^2$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 246) = 0.00$ ,  $p = .99$ .

The non-significant finding in Hypothesis 3 influenced me to investigate the relationship between gender and career level in the current sample. A chi-square test of independence was conducted between gender and career level did not reveal a significant relationship between the variables ( $\chi^2(5) = 7.86$ ,  $p = .16$ ). The association was small, Cramer's  $V = .18$ . Table 9 provides the frequency for each variable. As can be seen, participants were no more likely to be a specific career level based on their gender.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to expand the current understanding of how illegitimate tasks may relate to intentions to quit and work engagement. Previous research suggests illegitimate tasks negatively impact strain and well-being based on perceived threats to identity (Semmer et al., 2015). Few studies have examined the mediating and moderating variables that impact why and how illegitimate tasks relate to the specific work outcomes of turnover intentions and work engagement. Thus, in accordance with SOS theory and SIT, I explored organizational identity as a possible mediator of the illegitimate tasks – intentions to quit relationship given the clear theoretical links between perceived task illegitimacy and threats to one's social identity, and the likelihood of employees coping with such strain through avoidance

(Apostel et al., 2018). I also examined meaningfulness of work as a possible mediator to the illegitimate tasks – work engagement relationship. Dedicating work time on tasks that fall outside the core of what is considered crucial and defining to one’s role may erode meaningfulness of work and invoke feelings of insignificance and insufficiency relating negatively to work engagement. Lastly, I investigated gender as a possible moderator between illegitimate tasks and both outcome variables, attempting to expand upon previous findings suggesting a stronger identity stressor – strain association among males.

Results for Hypothesis 1 suggest that illegitimate tasks are negatively related to organizational identity and that organizational identity indirectly mediates the overarching relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit. Consistent with SOS theory, employees who perceive their tasks as illegitimate do not identify strongly with the organization and thus, are likely to consider other employment as a means of coping (Eatough et al., 2016; Apostel et al., 2018). The illegitimate tasks-intentions to quit relationship is consistent with previous studies (van Schie et al., 2014). Illegitimate tasks are an important task-related stressor that can impact key outcome variables

Additionally, the fact that those who perform more illegitimate tasks lack strong organizational identification supports the notion that illegitimate tasks are an identity-based stressor. This is consistent with previous findings on the threat-to-identity effects of illegitimate tasks through associations with self-esteem (Eatough et al., 2016) and job identity (Ma & Peng, 2019).

The current study advances the illegitimate tasks literature by linking SOS theory’s theoretical framework with SIT, specifically broadening the identity relevant conceptualization to include threats to one’s social identity. Previous conceptualizations of identity have focused

on both internal and universal perceptions of identity (i.e., self-esteem) and identity that originates from the job duties themselves (i.e., job identity). As the first study to examine a more social identity perspective, I found that illegitimate tasks are detrimental to employee perceptions of group membership, belongingness, and shared values and norms with one's organization. Employees are expected to protect their self-esteem and social identity when confronted with identity relevant threats (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The disrespect and discrimination perceived when one is assigned illegitimate tasks may specifically impact organizational staffing and retention goals or contribute to the devaluation of interpersonal relationships within the organization. Altogether, this finding supports the idea that employees may contemplate leaving their organization or search for other job alternatives if given tasks that undermine what can reasonably be expected within their professional role.

Second, results from Hypothesis 2 do not support the notion that meaningfulness of work mediates the path between illegitimate tasks and work engagement. While illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness of work were related to work engagement separately, the absence of a direct relationship between illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness of work may indicate that, from a theoretical perspective, the assignment of tasks outside of one's role boundaries may not necessarily suggest the work performed is entirely meaningless to the individual. This is not consistent with SOS framework, in which previous findings suggest that the assignment of illegitimate tasks is inherently stressful, and the demeaning social messages carried with them negatively impact positive employee psychological states. A recent study examining the illegitimate task and meaningfulness of work relationship suggested that performing irrelevant or useless tasks may undermine one's professional identity, especially if one's work is perceived as a "calling" (Kilponen et al., 2021). Additionally, Kilponen and colleagues (2021) also indicate

that illegitimate tasks act as excessive job demands, which may reduce employees' energy and motivation for meaningfulness of work.

The inconsistency between this study's findings and those of Kilponen and colleagues (2021) may be a result of differences in measurement of the meaningfulness of work construct. Meaningfulness of work as measured in this study had strong internal consistency. However, the average value on this measure was roughly five on a scale of one to seven with only 20.4% of participants scoring lower than a four on the scale. This lack of variability in the meaningfulness measure may have impacted the ability to support a statistically significant association between meaningfulness and illegitimate tasks. Also, the current study utilized a three-item meaningfulness measure developed by Spreitzer (1995) while the Kilponen study (2021) measured meaningfulness using the positive meaning subscale in the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012). The positive meaning subscale captures the subjective experience of psychological meaningfulness regarding one's work, which is conceptually similar to Spreitzer's scale. However, the language used in the positive meaning subscale differs slightly from this study's meaningfulness scale. The other measure emphasizes the meaningfulness of one's career relative to one's life purpose. An example of this language is "I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning." In contrast, Spreitzer's scale focuses on meaningfulness through one's tasks and work responsibilities in general. Future researchers should distinguish between the two different conceptualizations of meaningfulness of work when developing their studies as my findings suggest this difference will impact the construct's relationship with illegitimate tasks.

Additionally, the chosen sample for most studies in the illegitimate tasks literature are occupation specific, with occupations ranging from German information technology employees,

to Chinese consulting firms, to American higher education faculty and students (Fila & Eatough, 2018; Ma & Peng, 2019, Apostel et al., 2018). To date, Kilponen and colleagues are the only researchers to demonstrate a significant relationship between illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness of work. They utilized a sample of health care employees in which high demands are common and work is often perceived as a “calling”. The present study used an online survey recruitment site which included individuals across various occupational settings and global locations. The majority of these individuals were within the first 5 years of employment (54%) and therefore may not believe their work to yet be a “calling”. Also, a measure of workload in the current sample revealed an average score of 15.8, which is lower than the norm average for that measure (Spector & Jex, 1998). These findings paired with a largely heterogeneous sample suggests that employees in occupations with high workloads and are one’s “calling” increases the chance of finding a significant relationship between illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness of work. Previous studies also support this notion. They suggest that certain occupational and societal cultures influence the perception of illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al., 2015). What is considered illegitimate in one culture or organization may not be consistent to the next organization (e.g., non-nursing activities are illegitimate tasks for nurses) Furthermore, the language used to describe these situations may differ across settings as well (Semmer et al., 2015). It is conceivable that the broader and more diverse perspectives associated with the current study may have influenced the illegitimate tasks and meaningfulness of work relationship.

Lastly, results from Hypothesis 3 suggest that reactions to illegitimate tasks do not vary based on gender. Specifically, gender did not moderate the relationship between illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit and work engagement. These findings do not support previous

research on gender role theory (Eagly, 1987) that socialized gender norms impact the social behavior and reactions to stressors. These findings also do not support gender differences found in the interpretation of stressors, specifically regarding illegitimate tasks (Day & Livingstone, 2003; Omansky et al., 2016). Instead, the current study provides evidence for universal impact of illegitimate tasks on workplace outcomes, regardless of an individual's gender.

One explanation for the findings with gender as it relates to intentions to quit and work engagement could be the disproportionate breakdown between men and women in the current study. Males accounted for nearly 65% of the participants in this study, while other gender differences studies typically have a more even distribution (Omansky et al., 2016). Results suggest that gender does not relate to career level in this sample. However, there did appear to be disproportionate number of men in managerial positions (77% male). Despite this shortcoming, previous research suggests that individuals in higher positions within an organization may receive fewer illegitimate task assignments due to their high status, higher tolerance for engaging in illegitimate tasks, and their likely role in assigning tasks rather than being assigned tasks (Muntz et al., 2019; Semmer et al., 2019). Additionally, gender in this current study was used as a proxy variable for the underlying socially constructed differences in values and behaviors between men and women. Researchers examining gender differences suggest that future studies should address this measurement concern by examining agentic versus communal self-view or other specific attitudinal or behavioral characteristics to better determine the role gender plays in experiencing and reactions to illegitimate tasks (Omansky et al., 2016).

Another potential explanation for these findings may result from the measurement and conceptualization of illegitimate tasks. Although the BITS has shown strong internal structure and consistency in previous studies and the current study (Semmer et al., 2015), further

examination of the items themselves reveals wording issues and awkward sentence structuring. These issues may impact the interpretation of illegitimate tasks as a construct and detract from the ability to support statistically significant results. In addition, exploratory analyses revealed that illegitimate tasks were unable to predict work engagement after controlling for role conflict. Given the similarities in conceptualization, this finding suggests that illegitimate tasks may represent a specific role stressor situation relating to task assignment. Continued research is necessary to further examine the measurement capabilities and distinct stressor conceptualization of illegitimate tasks in its relation to other workplace stressors.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has several limitations. First, the current study's cross-sectional design inhibits its ability to support causal conclusions relating to illegitimate tasks and intentions to quit. It also limits my ability to show how repeated exposure to illegitimate tasks may result in exacerbated or additive effects on intentions to quit or work engagement. Although previous studies have utilized longitudinal designs (Eatough et al., 2016; Semmer et al., 2015), future research should implement daily diary studies or experimental research designs to further investigate the causal mechanisms discussed in this study. Second, the use of self-report measures raises concerns around issues of common method bias impacting results. Inflated correlations among variables due to common method bias are likely to reduce test power and effect size estimates for moderated relationships (Siemsen et al., 2010). Future research should consider multisource data such as supervisor ratings for job-related variables, family perceptions of job stressors, or objective measurements of turnover (i.e., voluntary and involuntary).

Third, the limited number of demographic variables examined in this study limits its generalizability and ability to be replicated with other samples. Previous research suggests that

cultural factors at the department, organization, industry, and nationality levels may impact the perception and reaction to illegitimate tasks (Semmer et al., 2019). Without definitive sample characteristics associated with any of those levels, it is possible that investigation into the same variables with another study may produce different results. Future research should consider examining a specific industry sector or gathering more robust demographic data to aid in the generalizability of these results.

While this study focused largely upon the linking mechanisms between illegitimate tasks and workplace outcomes, several other individual difference variables should be investigated to establish potential buffer effects in the stressor – strain relationship. For example, one potential individual difference variable that has yet to be examined in the illegitimate tasks literature is self-efficacy. Previous research has conceptualized illegitimate tasks as hindrance stressors, or stressors that possess no motivating or growth potential (Lepine et al., 2005). Other studies have also shown how individuals high in self-efficacy will perceive more challenge demands and fewer hindrance demands (Ventura et al., 2015). It seems worthwhile for future studies to examine whether illegitimate tasks relate similarly to self-efficacy, specifically analyzing if individuals high in self-efficacy may be buffered from the negative effects of illegitimate tasks due to their tendency to view such demands as challenging. Other potential moderator variables such as perceived social support, organizational commitment, and psychological capital also seem promising.

### **Practical Implications**

These findings have several practical implications. As demonstrated in previous studies and in this current study, illegitimate tasks can negatively impact employee well-being and foster unwanted workplace outcomes and should therefore be avoided or reduced. Organizations should

be made aware of these findings and train supervisors to avoid assigning tasks that may be perceived as illegitimate. Openly communicating why the task is important to subordinates through relational transparency or demonstrating appreciation by signaling acknowledgement and recognition of one's work are key communication strategies shown to buffer job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions associated with illegitimate tasks (Apostel et al., 2018; Muntz et al., 2019). In addition, a greater effort should be taken to outline the key tasks and role expectations for each job and strictly adhere to those descriptions during hiring and onboarding processes to minimize instances of perceived unfairness and disrespect based on task assignment if a task is assigned. Employees who perceive a task to be illegitimate should be allowed a safe space to voice their concerns to a supervisor about the necessity or appropriateness of a task. Such discussions may present opportunities to improve work design and workflow or to allow supervisors to explain how tasks perceived as illegitimate may in fact, be legitimate. Overall, the goal for many organizations should be to implement open communication and feedback systems that allow for mutual understandings of role expectations between supervisors and subordinates.

Second, results for this study emphasize the importance of improving employee perceptions of organizational identity. In organizations where illegitimate task assignment is inevitable, focusing efforts on improved organizational identity may lessen the likelihood of costly turnover. Previous research suggests improving the external prestige of the organization combined with improving perceived internal respect will both positively impact an employee's organizational identification (Fuller et al., 2006). Specifically, targeting the organization's perceived success at achieving their goals, the visibility of the organization, and the status level of individual employees would all improve the external prestige antecedent. Similarly, visibility

within the organization, perceived opportunities for growth, and participation in decision-making are all associated with improved internal respect.

## **Conclusion**

Altogether, this study has extended research on illegitimate tasks by supporting the negative effects of the stressor on workplace outcomes such as intentions to quit and work engagement. Consistent with SOS theory (Semmer et al., 2007), this study also established organizational identity as a significant mediator of the illegitimate tasks – intentions to quit relationship. This further showcases the identity relevant and identity threatening nature of illegitimate tasks and expands upon the current understanding of what facets of one's identity are impacted due to illegitimate tasks. While significant findings were not found with meaningfulness of work and gender, proposed methodological improvements and directions for future research allow for future studies to examine the constructs more rigorously in hopes of adding to the illegitimate tasks literature.

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## Appendix A – Tables and Graphs

**Table 1**  
*Frequency Distribution of Demographic Variables*

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	161	64.4
Female	87	34.8
Non-binary	1	0.4
Prefer not to say	1	0.4
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 29	148	59.4
30 – 39	63	25.3
40 – 49	26	10.4
50 +	12	4.8
<b>Tenure</b>		
Less than 6 months	31	12.4
6 – 12 months	37	14.8
1 – 5 years	123	49.2
5 – 10 years	37	14.8
10 + years	22	8.8
<b>Career Level</b>		
Student/Apprentice/Intern	22	8.8
Entry Level (less than 2 years experience)	58	23.2
Non-Management (2 to 5 years of experience)	56	22.4
Non-Management (over 5 years of experience)	41	16.4
Management (at least one person reports to you, e.g., Supervisor, Director)	62	24.8
Senior Executive (President, CEO, DFO, etc.)	11	4.4

**Table 2**  
*Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations of All Measures*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	249	30.18	8.81									
2. Gender	248	.35	.48	.07								
3. Illegitimate Tasks	250	2.79	.77	-.10	-.08	(.86)						
4. Intentions to Quit	250	2.85	1.14	-.14*	-.11	.43**	(.86)					
5. Work Engagement	250	4.49	1.20	.05	-.02	-.18**	-.41**	(.93)				
6. Organizational Identity	250	3.15	.94	.11	-.02	-.15*	-.44**	.68**	(.92)			
7. Meaningfulness of Work	250	4.95	1.52	.02	.05	-.09	-.32**	.68**	.62**	(.94)		
8. Role Ambiguity	250	2.78	.99	-.09	-.01	.30**	.32**	-.47**	-.39**	-.31**	(.80)	
9. Role Conflict	250	3.79	1.24	-.15*	-.10	.67**	.48**	-.23**	-.22**	-.12	.36**	(.86)

*Note.* Gender: 0 = male; 1 = female; in the diagonal in parentheses; Cronbach's alpha.

\*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)

**Table 3**

*Regression Analysis for Mediation of Organizational Identity between Illegitimate Tasks and Intentions to Quit*

	<i>B</i>	95%CI	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					.18	.18**
Constant	1.08**	[.59, 1.57]	.25			
Illegitimate Tasks	.64**	[.47, .81]	.09	.43**		
Model 2					.33	.15**
Constant	2.80**	[2.16, 3.43]	.32			
Illegitimate Tasks	.55**	[.40, .71]	.08	.37**		
Organizational Identity	-.47**	[-.60, -.35]	.06	-.39**		

Note. CI = confidence interval

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4**

*Regression Analysis for Mediation of Meaningfulness of Work between Illegitimate Tasks and Work Engagement*

	<i>B</i>	95%CI	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					.03	.03**
Constant	5.27**	[4.71, 5.83]	.28			
Illegitimate Tasks	-.28**	[-.47, -.09]	.10	-.18**		
Model 2					.47	.44**
Constant	2.39**	[1.82, 2.96]	.29			
Illegitimate Tasks	-.18*	[-.33, -.04]	.08	-.12*		
Meaningfulness of Work	.53**	[.45, .60]	.38	.67**		

Note. CI = confidence interval

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 5***Moderated Regression Analysis Predicting Intentions to Quit by Illegitimate Tasks and Gender*

	<i>B</i>	95%CI	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					.18	.18**
Constant	1.07**	[.56, 1.57]	.26			
Illegitimate Tasks	.63**	[.47, .80]	.09	.43**		
Males – dummy code	.03	[-.25, .30]	.14	.01		
Model 2					.19	.01
Constant	.69	[-.08, 1.46]	.39			
Illegitimate Tasks	.77**	[.50, 1.05]	.14	.52**		
Males – dummy code	.65	[-.35, 1.64]	.51	.27		
Illegitimate Tasks x Males	-.23	[-.58, .12]	.18	-.29		

*Note.* CI = confidence interval\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .**Table 6***Moderated Regression Analysis Predicting Work Engagement by Illegitimate Tasks and Gender*

	<i>B</i>	95%CI	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					.03	.03*
Constant	5.23**	[4.66, 5.81]	.29			
Illegitimate Tasks	-.28**	[-.48, -.09]	.10	-.18**		
Males – dummy code	.07	[-.24, .38]	.16	.03		
Model 2					.04	.01
Constant	5.67	[4.80, 6.55]	.45			
Illegitimate Tasks	-.45**	[-.76, -.14]	.16	-.29**		
Males – dummy code	.65	[-1.79, .48]	.58	-.26		
Illegitimate Tasks x Males	.26	[-.13, .66]	.20	.33		

*Note.* CI = confidence interval\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 7**

*Regression Analysis examining the Illegitimate Task and Intentions to Quit relationship after controlling for Role Stressors*

	<i>B</i>	95%CI	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					.26	.26**
Constant	.84**	[.38, 1.29]	.23			
Role Conflict	.39**	[-.28, -.50]	.05	.42**		
Role Ambiguity	.19**	[.06, .33]	.07	.17**		
Model 2					.27	.02*
Constant	.54*	[.03, 1.06]	.26			
Role Conflict	.29**	[-.15, -.42]	.07	.31**		
Role Ambiguity	.18**	[.05, .31]	.07	.16**		
Illegitimate Tasks	.26*	[.04, .47]	.11	.17*		

Note. CI = confidence interval

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 8**

*Regression Analysis examining the Illegitimate Task and Work Engagement relationship after controlling for Role Stressors*

	<i>B</i>	95%CI	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Model 1					.27	.27**
Constant	6.24**	[5.75, 6.73]	.25			
Role Conflict	-.07	[-.18, -.05]	.06	-.07		
Role Ambiguity	-.54**	[-.68, -.40]	.07	-.45**		
Model 2					.27	.00
Constant	6.24*	[5.68, 6.80]	.28			
Role Conflict	-.07	[-.22, .08]	.08	-.07		
Role Ambiguity	-.54**	[-.68, -.40]	.07	.45**		
Illegitimate Tasks	.00	[-.23, .23]	.11	.00		

Note. CI = confidence interval

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*

**Table 9**  
*Crosstabulation of Gender and Career Level*

Career Level	Gender	
	Male	Female
Student/Apprentice/Intern	13 (-.6)	9 (.6)
Entry Level (less than 2 years experience)	39 (.6)	18 (-.6)
Non-Management (2 to 5 years of experience)	32 (-1.4)	24 (1.4)
Non-Management (over 5 years of experience)	23 (-1.1)	17 (1.1)
Management (at least one person reports to you)	48 (2.4)	14 (-2.4)
Senior Executive	6 (-.7)	5 (.7)

*Note.* Adjusted residuals appear in parentheses below observed frequencies

## Appendix B – Scales in Questionnaire

**Figure 1.** Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (Semmer et al., 2007)

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Once in a while (3)	Rather often (4)	Frequently (5)
<b>Unnecessary Tasks</b>					
Do you have work tasks to take care of, which keep you wondering if:					
They have to be done at all?					
They make sense at all?					
They would not exist (or could be done with less effort), if things were organized differently?					
They just exist because some people simply demand it this way?					
Are so rudimentary that they are a waste of your time?					
<b>Unreasonable Tasks</b>					
Do you have work tasks to take care of, which you believe:					
Should be done by someone else?					
Are going too far, which should not be expected from you?					
Put you into an awkward position?					
Are unfair that you have to deal with them?					
Require a more advanced knowledge or training than someone in your position should have?					

**Figure 2.** Intentions to Quit Scale (Ballinger et al., 2010)

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I am actively looking for a job outside my current company.					
As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave my current company.					
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job.					

**Figure 3.** Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (Schaufeli et al., 2002)

The following 9 statements are about how you feel at work. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way about your job. If you have never had this feeling, select “0” (zero). If you have had this feeling, indicate how often you felt it by selecting the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way.

Never (0) Never	Almost Never (1) A few times a year or less	Rarely (2) Once a month or less	Sometimes (3) A few times a month	Often (4) Once a week	Very Often (5) A few times a week	Always (6) Every day
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At my work, I feel  
bursting with energy.  
(VI1)

At my job, I feel  
strong and vigorous.  
(VI2)

When I get up in the  
morning, I feel like  
going to work. (VI3)

I am enthusiastic  
about my job. (DE1)

My job inspires me.  
(DE2)

I am proud of the  
work that I do. (DE3)

I feel happy when I  
am working intensely.  
(AB1)

I am immersed in my  
work. (AB2)

I get carried away  
when I am working.  
(AB3)

*Note:* VI = Vigor scale; DE = Dedication scale; AB = Absorption scale.

**Figure 4.** The Organizational Identification Scale (Edwards & Peccei, 2007)

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
My employment at my company is a big part of who I am. (SCL1)					
I consider myself a ( <i>your company</i> name) person. (SCL2)					
What my company stands for is important to me. (GV1)					
I share the goals and values of my company. (GV2)					
My membership at my company is important to me. (BM1)					
I feel strong ties with my company. (BM2)					

*Note:* SCL = Self-categorization and Labelling; GV = Sharing organizational Goals and Values; BM = Sense of Belonging and Membership of the organization.

**Figure 5. Meaningfulness of Work Scale (Spreitzer, 1995)**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat Agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly Agree (7)
The work I do is very important to me.							
My job activities are personally meaningful to me.							
The work I do is meaningful to me.							

**Figure 6.** Role Conflict (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970)

How accurate are each of the following statements in describing your job?						
Very Inaccurate (1)	Mostly Inaccurate (2)	Slightly Inaccurate (3)	Uncertain (4)	Slightly Accurate (5)	Mostly Accurate (6)	Very Accurate (7)
I have to do things that should be done differently. (C1)						
I receive an assignment without the help I need to complete it. (C2)						
I have to bend or break a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment (C3)						
I work with two or more groups who operate quite differently. (C4)						
I receive incompatible requests form two or more people. (C5)						
I do things that are apt to be accepted by one person and not accepted by others. (C6)						
I receive an assignment without adequate resources and materials to execute it. (C7)						
I work on unnecessary things (C8)						

**Figure 7. Role Ambiguity (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970)**

How accurate are each of the following statements in describing your job?							
Very Inaccurate (1)	Mostly Inaccurate (2)	Slightly Inaccurate (3)	Uncertain (4)	Slightly Accurate (5)	Mostly Accurate (6)	Very Accurate (7)	
I feel certain about how much authority I have. (A1)							
There are clear, planned goals and objectives for my job. (A2)							
I know that I have divided my time properly. (A3)							
I know what my responsibilities are. (A4)							
I know exactly what is expected of me. (A5)							
Explanation is clear about what has to be done on my job. (A6)							