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Mari Holmström

BREAK-TAKING AT WORK AS A COLLABORATIVELY CONSTRUCTED SOCIAL ACTIVITY

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HUMANIORA

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Abstract

The dissertation examines break-taking at work, drawing on data from both onsite breaks at the workplace and break-taking on virtual platforms. The dissertation consists of a summary and three original articles that explore break-taking from different angles, shedding light on how participants orient to the ongoing interactional situation, how they display social curiosity, and how they jointly manage break-taking in interaction. The dissertation mainly utilizes a conversation analytic methodology, while also paying attention to the participants' experiences of break-taking, and what they regard important. The data utilized in the study consists of video-recordings from onsite and online breaks, interviews, and observations. The data is in English and Finnish.

The dissertation shows that break-taking from work is a multifaceted phenomenon that participants jointly create and maintain in interaction. Article I shows how participants allocate interactional resources during breaks by suspending and resuming drinking in accordance with the ongoing sequence, and how participants make this re-allocation visible by withdrawing their coffee or teacups in the prebeginning position. Article II, in turn, explores break-taking on video-mediated platforms and shows how participants create and maintain co-presence and social intimacy with displays of so-called social curiosity. Finally, Article III sheds light on participants' perspectives on break-taking, examines ethnographic and conversation analytic data, and discusses shared break-taking as an informal community of practice. The summary provides a synthesis of the individual articles, discusses relevant background literature, and presents the results of the research.

The dissertation illustrates three central themes in break-taking, based on the findings of the articles: co-presence and displays of social solidarity and support, objects and the material environment in breaks rooms facilitating social encounters, and timely displays of engagement that illustrate the participants' ongoing and timely involvements in shared break-taking. Further, the analysis shows that participants orient to togetherness in different ways in interaction: by allocating resources to talking instead of drinking when it becomes relevant in interaction, by displaying social curiosity during breaks, and by orienting to shared break-taking by inviting newcomers to participate, for example. The dissertation contributes to a further understanding of participants' social interaction and social activity during breaks from work.

Keywords: break-taking, conversation analysis, ethnography, social activity, social interaction, video-mediated interaction, workplace

Holmström, Mari, Tauonpito työpaikalla yhteisesti rakennettuna sosiaalisena toimintana

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Tiivistelmä

Väitöskirja tarkastelee tauonpitoa töissä sekä fyysisissä työpaikan taukotiloissa että virtuaalisilla alustoilla. Väitöskirja koostuu yhteenvedosta ja kolmesta alkuperäisestä osajulkaisusta, jotka käsittelevät tauonpitoa erilaisista näkökulmista: tutkimukset tuovat esiin tapoja, joilla osallistujat orientoituvat meneillään olevaan vuorovaikutustilanteeseen, osoittavat sosiaalista uteliaisuutta ja yhdessä rakentavat tauonpitoa vuorovaikutuksessa. Väitöskirjassa käytetään pääasiallisesti keskustelunanalyyttistä menetelmää, mutta huomiota kiinnitetään myös siihen, miten osallistujat kokevat tauonpidon ja mitä he pitävät tärkeänä. Aineistona hyödynnetään videoituja taukoja sekä lähi- että etätauoilta, haastatteluja ja havainnointeja. Aineisto on englannin- ja suomenkielistä.

Väitöskirja osoittaa, että tauonpito työstä on monimuotoinen sosiaalinen ilmiö, jota osallistujat rakentavat ja ylläpitävät vuorovaikutuksellisin keinoin. Ensimmäinen osajulkaisu osoittaa, miten osallistujat käyttävät erilaisia vuorovaikutuksen resursseja: he keskeyttävät juomisen ja palaavat siihen meneillään olevan toimintajakson mukaan sekä tekevät tällaisen toiminnan suunnanmuutoksen näkyväksi liikuttamalla kahvi- tai teekuppiaan ennen vuoron alkua. Toinen osajulkaisu keskittyy vuorovaikutukseen videovälitteisillä tauoilla ja tarkastelee sitä, miten osallistujat rakentavat ja ylläpitävät yhteisöllisyyttä ja läheisyyttä niin kutsutun sosiaalisen uteliaisuuden keinoin. Kolmannessa osajulkaisussa tutkitaan etnografisia aineistoja ja videoituja taukoja ja tarkastellaan tauonpitoa epävirallisten käytäntöyhteisöjen näkökulmasta. Väitöskirjan yhteenveto-osio tiivistää osajulkaisut, tarkastelee relevanttia taustakirjallisuutta ja esittelee tutkimuksen tulokset.

Väitöskirja tuo esille kolme artikkelien tuloksiin pohjautuvaa keskeistä teemaa tauonpidossa: yhteistoiminta ja sosiaalisen solidaarisuuden ja tuen näyttäminen, taukohuoneen materiaalisen ympäristön merkitys sosiaalisissa kohtaamisissa sekä hyvin ajoitetut osallistumisen osoitukset, jotka tekevät näkyväksi osallistujien jatkuvan ja oikea-aikaisen osallistumisen yhteiseen tauonpitoon. Lisäksi analyysi näyttää, että osallistujat orientoituvat yhteisyyteen vuorovaikutuksessa eri tavoin: osallistujat keskeyttävät juomisen, kun vuoron tuottaminen nousee relevantiksi, he osoittavat sosiaalista uteliaisuutta toisia osallistujia kohtaan taukojen aikana, ja he orientoituvat yhteiseen tauonpitoon esimerkiksi kutsumalla mukaan uusia työkavereita. Väitöskirja edistää ymmärrystä osallistujien sosiaalisesta vuorovaikutuksesta ja sosiaalisesta toiminnasta tauoilla.

Asiasanat: etnografia, keskustelunanalyysi, sosiaalinen toiminta, sosiaalinen vuorovaikutus, taukoilu, työpaikka, videovälitteinen vuorovaikutus

To my family

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A long and interesting journey is coming to an end. My PhD project started in 2018, and two years later, so many things changed along with COVID-19. We were no longer able to work at the office, and thus, even break-taking at work halted. Thankfully, it was possible to keep in touch with important people in many other ways. While this dissertation journey has not been without challenges, I am forever grateful for meeting so many wonderful people along the way. I am also very thankful for all the participants in the Break project: without you, this dissertation would not exist. Thank you so much.

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Oulu, February 2025   Mari Holmström

List of abbreviations and symbols

etc.   et cetera
i.e.   id est
e.g.   exempli gratia
et al.   et alii
cf.   confer
CA   conversation analysis

List of original publications

This dissertation is based on the following publications, which are referred to throughout the text by their Roman numerals:

I   Holmström, M. (2024). Preparing to talk in workplace break interaction: Withdrawing a coffee cup from the lips as a prebeginning. *Gesprächsforschung 25*, 170–194. http://www.gespraechsforschung-online.de/fileadmin/dateien/heft2024/ga-holmstroem.pdf

II   Holmström, M., Rauniomaa, M., & Siromaa, M. (2022). Zooming in on a frame: Collectively focusing on a co-participant's person or surroundings in video-mediated interaction. In Alarauhio, J.-P., Räisänen, T., Toikkanen, J. & Tumelius, R. (Eds). *Shaping the North Through Multimodal and Intermedial Interaction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 95–120. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99104-3

III Holmström, M. (under review). Coffee breaks as informal communities of practice.

My contribution to Article II is as follows: All three authors actively participated in preparing the book chapter. However, I was primarily responsible for writing the chapter, as well as for initially inspecting the data and identifying the phenomenon in question.

Contents

1   Introduction

Having a cup of coffee or tea with colleagues at work is a mundane activity that many recognize and participate in. Some take breaks together regularly, whereas others participate in them more sporadically. In Finland, break-taking at work is a common phenomenon, and enjoying hot beverages together is a fixture in social encounters, much like *fika* in Sweden (see Morley et al., 2018). Overall, in the Nordic countries, drinking coffee with others, sometimes paired with sweet or savory snacks, is a well-known tradition, and people in these countries consume coffee with a passion. Break-taking is not only a common social custom, but it is also noted in legislation: in the European Union, workers are entitled to take rest periods during working hours, and member states are called on to take necessary measures to ensure adequate intermissions from work (Rest Periods, 2020). For example, in Finland, provisions on breaks and rest periods are specified in collective agreements, and intermissions from work may be legally mandated (see, e.g., the Working Time Act, 2020).

The benefits of breaks for carrying out work tasks have indeed been widely recognized. Reporting on an interview with Huotilainen, Puurunen (2019) points out that during working hours, people may be constantly riddled with haste, interruptions and stress, which are detrimental to brain health and may result in more mistakes. Considering the importance of breaks in knowledge work, Huotilainen (2021) suggests that there are four reasons why break-taking should be taken seriously: 1) a break-taking habit or a culture developed around it can help prevent burnout, and 2) as people are faced with problems that require creativity, resourcefulness and realization, developing break-taking at work can help increase porosity in a work day and thus allow the brain to function better (p. 14). Further, as Huotilainen (2021) points out, 3) taking breaks together can aid in becoming familiar with co-workers, which creates trust, and may also aid in processes relating to co-creation at work, and 4) a good break-taking culture may make work feel more rewarding and thus contribute to the sustainability of careers (p. 15).

Despite their apparent benefits, breaks may be frowned upon in the contemporary work climate in which efficiency and time management are highly valued. The evident but contested importance of resting, socializing during breaks and talking about matters related to work is a topical theme that is regularly taken up in the media (e.g., Scammell, 2018; Tam, 2019). Language relating to taking breaks also reflects dichotomous perspectives on the matter. Kangasvuo et al. (2018), for instance, discuss the importance of taking breaks through concepts such

as *kotviminen* and *vääjääminen*. First, Kangasvuo et al. (2018) note that *kotviminen* (an old Eastern Finnish word deriving from *kotva* 'moment' and *kotvia* 'to wait') relates to a break "without which the job will not be finished" (p. 16). The term refers to procrastination in a positive way: *kotviminen* is used in connection to short breaks, allowing a rest for the brain and a possibility to come up with new ideas (Kangasvuo et al., 2018, p. 17; Paajanen & Pyhälahti, 2018). Kangasvuo et al. (2018) note that embedded in the idea of *kotviminen* is that it is an important part of work and beneficial to it, whereas *vääjääminen* has a negative connotation, and it refers to dawdling or delaying attending to activities (pp. 17–18). Kangasvuo et al. (2018) further note that the difference between *kotviminen* and *vääjääminen* can be determined by reflecting on whether it contributes to one's mood positively or negatively, and whether it is seen as beneficial or detrimental (p. 19).

It is also worth noting that the increase in distance working after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s has impacted how break-taking is perceived in the contemporary working climate. After the surge in distance working post-COVID, many companies are wondering how to encourage workers to return to the office, at least in some capacity. For instance, it has been suggested that the possibility to socialize with coworkers on different levels, whether during breaks or otherwise, could entice people to come back to the office (Capossela, 2022). However, the sufficiency of investing into different spaces in modern offices (e.g. so-called activity-based offices) as a way to encourage employees to return to the office has also been questioned: instead, the necessity of providing spaces where people can focus on work in adequate surroundings is being called for (Taulavuori, 2022). In a critical column, Siltamäki (2024) challenges the contemporary trend of luring workers back to the office with a variety of amenities and changing work stations. Rather, Siltamäki (2024) advocates for assigned work stations to boost productivity, and suggests that instead of "innovative" work spaces, new ideas and surprising encounters may happen in the break room, hallways and Christmas parties, for example.

In this dissertation, break-taking at work is considered as an interface, or a "boundary zone" (Wegener et al., 2015, p. 48), between the personal and the professional. The focus is on shared breaks from work that are taken regularly in a break room provided by the workplace or in a virtual space set up by members of a work community. Break-taking provides opportunities for participants to engage with each other on a personal level in an informal environment, within the professional, institutional context of the workplace. Breaks thus provide opportunities to socialize and cultivate communality at the workplace in and

through interaction. While interactions during breaks resemble everyday conversations more than institutional interaction, the institutional context provides a frame for interaction, for instance in terms of time spent on breaks or appropriate talk topics.

This dissertation examines video-recorded data from break rooms as well as interviews and observations. The dataset reflects two kinds of changes in break-taking in contemporary society, the first determined from the outset of the project and the second captured somewhat coincidentally during the project. First, data was collected before and after some of the studied communities moved to new premises and adjusted their break-taking routines to the new break facilities. Second, data was collected prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and so it records an unprecedented change in working and break-taking conditions. Thus, the dataset provides insight into break-taking at work in a time before the pandemic and during the pandemic, while also commenting on the change of office and break spaces. Indeed, it became apparent that in this dissertation, the change brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic presented a more significant shift in break-taking, and thus features in the articles and this summary more prominently.

This doctoral dissertation explores social interaction during breaks from work: break-taking is considered a multifaceted phenomenon and it is described from different theoretical and analytical viewpoints. The dissertation consists of the present summary and three articles, two of which have been published in peer-reviewed collections or journals and one of which has been submitted to peer-review. The summary includes the present section which provides an introduction to break-taking and the aims of the dissertation, and section 2 discusses the research materials and methods. Section 3 presents the summaries of the three original research articles, and section 4 sheds light on the key themes that run through the individual articles. Finally, section 5 concludes this dissertation and discusses future implications. In what follows, the subsections in this introduction outline relevant previous studies on break-taking, and the aims of this doctoral dissertation.

1.1   Break-taking facilitating recovery

The importance of breaks has been noticed and researched in various disciplines, such as psychology and organizational management. Some studies from a time before the COVID-19 pandemic suggest that positive activities such as socializing during micro-breaks from work seem to have a favorable effect on work performance (Kim et al., 2017), that engaging in activities that are preferred and

taking breaks earlier in the day facilitate more recovery (Hunter & Wu, 2016, p. 302), and that coffee breaks are significant for socializing and coping with work (Stroebaek, 2013). A dedicated break-taking space has been found beneficial, for instance, for nurses' work (Liberati et al., 2019) and morning tea breaks have been shown to give nurses opportunities to rest, express their feelings and receive support (Lee, 2001). Further, a study suggests that coffee breaks facilitate a more informal flow of (implicit) information, also allowing for the formation of 'informal communities of practice', which refers to spontaneous discussions relating to different issues in organizations (Barmeyer et al., 2019, p. 800). According to Morley et al. (2018), the Swedish tradition of *fika*, having coffee together, is perceived as an agreeable social event; however, on the downside, sometimes participants may experience it as yet another duty to perform at work.

Discussing the benefits of break-taking, Zhu et al. (2019) found that based on participants' reports, breaks taken during the workday had a positive impact on their fatigue and affect levels (p. 191). Further, based on their research Kühnel et al. (2017) encourage taking self-initiated short breaks from work when needed, as they have a positive influence on focus and engagement in work later in the day. The benefits of breaks and flexible break-taking schedule was also reported by Li et al. (2020): employees who took several, reasonably fixed breaks had improved work efficiency, better employee satisfaction and makespan compared to those who did not have breaks. In a questionnaire study among Finnish employees (Pennonen, 2011), it was found that the patterns of recovery experiences contribute to maintaining well-being at work (p. 5).

Regarding beneficial break-time activities, Fritz et al. (2013) studied a variety of breaks from work (i.e. vacations, weekends, evenings after work, breaks at work) and found that "specific activities and experiences during breaks play an important role in "recharging one's batteries" after coping with the exigencies of work." (p. 277). It was further noted that while drinking coffee during at-work breaks may introduce health detriments, activities such as building positive relationships are associated with higher perceived energy as well as less fatigue (Fritz et al., 2013, p. 277). Singh et al. (2020) found that when it came to activities during breaks, boxing and a relaxation system, which included audio-visual stimulation and a 10-minute deep relaxation program in a shiatsu massage chair, had greater impacts on performance variables than taking a nap. Moreover, Kim et al. (2019) noted that online breaks (i.e. breaks taken via technology, such as checking personal emails or reading the news) have both potential benefits and costs depending on a person's

ability to self-regulate: they may improve recovery, but if individuals do not appropriately disengage from online breaks, job performance may be hindered.

In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s and its effects on increased distance and hybrid work, Tanskanen et al. (2023) detail their findings relating to loneliness and note that "many participants missed having shared lunches and coffee breaks with others, specifically for social reasons" (p. 14). Further, the authors reported concerns for the lack of spontaneous exchanges, which some participants felt hindered their work performance (Tanskanen et al., 2023, pp. 14–15). The data for their project was collected in 2020–2021, and Tanskanen et al. (2023) note the increased importance of understanding distance and hybrid work in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 2). Further, such findings highlight the importance of studying break-taking at workplaces: chances for informal interaction are in flux as employees have more flexibility to select their working locations.

1.2   Break-taking as social interaction at the workplace

As section 1.1 has highlighted, break-taking has been studied mainly from the perspective of how it benefits both the employee and employer. However, breaks have not been extensively studied from an interactional point of view. Breaks are, in essence, a possibility for employees to set aside their work, have lunch or a cup of coffee, and sit down with others. Social interaction is a crucial part of break-taking, as the following will elaborate.

Workplaces offer different possibilities for social interaction, and people engage in both personal and professional interactions with each other. Break-time interactions are mostly casual and informal, but people also have a chance to bring up work-related issues with their coworkers. In addition to breaks, it has been shown that staff utilize corridor conversations when they are on the move in their jobs, to talk about matters relating to work and the provision of care (González-Martínez et al., 2016), but also to perform "doingokay" checks with their coworkers, which establish co-presence and contribute to collegial solidarity (González-Martínez et al., 2017). People may also have chances for informal interaction prior to work meetings: pre-meeting talk was found to positively affect the effectiveness of meetings (Allen et al., 2014) and it can aid in "establishing and maintaining social relationships so work relationships can function smoothly" (Mirivel & Tracy, 2005, p. 8). Informal interactions at workplaces, especially from an organizational point of view, have also been noted in sociological literature. For instance, Kuipers

(2009) suggests that informal trust and friendship networks may have an impact on workplace attachment, organizational internalization and identification, when they co-occur with formal authority networks. Further, Bencsik and Juhasz (2020) note that although informal information exchange in the form of gossip can have a negative influence on organizational trust, overall, formal or informal knowledge sharing is an important tool in building trust in organizations.

What is more, social interaction during breaks can establish a social glue among coworkers, as the interactions are freer in their form than those bounded by immediately preceding or following work obligations. While participants may discuss work-related issues during breaks, usually there is no impending work talk or awaiting meeting agenda (such as in the case of pre-meeting talk). Breaks could thus be considered the embodiment of free talk in the institutional context of work.

The previously mentioned studies provide some insights into informal social interaction at work. In recent years, some studies have focused on social interaction during breaks from work and it has been shown that during breaks, participants orient to the co-present encounter and display social solidarity and support in a variety of ways. Siitonen and Siromaa (2021) suggest that leaving the break room is a multifaceted social activity, which participants coordinate based on the ongoing interactional sequence, and that participants treat leaving a break as an accountable action, showing consideration for co-presence and social solidarity (p. 179). Indeed, Siitonen and Siromaa (2021) argue that there is a "sensitivity to social solidarity that determines when and how to close the break" (p. 195). Further, it has been found that when arriving on a break, participants acknowledge the presence of others and attend to break-taking in such a way that suggests break-time encounters are routinized and expected (Helisten & Siromaa, 2022). Participants also display a familiarity towards others in the break room, and skillfully manage break-relevant activities together, such as making coffee or tea (Helisten & Siromaa, 2022).

Break-time encounters are more open also in the sense that participants may introduce and discuss an array of matters. Ruopsa (2018) notes that in the workplace setting, a series of events may be *tellable* in the break room, whereas that might not be the case in other environments (such as workplace meetings), referring to situational awareness of when, to whom and where a story can be told (pp. 78–79). This highlights the different environments at workplaces; that is, a break room can be a more informal setting than a meeting space, where the institutional context of the workplace may be more pressing and thus dictate the appropriateness of talk topics. It has also been shown that while participants report in interviews that they talk about *everything* during breaks, they often delimit the

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notion of everything, which may suggest an understanding of suitable talk topics in the particular context of break-taking (Holmström et al., 2021). Indeed, participants decide on talk topics on a moment-to-moment basis during breaks, and interview participants reported that the constellation of people may also be a factor in what is talked about (Holmström et al., 2021).

Many of the studies discussed above illustrate the importance of break rooms as interactional spaces. Moreover, it has been noted that if a certain privacy from break rooms is removed and break rooms are instead located and designed to be open, this may have an effect on the formation of so-called *communities of coping* (Peteri et al., 2024, p. 16), which are characterized by informal interactions and social relations among co-workers, to find support and better cope with different circumstances relating to work (see Korczynski, 2003, p. 58). Thus, it could be argued that within institutional organizations, break rooms provide possibilities to be social and talk about different issues, and the participants also recognize it.

1.3   Research aims

By examining both naturally-occurring video data from break rooms and the participants' perspectives through interviews and observations, this dissertation aims at contributing to research on social interaction and activity during breaks from work. The dissertation provides a comprehensive picture of break-time social interaction and activity, while also considering the changing circumstances of contemporary working life. The dissertation consists of three articles that shed light on the establishment and maintenance of co-presence and social solidarity in both physical and virtual break-taking spaces. They also examine how participants orient to the material environment during breaks, and how it is intertwined with social interaction. Further, the articles discuss participants' timely displays of engagement in shared break-taking.

The dissertation explores the following research questions:

1. How do participants collaboratively construct and maintain break-taking as a social activity and build togetherness within a work community?
2. How do participants orient to the material environment in their break-time interactions?
3. In what ways do participants on breaks display their sustained orientation to the interactional situation and each other?

Through these research questions, the three articles in this dissertation aim at examining break-taking from a comprehensive perspective. The articles are ordered so that they shed light on break-taking starting from minute details and expanding to look at break-taking from a broader viewpoint. That is, Article I begins with a micro-analytic perspective of how social interaction is intertwined with the material environment in break rooms. Article II examines break-taking online, focusing on how participants build togetherness through displays of social curiosity. Then, Article III, illustrates a more general overview of break-taking with examples from naturally-occurring data and interviews, taking a mixed methods approach to data and analysis, and discusses break-taking from the viewpoint of an *informal community of practice*.

2   Research materials and methods

This dissertation utilizes data that was collected for the project *Interactional organisation of break-taking activities and social support in a changing workplace environment* (henceforth the Break project) which was carried out in 2018–2022 at the University of Oulu, Finland. Conversation analysis as a method was utilized to some degree in all three articles of the dissertation, and most notably, in Articles I and II. Article III also applies a conversation analytic view on data, but additionally, takes a mixed methods approach to study the participants' perspectives on break-taking in depth. Article III utilizes ethnographic data as well as the concepts of *community of practice* and *community of coping*, discussing break-taking as an *informal community of practice*. In this way, the notion of participants' perspectives is particularly prominent in Article III but also present in Articles I and II.

The following sections introduce the research materials and methods: 2.1 outlines the video data and the conversation analytic approach adopted to study it, and 2.2 presents the interview and observation materials and the ethnographic approach. Finally, section 2.3 discusses the ethical considerations of data collection and analysis.

2.1   Analyzing naturally-occurring social interaction

The following subsections will first discuss video data that was collected and utilized in this dissertation (section 2.1.1), and then briefly outline relevant previous research in multimodal conversation analysis (section 2.1.2), and on social interaction on virtual platforms (section 2.1.3).

2.1.1 Video data

The main source of data for the Break project as well as for this dissertation are video recordings of naturally-occurring social interaction and break-taking activities. The data amount to approximately 60 hours in total. Most of the video data, some 50 hours, was collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was collected in physical break rooms of six different work communities. A variety of equipment was used for collecting the data: at least one, typically two and up to three video cameras were used (incl. 360° camera, digital camcorders and action cameras) and, additionally, at least one separate audio recorder was used. The cameras were placed so as to capture those "interactional hotspots" where

participants gathered when on a break; the cameras were often pointed at tables and seats of various kinds and, in some cases, would also capture coffee makers and kitchenettes.

About 10 hours of the video data in the Break project was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, more specifically in the spring of 2020 and in the spring of 2021. Break spaces or meetings on the utilized virtual platforms (Zoom and Skype) were created by the participants using them. The recordings on virtual platforms were made using the software's recording function. Most of the video-mediated break data was collected in the early days of the pandemic when working remotely was still a novelty for many and the so-called "Zoom fatigue" was not yet an issue.

2.1.2 Multimodal conversation analysis

In this dissertation, shared break-taking is explored with the means of multimodal conversation analysis (henceforth CA). Through working with audio and video recordings of naturally-occurring social interactions, CA aims to "describe, analyze and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life" (Sidnell, 2010, p. 1). Conversation analysis is interested in social action as it happens in real time. Multimodality refers to the range of resources that participants have at their disposal when engaging in social interaction (such as gaze, gesture, language, and movement); participants can employ these resources to both construct and display an understanding of social interaction (Mondada, 2019).

Conversation analysis as a method derives from Erving Goffman's sociology and Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, and as an empirical method to study social interaction it was further developed by Emanuel A. Schegloff, Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson (Maynard, 2013). Some of the early works in CA dealt with the analysis of phone calls (see e.g., Schegloff, 1979): since then, phone calls and other audio recordings have been a fixture in conversation analytic research, including contexts such as telephone surveys, openings of calls between family members, and calls relating to domestic violence (see e.g., Maynard & Schaeffer, 1997; Kitzinger & Jones, 2007; Stokoe & Richardson, 2023), also reflecting the emergence of new technologies, in terms of smartphones and video-conferencing software. With the emergence of new technologies, CA has expanded to look at video recordings in a variety of contexts, and video recording naturally-occurring interactions has made it possible to study participants' multimodal conduct in co-present situations both in onsite and online settings (see subsection 2.1.3 for video-mediated interaction).

The premise of CA is that conversation is locally and sequentially organized (Stivers, 2013), and turns are the basic unit of conversation, and as participants engage in social interaction, single turns become a *turn-taking system*, which is thought of as the "underlying framework of conversation" (Sidnell, 2010, p. 36; see also Schegloff, 2007). Turns are organized in so-called adjacency pairs (consisting of a first pair part and a second pair part, such as in a question–answer sequence) and participants orient to them as such, noting, for instance, a missing answer to a question (Sidnell, 2010). Turns-at-talk and adjacency pairs accomplish certain *actions* (Schegloff, 2007; Sidnell, 2010). Indeed, conversation analysts have identified a variety of actions (for example requesting, inviting, complaining), and described the practices that accomplish the actions (Sidnell, 2013). For mutual understanding to happen and interaction to keep its course, practices must be recognizable and efficient to the participants (Sidnell, 2013); that is, each turn reflects an understanding of the previous turn (see e.g., Schegloff, 2007). Conversation overwhelmingly unfolds one speaker at a time (see Sacks et al., 1974) and as turns reach possible completions, transition relevance places occur: in these places, speaker change becomes relevant (Schegloff, 2007). Participants may self-select to speak next, or the current speaker may select a next speaker (Schegloff, 2007). Conversation is, at its core, progressive: it operates on a turn-by-turn basis, next elements reflecting the understanding of prior ones (Schegloff, 2007). Then, if intersubjectivity – the shared situational understanding achieved through verbal and embodied means (Sorjonen et al., 2021, p. 1; Linell & Lindström, 2016, p. 2) – is not achieved, participants may employ various forms of *repair* (Sacks et al., 1974) to ensure mutual understanding of the current interactional situation.

A central concept in CA is that of *participation frameworks*. The concept was introduced by Goffman (1981), who defined a participation framework as those people who have perceptual access to a spoken utterance (p. 3). People may signal their participation in an interactional situation by displaying a shared orientation with different resources, such as bodily orientation and gaze (see e.g., Goodwin, 2007). Thus, participants display their involvement in the situation and alignment with others in a variety of ways, and as Goodwin and Goodwin note, "participants work together to build social action" (2004, p. 240). Participants may also have access to multiple simultaneous participation frameworks (see e.g., Rautiainen et al., 2022), and in such situations, participants negotiate their involvement in them (for virtual and in-person participation frameworks see Holmström et al., 2022, and section 4.3 in this dissertation).

Conversation analytic research has pinpointed a number of elements through which participants can display their sustained attention to the ongoing conversation, and modify their involvements in a way that makes visible how they allocate their resources in situ. For the purposes of this dissertation, the concepts of *prebeginning, suspension* and *resumption* are most relevant. These concepts are utilized in Article I, which discusses the timely displays of involvement and intertwining of talk and drinking coffee or tea in break room encounters. In this dissertation, break-taking is considered an activity: within the overall activity of "being on a break together", participants perform a variety of ordinary social actions, such as requests for information or confirmation, which they may also modify, abandon, or suspend and resume (see e.g., Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987 for activities).

Pre-beginning elements may take place immediately before a verbal turn, such as laughter, in-breaths, cut-offs, or other perceivable elements (such as 'ums' or 'you know's'), and they can foreshadow an upcoming turn-at-talk (Schegloff, 1996). Building on Schegloff (1996), Lindström (2006) describes prebeginning speech anticipations more as non-linguistic features, such as laughter or in-breaths. Research on prebeginnings further shows that a variety of embodied or material elements can be utilized in the prebeginning position. In classroom settings, students may employ in-breaths and body movements to claim incipient speakership and establish recipiency with another participant prior to verbally initiating their turn (Mortensen, 2009). In pool skate sessions, participants' visible bodily actions in the prebeginning position may indicate to others that a skater wants to take a ride (Ivarsson & Greiffenhagen, 2015, p. 417). As a prebeginning component, a sigh can not only project upcoming talk, but also give indication to others regarding its valence (Hoey, 2014, p. 180). Streeck (2009) further notes that in the prebeginning position, people often show their stance towards their upcoming turn-at-talk (pp. 167–168). Furthermore, it has been found that in request sequences, participants orient to their surroundings and utilize materials and their bodies in prebeginnings, and make their requests at opportune moments in interaction, attempting to reach an ideal moment for the grantability of their request (Keisanen & Rauniomaa, 2012).

In navigating the two break-relevant activities of talking and drinking, participants may *suspend,* or put on hold, an ongoing action in favor of another, and then *resume,* or return to, the initial action when the situation so allows (see Helisten, 2018). Thus, the action that is suspended, is still relevant, and is only discontinued until a resumption becomes relevant (Haddington et al., 2014, p. 25). Sutinen (2014) has shown that participants make a collaborative effort to negotiate

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the conditions for resuming a previously suspended activity: indeed, participants work through a process to collaboratively close the competing activity and employ verbal and embodied means to return to the suspended activity (p. 158).

2.1.3 Social interaction on virtual platforms

In the conversation analytic tradition, researchers are interested in social interaction in various contexts, and different technology-mediated interactional contexts have been an interest of study as such technologies have developed. Luff et al. (2003) note that as participants do not share a physical location when they are interacting on virtual platforms, they operate in "fractured ecologies"; that is, actions are not produced and received in the same environment but rather through a medium, which affects the co-ordination of actions among participants. Further, Licoppe & Morel (2012) discuss the "talking head configuration" as a default mode in interaction and one that participants often orient to, which in part limits the visibility of a person to others. Wasson (2006) focuses on two interactional spaces that are available to participants in virtual meetings: their own local spaces, and the virtual meeting space. In Wasson's (2006) study, participants had no visual access to their co-interlocutors in the meeting and they were connected by phones, and in cases when they were not muted, noises from their local spaces would leak to the shared virtual space. Oittinen (2020), in turn, identifies (at least) three partly overlapping spaces that become relevant through virtual interaction, and that participants orient to and jointly create: the local space, the overall meeting space, and other adjoining spaces (pp. 22–23).

What became especially relevant for the aims of this dissertation, were the "meeting space", or the virtual space created by the participants for break-taking, and the participants' own local spaces. The latter, especially, provides a novel vantage point to the personal lives of the participants as the participants often access the common virtual space from their homes. Indeed, Harper et al. (2017) point out the different intentions behind virtual interaction that is set up for work purposes and virtual interaction for private life, and further, the implications of home and work settings for video calls (p. 7). Questions of privacy, Harper et al. (2017) note, are not so prominent at the workplace, whereas they may become visible in a video call taken from home (p. 8). While Harper et al. (2017, p. 8) suggest designing a system that displays a narrow camera slice, with the current technology, privacy can be achieved with filters and even disabling the camera and audio altogether. The virtual break-taking setting thus brings a novel dimension to interactions

between co-workers, as through their virtual encounters, they have access to their co-interlocutors' home lives.

While onsite and online interaction have differences and shape interaction in their unique ways (see e.g., Arminen et al. 2016), Stokoe et al. (2021) argue in a blog post that we should not consider in-person interaction to be the highest standard and mediated interaction always the second-best option, but rather determine what people want to accomplish, and how that is affected by the choice of modality. Further, as Arminen et al. (2016) note, the analysis should be "contextualized within the ecology of material resources available in the mediated setting at stake" (p. 302). On virtual platforms this could mean that the analyst should take into consideration what is seen (or not seen) on the screen, what is heard through speakers or headphones, and what is written in the chat, for example. In a comprehensive review of research on video-mediated interaction, Mlynář et al. (2018) point out that interaction on virtual platforms has become more prevalent and that it grants an array of possibilities for social interaction. Mlynář et al. (2018) further illustrate how previous research on participants' practices and their multimodal conduct on virtual platforms shows that participants adapt to their present circumstances: in addition to orienting to a variety of aspects on virtual calls (such as creating and maintaining a connection with their co-interlocutors), participants also take on the affordances of the virtual platform in different ways, for instance in terms of gestures (for waving, see Siitonen et al., 2022).

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the mass move to home offices, social interaction in different technology-mediated contexts gained more traction as an object of study. In conversation analytic research, video-mediated interactional encounters have been studied, for instance, between healthcare staff and patients (Seuren et al., 2024), in learning environments (Oittinen, 2024), at workplaces (Weiste et al., 2023), and in informal encounters among families, friends, and loved ones (Gan & deSouza, 2022). As taking breaks at the workplace was put on hold, some communities adopted virtual break-taking as a way to maintain informal encounters with co-workers. It has been shown that during virtual breaks from work, people often wave at the start and end of the encounter, in orientation to establishing a sense of co-presence on video-based platforms (Siitonen et al., 2022, p. 90). Such a notion highlights not only the importance of breaks and informal encounters with colleagues, but also how participants adapt to changing circumstances and establish co-presence in a new environment, with the affordances that are readily available. However, Tanskanen et al. (2023) also note that while participants in their study

considered virtual coffee and team meets to be "good and important", many felt that virtual encounters could not replace meeting workmates face-to-face (p. 15).

Concerning the spectrum of formality, social interaction during breaks is partly affected by the institutional context of work whether onsite or online. In the conversation analytic tradition, institutional interaction has been studied from different perspectives, and it has been suggested that participants' professional identities would determine whether interactions are classified as institutional, rather than the physical settings where interactions take place (Drew & Heritage, 1992, pp. 3–4). Institutional interaction has been characterized by goal-orientedness, special constraints on conversational contributions, and context-specific inferences (Heritage, 2005). Further, Sacks et al. (1974; see also Arminen, 2016) note that the constriction of turn size, order or content affect participation, and thus indicate an institutional setting. By contrast, turn size, order or their content are not similarly affected by the context in ordinary conversation (Sacks et al., 1974; Arminen, 2016). While breaks are taken in a generally goal-oriented professional environment, they do not have a specific agenda similar to work meetings, for example. The institutional context may be reflected, for instance, in the time and space allotted for break-taking as well as, in some respects, in the content of break interactions. It is also worth noting that while organizing opportunities to take breaks may be legally mandated and taking breaks may be highly recommended, the activity itself is voluntary and the specific form it takes on a given occasion is not determined by the institutional setting alone.

2.2 Understanding the participants' perspectives

The following subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 outline, respectively, the interviews and observations collected for this dissertation, and the approach that utilizes an ethnographic method alongside a CA-informed approach to data.

2.2.1 Interviews and observations

Interviews were included as a part of data for this dissertation, as it was deemed relevant to understand how participants themselves verbalize their break-taking practices and experiences. During the first round of interviews, an invitation was extended to select members of work communities who were known to attend shared breaks, with the thought that these key members could share insights about break-taking in their respective communities. In the second round, an invitation to

participate in the interviews was extended to the entire community where video data was also being collected. In the third round, an invitation was again extended to select members of a break-taking community. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with members of different communities.

The interviews were video recorded and lasted approximately an hour each. The interviews were semi-structured, and the aim was to discuss a variety of aspects relating to shared break-taking at work. The interviews were conducted by the author, and another member of the Break project was present for one of the interviews. The aim was to encourage free conversation, while also covering the topic of break-taking from various angles.

To complement the interviews and give the participants an opportunity to structure their thoughts regarding break-taking prior to the interview, a photo-elicitation method was utilized (see Bowling et al., 2017; Cooper, 2017; Shortt & Warren, 2012). The interview participants were asked to take 3–6 photographs of aspects that they considered significant in break-taking. All interview participants were given the opportunity to take photographs, and eight of the ten participants decided to do so as part of the interview process. The participants were asked to send the photographs to the interviewer via email prior to the interviews, and the photographs were then printed for the interview, to be discussed and used as props. During the interview, the participants had access to the photographs, as well as markers, colored pens, Post-its and colorful papers, and in the beginning of the interview the participants were instructed to use the different materials as they saw fit. After introductory remarks, the interview began with a request that the interviewee describe the photographs they took, setting the interview situation into motion. During the interviews, participants engaged with the photographs to different degrees: some discussed their content, and some engaged more, for example by drawing on the photographs. The participants had taken many kinds of photographs that they associated with breaks, such as photographs of coffee cups, other people, a clock on the wall, and snacks.

The fact that the participants took photographs, discussed them and the different aspects of break-taking during the interviews shows that break-taking can be considered as an established habit that can be visually represented and reconstructed in photographs. Through the photographs the participants were able to visually represent different matters relating to breaks, and to metaphorically conceptualize the importance of people by representing them through photographed coffee cups, for example. Such an approach shows the interviewees' consideration for the privacy of other members of their work communities, and

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instead of highlighting the company of specific participants, it brings forth the importance of company during breaks in general.

All in all, the aim of the photo-elicitation technique was to draw the participants' attention to the subject matter of the study, to encourage them to prepare for the interview and to start exploring meanings and behaviors related to break-taking in advance. Utilizing such a technique appears to have created an extra layer of meaning to the interviews and given the possibility to both the interviewees and interviewer to conceptualize break-taking through the participants' photographs.

For this dissertation project, ethnographic notes were collected during breaks to better understand break-taking in different communities. More specifically, they enable the consideration of how break-taking is integrated into the working day, and of how breaks provide an important possibility for employees to have an informal encounter during the day. Notes were also collected to find ideas for potential avenues of study, and aid in the analysis of other forms of data. While ethnographic notes are not explicitly referenced in this dissertation, they form a backdrop for and are utilized in the analyses.

2.2.2 Ethnographic data and a CA-informed approach

Interviews were included in this dissertation to learn about the participants' perspectives regarding shared break-taking at the workplace. Article III, in particular, takes a data-driven ethnographic approach informed by conversation analysis, to identify elements from the interviews that participants report as important in break-taking and to discuss those elements in connection to sequences of naturally-occurring interactions, where participants raise issues that relate to the elements brought up by interview participants. In this way, interview participants provide further information on the social backdrop of breaks: in Article III, this provided a novel perspective into understanding how participants create and maintain break-taking.

As Rawls and Lynch (2024) note, ethnographic methods have long been used by ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts, for instance, to gain information about the setting, participants, their relationships, and the like. Maynard (2003) notes that "[e]thnographic data, including narratives about everyday life, can be helpful in providing access to inner experience and its relation to behavior and conduct" (p. 83). However, Maynard (2003, p. 69) emphasizes the significance of ethnographic data in further explaining the circumstances of utterances as an addition to sequential analysis, a notion also discussed by Lehtinen

(2002). Moreover, utilizing participants' commentaries as additional information on data, Pomerantz (2005) suggests that they may have value for the analysis, for instance when looking for an interactional phenomenon for closer analysis (p. 112). However, combining ethnographic methods with conversation analysis has been the subject of some critique, as Potter and Hepburn (2005) make a case for the careful consideration of how to present and utilize interview data: for instance, they suggest that interviews should be analyzed as interactional events, and the role of the interviewer should be visible.

Despite the critique, exploring both ethnographic and conversation analytic data can provide further insights into break-taking, beyond the sequential interactions, and are thus worth looking into (see Holmström et al., 2021). Indeed, it is argued here that while interviews as a method to collect data are not the same as video-recorded, naturally-occurring interactions, they have a place in eliciting participants' stories (for oral history interviews, see e.g., Mlynář, 2020). For instance, Lindholm (2016), has emphasized the possibilities for ethnographic and conversation analytic data to complement each other and points out that understanding the context is especially important in institutional settings. Moreover, ethnographic methods have previously been adopted alongside multimodal conversation analytic methods in hospital settings (González-Martínez et al., 2016), and dementia care units (Chatwin et al., 2022). In the hospital setting, González-Martinez et al. (2016) suggest that observations made prior to recording video data were utilized in determining that the staff behaved naturally in the video-recorded data (p. 530). Further, Moerman (1996) has advocated for understanding the context when studying interaction, stating that "[e]very context is multi-layered: conversation-sequential, linguistic, embedded in the present scene, encrusted with past meanings, and more" (p. 7). Ethnographic data can also be useful in understanding and depicting a culture from the perspective of its members (Lindholm, 2016, p. 347).

In addition, Zinken and Borek (2012) have discussed the combination of conversation analysis and ethnography, arguing for the priorization of either one in the analysis, the authors themselves leaning to prioritize conversation analysis. Zinken and Borek (2012) further suggest that analysing both participants' experiences and their interactional conduct can bring forth different dimensions of the studied phenomenon, and help to "gain a understanding of an interactional practice with a scope that goes beyond a particular setting" (p. 110).

It is argued here that both conversation analytic and ethnographic data can complement each other, and provide a rich perspective on the phenomenon of

break-taking. While conversation analytic data provides access to interaction on a moment-to-moment basis, and allows for the examination of the micro details in interaction, ethnographic data can set the context, and provide a broader perspective to the matter at hand. Interviews further provide a chance for the participants to verbalize their experiences.

In Article III, break-taking is considered an *informal community of practice*, a concept which is utilized in reference to a *community of practice* (see Wenger, 2000), while also sharing features with *communities of coping* (see e.g., Korczynski, 2003; Stroebaek, 2013). Communities of practice are described as social learning systems with three basic dimensions: domain, community and practice (Snyder & Wenger, 2010, p. 110). Revolving around a shared interest, communities of practice rely on engagement, and provide opportunities to learn, share ideas and knowledge in a community (Snyder & Wenger, 2010). Communities of coping, on the other hand, refer to such informal networks at workplaces that provide social possibilities and resources to cope, for instance with the demands of work (see Korczynski, 2003; Stroebaek, 2013). These concepts are utilized in Article III, which takes a mixed methods approach to understanding community-building during breaks.

As Article III adopts a mixed methods approach to examine break-taking, and the co-occurrence of similar issues in both the conversation analytic and ethnographic data was thought to provide a rich description of different dimensions of break-taking, as the matters interview participants reported on were also visible in the conversation analytic data. Such a co-occurrence provided a multifaceted look into different aspects of community in break-taking, and how participants create and maintain it in and through interaction.

2.3   Ethical considerations

The data utilized in this dissertation consists of video recordings of naturally occurring interactions in physical and virtual break rooms (approximately 60 hours from six break rooms), as well as ethnographic data (10 video-recorded interviews, and observations collected between 2018–2020). Participants were asked to sign consent forms stating that they allow the researchers to use the video-recorded data for research and teaching purposes. About one to three breaks were recorded during one day, usually on several consecutive days in a given work community. On such occasions, the participants were informed that signing the consent form once was sufficient. All members of work communities were encouraged to use their break

room as usual, and the recordings were later edited to cut out any segments including people who did not wish to participate in the study.

In the case of virtual breaks recorded on Zoom, participants were provided with a link to a specifically created Zoom room, and they were informed that these sessions would be recorded for research purposes. They were further informed that by participating in the recorded breaks, they would signal their willingness for the recordings to be used for research purposes. Data was also collected from Skype interactions, and the participants were asked to sign consent forms. Interview participants also signed separate consent forms, designed for the interviews.

Research and the processing of the data in the project was based on participants' consent, and the data has been collected, managed, and analyzed according to Finnish legislation and guidelines for responsible conduct of research and the EU General Data Protection Regulation. Personal data of the participants is treated ethically and respectfully. The data is stored securely, and participants' identities are protected: for research publications, measures are taken to prevent identification by referring to participants with pseudonyms, and displaying screen captures of video with a filter.

3   Research contribution

The articles in this dissertation seek to provide a multifaceted picture of break-taking. The previous sections have shed light on different aspects of break-taking at work as an everyday phenomenon and on the analytical starting points of this dissertation. The following will outline the research output of the dissertation. The first article, *Preparing to talk in workplace break interaction: Withdrawing a coffee cup from the lips as a prebeginning*, focuses on in-person breaks and studies how people intertwine the two break-relevant activities of drinking and talking. The second article, *Zooming in on a frame: Collectively focusing on a co-participant's person or surroundings in video-mediated interaction*, in turn, examines break-taking on virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic and illustrates how co-presence is created through social curiosity. Finally, the third article, *Break-taking as an informal community of practice*, looks at break-taking from the perspective of an informal community of practice and sheds light on the different qualities of breaks in drawing people to the workplace and bringing people together.

3.1   Article I: Preparing to talk in workplace break interaction: Withdrawing a coffee cup from the lips as a prebeginning

Article I in this dissertation focuses on the question of how participants manage two break-relevant involvements, talking and drinking, while they are on a break. More specifically, the article sheds light on situations where participants, on a moment-to-moment basis, reconsider and reallocate their resources as they withdraw a cup from their lips and suspend drinking to talk instead. The break room as a context provides a fruitful setting for studying such a phenomenon, as people often take breaks together and sit down for a while and drink coffee or tea, thus providing opportunities to study how the participants fit together talking and drinking.

Article I examines cases where there are at least two participants in the break room, who are having a cup of coffee or tea. The focus is on how participants may suspend ongoing drinking and, instead, initiate a request for information or confirmation. In these cases, the participant visibly withdraws the cup from their lips after the preparatory phase of drinking, and the withdrawal becomes to constitute a prebeginning as it is followed by a verbal turn. The cases consist of instances where a participant has lifted their cup either from the table or a holding position in the hands and suspends ongoing drinking to produce a sequence-

initiating turn-at-talk instead of continuing with the ongoing drinking. More specifically, a participant suspends drinking to make a request for confirmation or information and directs their request to a specific co-participant. The requests come in different forms, but the analysis shows that they are made relevant in the interactional situation and in different sequential positions. The requests are treated as requiring a response, and the recipients do not treat the requests as problematic. Moreover, the requests are not overly mitigated, nor do they happen 'disproportionally' late in conversation.

The analysis in Article I is divided into three sections: the first two subsections discuss cases based on the length of the suspension (brief suspension and resuming drinking at a later point in the interaction), and the third subsection presents a contrastive case where a participant advances and retracts drinking action, before moving on with drinking. The first subsection takes a closer look at two excerpts where a participant suspends drinking, withdraws the cup from their lips, initiates a request for information or confirmation and resumes drinking after a relatively brief hold. It is notable that in these cases, the requests deal with matters that the recipient has personal access to. The second subsection, then, includes excerpts where the suspending participant resumes drinking at a later point in the interaction. In these cases, the requests are of a more general nature and relate to matters that also others than the intended recipient may have access to. The last subsection presents an example where a participant advances and retracts her drinking action, while visibly monitoring the ongoing interaction. Such drinking advancements and retractions can indicate that a participant is considering whether to take a turn or to continue drinking. In the studied case, the participant eventually moves on with drinking, displaying her careful monitoring of the situation. Further, the last case shows that not all suspensions of drinking eventually constitute a prebeginning, if they are not immediately followed by a turn-at-talk.

Indeed, the article shows that participants monitor the ongoing interactional situation closely and take opportunities to talk when they are still relevant for the interaction. Suspending drinking also shows situational sensitivity and forecloses the opportunity of another talk topic coming up for the moment. That, in part, shows that participants have an understanding of when to make their verbal contributions to talk, so that they are still relevant. Further, the analysis shows that participants orient to progressing the conversation, as their requests invite a response from a co-participant. Article I also illustrates that participants employ different linguistic resources to connect their requests to ongoing talk, such as turn-initial discourse markers. By referring to prior talk, they are also marking them as relevant

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contributions to the conversation that is ongoing. Further, the participants contribute to the progression of interaction by assigning next turns to specific recipients. The examples in the article show that these recipients have access to certain information, and thus have relevant epistemic statuses. The requests invite the recipients to elaborate on a single word or multiple prior turns: in one example, other people than the intended recipient also weighs in on the matter at hand.

The examples in Article I show that, in some cases, participants resume drinking soon after they have made the request and, in others, at a later point in the interaction. In two of the examples, where participants resume drinking soon after the suspension, the requests they made also provide a chance for them to take a sip while the recipient is talking. It is argued in the article that if the cup is moved a short distance from the lips, the participant can resume drinking faster. This may also be reflected in how the participant sees the upcoming response: if the participant is expecting a short, uncomplicated answer, they may return to drinking sooner than if they are anticipating a more complex response. In the latter case, the participant may project a need to further participate and may move their cup further. Participants also hold their cups in various places in relation to their bodies. Their drinking trajectory may begin from the table or from a holding position in the hands (above the table), and during the suspensions, participants may move the cups a few centimeters from their lips, or to a provisional home position approximately halfway between their lips and the table. In two examples, the participants even put the cups on the table while the issue that they raised was still being clarified. In one of these cases, a participant needed to free his hands for gesticulation, to better illustrate the point he was making. Withdrawing a coffee cup from the lips can indicate to other participants that something else than drinking is coming. The analyzed excerpts show that in some cases the withdrawal of the cup appears to be in the other participants' line of sight, but it does not elicit a visible reaction. Coffee or teacups are thus considered to be "crucial semiotic artefacts" (Goodwin, 2000, p. 1505) in break room interactions.

The article shows that drinking is made social in interaction, and that participants may take turns as opportunities arise, and sometimes suspend an already ongoing drinking trajectory in favor of talk. Suspending ongoing drinking, taking a turn and selecting a next speaker suggests that participants actively monitor the ongoing interaction, and as they make a move to initiate a request for confirmation or information, they indicate that social interaction is the relevant activity in that moment. Moreover, the analysis sheds light on how participants skillfully manage talking and drinking, which are both break-relevant involvements:

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they monitor how the conversation unfolds and take turns at opportune moments. The analysis shows that sometimes it requires the reconsideration and reallocation of their current resources, if they have begun drinking. When allocating next turns to fellow participants, participants mobilize a variety of ways to make room for talk and invite a response, such as gaze, gesture, and different linguistic resources. During breaks, participants monitor the social situation continuously and adjust their actions as necessary. The examples show that participants also orient to conversation as relevant next, when they, instead of continuing with drinking, produce turns-at-talk. The urgent need to make a request in these moments also highlights its relevancy in the moment. The timing of drinking is made social in break encounters, as participants reconsider and reallocate their resources by withdrawing the cup from their lips when a turn-at-talk becomes relevant.

3.2 Article II: Zooming in on a frame: Collectively focusing on a co-participant's person or surroundings in video-mediated interaction

Article II sets out to explore virtual breaks amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic and focuses on the complex multimodal and spatial dimensions of breaks. More specifically, the article studies the characteristics related to sensorial experiences and intermediality, elements that appear in the data and are made salient by the participants. The article shows that during virtual breaks from work participants, in a way, "zoom in" and focus on the happenings of a certain participant's frame, contributing to the maintenance of co-presence and inclusion in uncertain times. The article examines cases where participants' sensorial experiences of what is happening on the screen prompts them to make comments regarding others' looks, living arrangements, happenings in their homes, and the virtual background images on other participants' screens. In this way, participants are making note of and tapping into others' lives behind the screens: such comments bring depth to the video-mediated encounters, as participants move beyond the two-dimensional "face wall" (Hochuli, 2021).

Instances where participants make note of what is happening on or behind others' screens are analyzed in Article II as displays of social curiosity: through social curiosity, participants actively work towards acquiring (new) social information and knowledge of others (Hartung, 2020; Renner, 2006). Such actions can promote interpersonal relations within a community, and people may also manage their social connections with others in this way. The data examined in the

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article features participants who may know each other from before, and thus it can be argued that their displays of social curiosity may strengthen existing interpersonal ties. Such instances also shed light on participants' showing interest in others and, further, displaying their existing knowledge of others' personal lives.

The article contributes to the understanding of how social intimacy and co-presence are created on a virtual platform, amidst a global pandemic. The uncertain situation was detectable in the collected data, as people discussed the new normal and their new routines. When people were asked to reduce the number of social contacts to keep the pandemic under control, possibilities for onsite interactions were greatly reduced for many. In such situation, video-mediated breaks provided opportunities not only to interact with others but also, as the new situation may have felt surreal, to be reassured by the presence of certain 'signs of life' visible on the virtual platform.

The analysis in Article II is arranged in two subsections. The first subsection explores cases where participants respond to visual and auditory cues in their co-participants' local spaces. The examples show how participants take note of visual and auditory cues relating to others' backgrounds, including for instance pets, family members or another's home itself. The second subsection focuses on examples of participants responding to cues that are visible on the screen, such as how a participant appears on camera to others or what image they have chosen as their virtual background. Examples in the article are considered as displays of social curiosity, and participants are shown to acquire and display social information about others through such exchanges, which thus promote and maintain interpersonal relationships. In this way, participants can also be seen to manage their social connections within their work community. As the participants in the data may know each other from before, such instances of social curiosity may strengthen existing social ties and create co-presence.

Prior to COVID-19 and the increase in distance working, taking breaks did not usually mean having visual and auditory access to the homes of one's workmates. Meeting others on video-mediated platforms, then, provides a novel dimension to break-taking, and participants can witness 'in the flesh' those people or pets from home that may have earlier been discussed during breaks at the workplace. During virtual breaks, participants naturally have the option of using filters or muting their audio and thus to decide what parts of their home life they wish to display to others. However, sometimes a family member or a pet makes a visible entrance, or even an auditory one, which provides opportunities for participants to show that they are 'in the know' about various aspects of others' lives, creating and maintaining

togetherness and social intimacy. As the article notes, virtual breaks allow for a certain "sense of being there for and with others", in uncertain times.

3.3 Article III: Break-taking as an informal community of practice

Article III in this dissertation explores break-taking from the perspective of an informal community of practice, considering break-taking as a "continuous act of social mutuality" (Neal et al., 2019, p. 82). The article discusses different elements in break-taking and aims at shedding light on how they are created and maintained in and through interaction. The data examined in the article was recorded before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it therefore reflects the break-taking habits of when in-person breaks at the workplace were the default option.

The analysis in the article is divided into three subsections: shared interest and space, participants in a break-taking community, and mutual engagements facilitating break-taking. The first subsection sheds light on the spatio-material and socio-cultural context of break-taking by, on the one hand, examining how interview participants view the break-taking facilities at their workplace and how they report on passing on the information about break-taking routines of the work community to newcomers, and, on the other hand, discussing an example from the video data of how participants talk about not seeing their new workmates in the break room. The second subsection explores in greater depth the significance that social interaction with others has for participants. The subsection presents examples where interviewees tell about the importance of other people and of the possibility of talking about a variety of personal and professional matters during breaks as well as examples from the video data in one of which a participant decides to stay on a break because others are joining her, and in another of which a participant comes to the break room to ask for help in a work matter. Finally, the third subsection in Article III discusses different habits that participants have created to facilitate break-taking, such as remembering to bring coffee to share with others. The analysis illustrates that the participants position themselves as members of break-taking communities and as experts in the topic of break-taking. They do this by orienting to the previously mentioned elements in the interviews and, further, by discussing them during break-time encounters with their coworkers. The participants appear to also value taking breaks together with others, and the analysis shows that in some communities, members have decided to facilitate break-taking by taking turns in buying coffee, for instance. Participants also discuss these

practices relating to the material world of breaks, as well as informing new members of the communities about shared break-taking, during their breaks.

Break-taking shares elements with communities of practice and communities of coping. Without having a set activity or agenda that communities of practice have, shared breaks provide opportunities in terms of information flow, social interaction, distancing from work and connecting with fellow employees. They also facilitate coping with personal and professional matters by providing possibilities to connect with people on different levels as well as to give and receive support from others. Further, an important aspect of break-taking is connecting with people who may share similar values or interests, which can increase social well-being. At its core, break-taking at work enables the emergence of informal communities of practice, concerning the participants of the break-taking community and their shared interests and engagements in a shared space. All of these elements are connected with social interaction, as participants do the work of creating and maintaining break-taking in and through interaction.

By examining data collected before the COVID-19 pandemic a few years after the pandemic, Article III provides a reflective commentary on changes in the working culture. The drastic increase in distance working and the simultaneous decrease in opportunities to engage in social interaction in person, led some work communities to opt for taking shared breaks virtually, which allowed people to stay in touch and maintain informal connections with their coworkers. The change in working and break-taking conditions was impossible to predict, and, after the pandemic, some workers have continued working remotely. Article III contributes to an understanding of why break-taking may be important socially, and it can thus provide insights into how to facilitate break-taking in the present-day working climate and, perhaps, how to entice workers to come back to the office. In other words, the article aims at bringing forth a new perspective on break-taking, which could be taken into consideration when trying to understand the value of shared break-taking at the workplace and the kind of possibilities it offers.

4 Break-taking as a collaboratively constructed, situated social activity

To set the scene for presenting the common themes of the articles in this dissertation, it is useful to offer a description of a **typical break scenario** in the data, with all the details and behaviours included. Beginning with onsite breaks, as people prepare to leave for a break, they set aside their work duties and physically move to the shared break room. In the data, break times have formed over a (long) period of time, through common practice. Thus, it is likely that company will be present if a participant goes to the break room at a specific time. Participants may sometimes agree with each other to take a break at a certain time. While information about breaks and the location of the break room is often verbally relayed to new employees, participants may also instruct others about the break-taking habits of a community through common practice that has formed over time.

Break-taking spaces in the data are provided by the employer, and they feature a variety of items, such as tables and sofas, and facilities for making coffee and tea and storing and heating up lunch. Participants may also bring their own material objects to the break room: mostly they bring their own cups, which can be stored either in the break room or at the participants' work stations. In some communities and break-taking spaces, employers have provided a coffee machine or a maker; however, the data shows that participants also have shared agreements relating to the procuring of coffee, tea, and milk.

When participants enter the break room, they may acknowledge others with a subdued greeting, which suggests that they treat break-taking as an everyday activity (Helisten & Siromaa, 2022). Upon arrival in the break room, participants orient to "break talk", such as inquiring whether the coffee maker is brewing or if the kettle is on, as well as the presence or absence of others, relating it to potential ongoing events. Participants position themselves to take a break, as they take coffee or tea, sit down, put their belongings on the table, and engage in conversation with others. The data shows that during breaks, participants discuss a variety of matters, both personal and professional. Interview participants reported talking about "everything"; however, they then proceeded to delimit the notion of everything, which may suggest that they consider what is a suitable talk topic, also depending on the company (see Holmström et al. 2021). Talk topics may reflect the days' news, tellings of personal events, work talk on occasion, et cetera.

When participants are ready to leave the break room, they make it visible to others in some way: they drink the last bit of coffee, collect their belongings and

announce their departure to others, perhaps citing work obligations as a reason for their departure (Siitonen & Siromaa, 2021). Participants may leave mid-break, or they may collectively close the break, and everyone who is present leaves. An important aspect relating to break-taking is that it is often treated as a recurring event, and thus participants do not extend elaborate goodbyes to their counterparts, but rather orient to it as a mundane encounter, and expect that they will meet again soon. In addition, participants also provide accounts for longer, foreseen absences.

Video-mediated breaks, then, present a slightly different setting. In the data, participants themselves created spaces in Zoom and Skype to meet for coffee or lunch with others. Time for these meetings was set, and while the physical aspect of arriving and departing from a break room was different online, participants seemed to make up for it in embodied ways, namely waving (see Siitonen et al. 2022). While a central aspect of break-taking, making coffee together, was missing during video-mediated breaks, participants nevertheless had the chance to get together in an informal way, and keep in touch with each other. Thus, the constitutive aspects of break-taking appear to be the movement from work station to an assigned break room during specific, agreed upon times, the expectation to participate, participating in break-relevant activities and talking with fellow break takers.

With this description in mind, three common themes emerge in the research data: the establishment and maintenance of co-presence in both in-person and virtual break interactions, the affordances created by the present material environment and how that material environment is made social, and timely displays of engagement in shared break-taking. This section sheds light on these key themes and illustrates them through data examples. Section 5.1 discusses how co-presence is created and maintained during breaks from work, and how co-participants show social solidarity and support to each other. Section 5.2, in turn, explores the affordances created by the material environment and objects in break rooms, and their impact on social interaction and a sense of togetherness. Finally, section 5.3 looks at timely displays of engagement in break-time encounters, and at how, by displaying an understanding of different matters relating to break-taking, participants are actively participating and renewing break-taking.

Data examples in the following subsections have been transcribed, to relevant degree, according to Jefferson (2004) and Mondada (2018), which allows the depiction of both talk and multimodal conduct (see Appendix 1 for transcription symbols). Excerpts, or parts thereof, have been translated into English when necessary.

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4.1   Co-presence and displays of social solidarity and support

The articles in this dissertation discuss a variety of ways in which participants orient to co-presence during breaks and display social solidarity to each other. Article I presents situations where participants orient to the shared encounter and display their sustained connection to it by modifying drinking in relation to talking. Further, Article II sheds light on how participants orient to the co-present situation on virtual platforms and pay attention to what happens on others' backgrounds. Finally, Article III discusses break-taking from the perspective of an informal community of practice and shows how co-presence is created and maintained in different ways.

As the previous sections have highlighted, social interaction is a crucial part of break-time encounters. In a co-present encounter, participants share a space with others in a way that allows them to monitor each other and be held accountable for their actions (Goffman, 1964). The data examined in this dissertation shows that participants orient to co-presence as an integral part of shared break-taking and to time in a shared space as an opportunity to talk about a variety of topics and get to know members of the work community at a more informal level.

The following excerpt from the video data illustrates such participant orientations. In Example 1, three women are sitting in the break room. The beginning of their encounter and the subsequent discussion on who is going to stay on the break has been analyzed elsewhere (Article III). Before the excerpt shown here, the participants have been talking about shopping for a while, and the excerpt is in effect a part of a *story round* (Niemelä, 2011): the participants have shared similar, parallel stories relating to the topic of extra sales (see also Tannen, 2005; for second stories see Arminen, 2004). The break room offers favorable conditions for story rounds to develop, as people sit together for a while and often share stories and anecdotes from their lives. Further, displays of *affiliation* (Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013) often occur amidst storytelling (Stevanović & Lindholm, 2016, p. 286), as is also the case in the following.

Example 1. "Täti won't put such things on"
```
01 VEE: joo (.) mua ärsyttää se ku mua joskus semmonen oikeesti mua
           yeah       I'm annoyed that when I'm sometimes like
02       silleen niinkö että mun tekis vaan mieli ostaa joskus
           I'm like I'd sometimes just like to buy
03       jotakin koska myy- jos on kiva myyjä,
           something because the sal- if the salesperson is nice
04 EMM: mm[m ]
05 VEE:   [ni]in sitte on aivan silleen niinku tsk (0.2) et emmä nyt kyl
             and then ((I'm)) just like I don't really
06       tarvi mut toi (myy tän myydään) mulle kohta oi[keesti]
```

```
                            need it but (they will) sell this to me soon for real
07 EMM:                                                              [mmm    ]
08 VEE: (ko niinko). (2.0) mut ethhh (.) ei pitäisi langeta sellaisiin
        (I mean like) but that one shouldn't fall for that kind of
09      varsinkaan sitten kun alkaa ehdotella kaikkea lisää (että).
        especially when they start suggesting something more (that)
10      (1.2)
11 EMM: hjoo.
        yeah
12      (1.0)
13 VEE: lisämyynt[iä].
        extra sales
14 EMM:          [se] oli musta hämmentävä (1.0) sillon vuosia sitte
                  I thought it was confusing when years ago
15      mä en tiä harrastetaanko sitä vielä (.) ((kauppa)) mut tosiaan
        I don't know if they still do it at ((store)) but like
16      olin ostamassa niitä (.) semmosia perustrikoo§paitoja§ vaan
        I was buying those like basic tricot shirts only a kind of a
    san                                           §nodding§
17 EMM: [semmo]sen satsin, nii sit siinä se myyjä (.) semmonen nuori
        batch and then there the salesperson a kind of a young
18 SAN: [mmm. ]
19 EMM: ↑mies, (.) samalla ko se ottaa sitä niinku rahaa vastaan,
        man at the same time he was taking the money
20 VEE: joo
        yeah
21 EMM: niin (siinä on sitte) m+eillä ois myös tämmösiä ↑leggingsejä
        then (there's like) we also have these leggings
                              +makes a showing gesture to r.-->
22      tässä niinku tarjouksessa.
        here like on sale
23 SAN: aina on jotaki
        there's always something
24      kaik[kea aina mitä täytyy täytyy tyrkyttää      ]
        all kinds of things that they need to need to push on you
25 EMM:     [niin niin tavallaan (.) niin siitä ti+skil]tä
                                     yeah yeah like sort of selling from the counter like
                                           -->+continues to motion
        with r. hand
26 EMM: niin[kun   ]
        like
27 SAN:     [§niin§]
             yeah
            §nodding§
28 EMM: niinku m+yi j+a [sitte] mää olin vaan silleen että (0.1) että
          like selling and I was just like
        -->+    +crosses arms to chest-->
29 VEE:                 [joo. ]
                         yeah
30      joo niinku minä en mitään leg#gingsejä julkisesti käytä ne on
        yeah right like I am not wearing leggings in public they are
                                    #Fig1
31      kalsareita niinku. [ha ha ha ]
        long johns like ha ha ha
32 SAN:                    [sannoiksä] sille ha ha
                           did you say that to him ha ha
33 ((laughter by all))
34 EMM: täti ei laita semmosia päällensä niinku.
        täti won't put such things on like
35 VEE: (°jo+o°)
```

50

```
              yeah
    emm        +uncrosses arms-->>
```
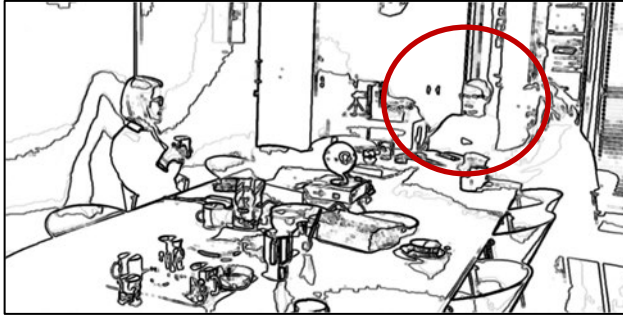

Fig. 1. Emma has her arms crossed as she tells the others that she does not wear leggings in public.

Before the excerpt, Veera, Emma and Sanna (from left to right in Figure 1) have discussed shopping. At the beginning of the excerpt, Veera is telling the others about her experiences of "falling for extra sales" (lines 1–13), referring to a tactic that salespeople use when attempting to convince customers to buy something extra, for example as they reach the cash register. Veera is communicating her negative attitude towards extra sales, which may prompt Emma to tell about her experience in the form of a complaint, an affiliative response to Veera's prior telling (see Pillet-Shore, 2015). When telling complaint stories, affiliating turns are often the next relevant actions (see Pillet-Shore, 2015).

As Emma begins her telling, she first displays her stance towards the incident, describing it as 'confusing' (*hämmentävä*), and continues by telling the others that she was buying a batch of basic tricot shirts, further setting the scene of her visit to the shop (lines 14–17). Emma's report of how she perceived the event suggests that she is framing the story in a specific manner in this context where the group has shared experiences of extra sales, placing the story in the current interactional context (see e.g., Jefferson, 1978, p. 224). Sanna and Veera align as recipients to Emma's telling, producing continuers ('mmm' and 'yeah', lines 18 and 20). Then, Emma's telling reaches its high point: she tells the others how at the register, the salesperson (a young man) informed Emma that they have leggings on sale (lines 17–22). To this, Sanna produces an affiliative turn, 'there's always something they need to push on you' (lines 23–24), indicating that she has similar experiences. Sanna also displays a shared stance (Siromaa, 2012) with Emma, as she describes

the activity with the verb *tyrkyttää* 'to push (on you)', conveying a negative attitude towards selling additional items to customers.

Emma then continues her telling by reporting to her co-interlocutors that she 'was just like yeah right like I am not wearing leggings in public they are long johns' (lines 28–31), eliciting laughter from Sanna. At the beginning of her turn, and perhaps to emphasize her storytelling mode, Emma lifts her arms up and crosses them at her chest (as seen in Figure 1), further conveying her negative attitude towards the issue. Sanna continues with a question, 'did you say that to him', in jocular disbelief (line 32), which sparks more laughter in the group. Emma, Veera and Saara show affiliation and social solidarity to each other, by sharing their experiences on extra sales, producing turns that show their alignment to the teller, by commiserating on the issue together, and also laughing at Emma's story.

Emma makes a closing remark on line 34, saying that 'täti won't put such things on like'. Emma's remark can also be considered in contrast to her previous statement of being in the shop to buy basic tricot shirts. Emma emphasizes the fact that she was buying sensible clothes when someone tried to sell her leggings, which she regards underwear, to be worn in public. Problematizing the wearing of leggings and calling them underwear appears as work to establish a certain sense of style. The Finnish word *täti* can be translated as 'aunt', but it is also used when talking to children to refer to unknown, often older, women (cf. English *lady*). It may be that *täti* is here used to highlight the age difference between Emma and the salesperson, who is reportedly a young man, but it further emphasizes the point of what is age-appropriate wear. In her telling, Emma constructs a contrast between a young man who is selling leggings and a self-proclaimed *täti* who seems to engage in self-policing: she knows the "limits" and does not wear underwear in public, even if a representative of a clothing store might categorize her as someone for whom such attire is appropriate. Following Emma's telling, Veera offers her opinion on the sales activities that took place and contests the idea of the young man selling leggings to Emma particularly (data now shown). Veera thus de-personifies the action and offers an explanation that makes the issue of extra sales wider than just the looks and age of one individual.

In sum, in keeping with the findings of Article I of this dissertation, Emma's storytelling and other participants' responses show how they maintain their connection and engagement in the shared activity of an informal break. Moreover, although this example is set in a physical environment, the principles of attending to the immediate environment and other participants' actions is parallel to what is presented in Article II of this dissertation. The participants' shared experiences

reflect their engagement with the present interactional situation, similarly to how participants would interact in a virtual setting. Finally, in line with Article III, the affiliative turns and shared stances illustrate how the participants create and maintain a sense of community and solidarity in their informal encounter during a break.

The previous Example 1 of mid-break storytelling sheds light on the typical nature of break talk in the 'middle part' of a coffee break: participants are seated in the break room with their coffees, and story rounds are taking place. Here, three break-takers are discussing their experiences relating to shopping and extra sales, which illustrates talking about "everything" as a meaningful part of break-taking. The example also shows that during breaks, participants may also negotiate norms and expectations related to, for instance, clothing and age (see also Holmström et al. 2021). Nissi and Pässilä (2022) noted that within professional mentoring networks "storytelling […] also contributes to building broader social processes" (p. 29). In a setting such as the workplace, a community which people often do not get to choose, but rather end up in, break-talk can create a sense of togetherness, participants can share different experiences and display social solidarity to each other, as shown in Example 1. With conversations concerning clothing, for instance, participants also take part in creating and renewing norms in the society. Further, the dynamic between these specific participants may also reflect on the tellability of stories.

4.2 Objects and the material environment as resources for break-taking

As noted in previous sections, both talking and drinking are break-relevant activities, and they have an impact on each other as they require the use of the same resources. Overall, the paraphernalia of the break room are a constitutive part of the break-taking actitivity at the workplace. Article I indeed shows that coffee cups have a significant situational and material role in break-time interactions, but as the following shows, they can also reflect the participants' views of the break room. Further, the break-taking space itself is a material environment, through which participants may gain access to their co-interlocutors' personal spaces (see Article II), and in which they can create and maintain shared break-taking (Article III). Affordances (such as coffee cups in the break room or the virtual space created for break-taking) are defined as anything that is available to participants in their perceptual range (see Hutchby, 2001; Hutchby, 2014; Gibson, 2015). Further,

affordances are functional, as they enable or constrain engagement in an activity, shaping its conditions; affordances are also relational, which refers to how they may differ between contexts (see Hutchby, 2001; Hutchby, 2014; Gibson, 2015). The break room is a shared space that participants can, to an extent, shape to their needs: they can, for example, bring their own coffee cups or other items that may be there for others to use as well. In the case of virtual break-taking spaces, participants can choose the platform and decide what they want to display to others by using different filters or by controlling the camera and microphone. Virtual spaces may also offer access to individuals' home spaces, in addition to the shared virtual space.

Break rooms have different levels of equipment and spatial resources. In the studied communities, the break rooms were equipped with possibilities to make coffee and tea, to cook or heat up meals, and places to sit. Some of the break rooms also featured a variety of items to make the room cozier, such as sofas, plants, decorative items and newspapers. Coffee and teacups are material artefacts that are often found in break rooms: they may be brought from home, given as gifts or provided by the workplace. Drinking is a resource for managing lapses in interaction (Vatanen, 2021), but it may also be an alibi for social interaction (Laurier, 2008, p. 171). Thus, as cups have an impact on social interaction and they are a fixture in break-relevant activities, they could be categorized as "crucial semiotic artefacts" in the break room (Goodwin, 2000, p. 1505).

The intrinsic nature of break-relevant objects and their placement in the break-taking environment was highlighted during the interviews, when participants brought up and were asked about their coffee cups: they told stories about them, and some even took photographs of their cups. In Example 2, from the interview data, Piia metaphorically conceptualizes people through photographs of coffee cups.

Example 2. "The most important thing"
```
10 PII: mä oisin halunnu ottaa ihmisistä kuvaa koska (.) se ois
        I would have wanted to take photos of people because it would
        >> Piia's gz on the photos -->
11      ollu (.) tai se on se kaikista tärkein asia niin nä♣mä (.) tässä
        have been or it is the most important thing so I have these
                                                        ♣gesturing
        tw. photos with finger-->
12      nyt on näitä kahaviku#ppeja [niin, ]
        coffee cups here so
                          #Fig2
13 MAR:                            [δjoo. δ]
                                    yeah
                                    δnoddingδ
14 PII: ne nyt kuv♣aa niit%ä ihmisiä kun mää aattelin
        they now represent the people because I thought
        -->♣         %gz to Mari-->
15 MAR: [£joo£]
          yeah
16 PII: [että ] se ei oo korrektia he he mennä ott%amaan,
         that it is not correct to take
                                            -->%gz to photos-->
17 MAR: £joo£
         yeah
18 PII: ihmisistä (0.2) kuvia et se on varmaan (0.2) tärkein juttu siellä
        photos of people and it probably is the most important thing
19      kahvipöydässä että siellä näkee niit%ä työkavereita,
        at the coffee table to see the workmates there
                                            -->%gz to Mari-->>
20 MAR: joo
        yeah
21 PII: ja meillä on niitä kahavitaukoja (.) kolome kappaletta joka päivä
        and we have those coffee breaks three times every day
22      säännöllisesti.
        regularly
23 MAR: δokeiδ
         okay
        δnoddingδ
```


Fig. 2. Piia shows coffee cups from her photographs.

Piia talks about the importance of other participants and how she would have liked to take photographs of them, and she reports that other people are the most important thing during breaks (lines 10–11). Piia then gestures (Figure 2) towards her photographs, depicting coffee cups, which represent the other people on breaks (lines 11–12). Then, Piia expresses concern about the appropriateness of taking photographs of other people for the interview: consequently, she explains that instead she photographed coffee cups (lines 14–18). In the beginning of the excerpt, Piia mentions other people as the most important aspect of breaks, however, on line 18, she softens her expression slightly and reports that seeing other people is 'probably' the most important thing. Further, Piia notes the regular nature of breaks in their community, and reports that they have three coffee breaks per day (lines 21–22).

During the interview, Piia discusses matters relating to cups in their community by noting that the break-takers used to have mugs, but as a person occupying a higher position in the community changed theirs to a cup with a saucer, some other participants followed suit. Piia also shows a cup with a saucer in her photograph, but her jocular tone indicates the matter is not serious: nevertheless, it has been noted by the break-takers and could be thought of as an aspect that brings nuance to break-taking and reflects the participants' personalities, as well as consideration to what kind of props people bring to the break room. This notion sparks an exploration of the metaphorical connection between people and coffee cups, and it brings forth the idea of the cups being the kind of props that can also be utilized to personalize the environment. Piia's approach of taking photographs of coffee cups shows consideration for people's privacy, and instead of highlighting the company of specific people it brings forth the importance of company during breaks in general.

The following example further illustrates how participants facilitate break-taking in Piia's community.

Example 3. "Organized coffee culture"
```
59 PII: hän ilmottaa aina että ny%t on taas aika
        the person lets us know that it is time
        >>gz to table          %gz to Mari-->
60      suorittaa (.) kontribuutio ja,
        to contribute and
61 MAR: £joo okei£.
        yeah okay
62 PII: sitt%en (.) se suoritetaan ja sitten meillä on erilaisia
        then it is done and then we have different kinds of
          -->%gz to table-->
63      mai%toystävyyksiä ja teenjuojat ovat sitten (.) erikseen.
        milk friendships and tea drinkers are again separate
```

```
        -->%gz to Mari-->
64 MAR: okei%.
        okay
   pii  -->%gz to table-->
65      (.)
66 PII: ja tuota (.) hmm et semmonen (.) myös tämmönen
        and yeah it is kind of also this kind
67      järjestäyt(h)yny%t he he he he
        of an organized
                        -->%gz to Mari-->
68 MAR: joo.
        yeah
69 PII: %kahvikulttuuri.
        coffee culture
    -->%gz to table-->
```

In Example 3, Piia elaborates on the coffee culture in her work community: they
have a system where one person buys the coffee, and the others pay that person
(lines 59–62). Such an activity facilitates break-taking for the whole group, as
individuals do not have to bring coffee separately and for instance, wonder if there
is coffee at the workplace in the first place (see Article III). Furthermore, amongst
the break-taking group, they have a shared routine that Piia calls "milk friendships"
(line 63), which means that individuals buy milk together with someone, to avoid
everyone buying their own milk and it subsequently going bad. Piia also verbalizes
the fact that the coffee culture in their community is organized, displaying her
knowledge and status as a member of the community (lines 66–69).

Break-relevant activities that relate to the material environment and objects in
the break room can also be a way for the participants to create and maintain
togetherness and co-presence. The participants can, for instance, develop shared
activities that relate to the procuring of coffee, or bringing in shared milk: these are
also recognized and reported by Piia in her interview. In such activities, the material
environment and the possibilities it grants plays an important part. What came to
represent break-taking in a way, for Piia and other interviewees, were the coffee
and teacups. They were present in the participants' photographs and utilized to
represent other participants in their uniqueness, as well as the social aspect around
coffee and tea, and finally to signify a break room where it might be possible to
leave cups lying around and to have one's own cup in the first place. Further, the
cups represent change over time and at the discretion of others can also be changed
from one style of cups to another, sometimes depending on other participants,
which further highlights social interaction among break-takers. Thus, the social
nature of objects and materiality of breaks and the related activities also becomes
visible in the participants' photographs.

The constitutive role that the material environment plays in break-taking was highlighted in the importance of coffee and tea, and the participants' personal cups. The objects in the break room further differentiate the activity of being on a break from doing work, as does the fact that people move from their work stations to a designated break room, or enter a specifically created virtual space to take shared breaks.

4.3　Timely displays of engagement

As discussed in previous sections, participants show their interest in shared break-taking by routinely taking part and arriving at the agreed times. The articles in this dissertation illustrate the time-sensitive nature of interaction during break-time encounters from a variety of perspectives: how participants manage talking and drinking, how they display social curiosity at opportune moments during virtual breaks, and how participants for instance orient to seeing others on breaks, or whether there is coffee in the break room. The following example shows a situation where attending to the local participation framework of the home becomes relevant for one participant. The example comes from a recording of a virtual break where six participants are present, when due to the COVID-19 pandemic workers had recently migrated to home offices.

For some communities, virtual breaks during the pandemic were a way to continue a long-standing tradition of shared breaks at the workplace. After all, in the data, coming together is a constitutive aspect of break-taking at work. On virtual platforms, some aspects of the 'typical routine' remain, such as talking about a variety of topics. While the material environment, such as a separate break room and making coffee together, are not the same during virtual breaks, new kinds of resources for taking breaks together were provided by the affordances of the virtual medium. Examples of this are, for example, how participants orient to the different spaces: the meeting space itself, and their own and others' local spaces.

Example 4. "What's so funny"
```
((Doorbell rings))
01 MAR: yeah,
02 NOO: mmm
03      (2.1)
04 ULL: yeah.
05      (1.0)*(0.1)
   rii      *gz away from the screen, lips moving-->
06 NOO: ding dong,
07 ULL: ding do*ng,
   rii        *gz at screen-->
```

```
08 MAR: ding dong.
09 RII: that's our door.
10      (1.2)*(.)
   rii       *gz up from screen-->
11 ULL: yeah, I'm get*ing la*zier and lazier when I'm sort of
   rii             -->*gz at screen
                          *gz up from screen-->*
12 ULL: starting to plan to g*o for a wa&lk.
   rii                    -->*           &gets up, leaves camera view-->>

((33 seconds omitted: participants discuss meetings, preparing dinner and
joke about butlers at home. Riitta returns to her seat))

24 MAR: ha ha ha ha
   rii  >>gz at screen
25 ULL: o*kay,
   rii  *gz away from screen-->
26 MAR: (you,)
        ((children's noises in the background, Riitta quickly glances at
        screen))
27 RII: hei,
        hey
        ((children arguing in Riitta's background))
28 NOO: mm
29      (1.0)
30 KID: sulla on se.
        you have that
31      (0.2)
32 RII: mitä?
        what
33      (0.2)
34 KID: sä et väli#tä (mi-)∇
        you don't care about
                  #fig3
   rii                    ∇mutes her mic, lips moving-->
35      (4.0)
36 LIN: hm
37 ULL: who can read the lips, he *he he he *he he he
   rii                            *glances at screen *looks away-->
38      (1.0)
39 ULL: he he he
40      (1.1)
41 MAR: et saa, et voi ottaa, e*i,
        you can't do that, you can't take that, no
   rii                         *gz at screen, laughs-->
42 NOO: ei,
        no
43      ((laughter by all))
44 ULL: nyt asetutte j*a ootte kunnolla si*elä.
        settle down now and behave yourselves there
   rii              -->*                   *gz away-->
        ((laughter))
45 MAT: no no I said no,
46      ((laughter by all))
47      (.)
48 NOO: o*h::
49 ULL: j*a Jaakko mitäänhän ei ole sovittu siitä että sinä
        and Jaakko you know nothing has been agreed about you
   rii  *gz at screen-->
50      läh[det (0.2) ulkoilemaan.
```

```
        going outdoors
51 RII:    [ha ha ha joo,
                    yeah
52 KID: MIKÄ NAURATTAA?
        what's so funny
53 ULL: he [he he [he
54 RII:        [.hhh*
                    *gz away from screen
55 ULL: hhh
56      (.)*(1.2)
  rii     *gz at screen shaking head
57 RII: o[h:: ] what a nightmare.
58 ULL:  [okei]
          okay
        ((11 seconds omitted: children argue, and Ulla announces her
          departure, and others say bye and wave to her))
        >> rii gz at screen-->>
65 RII: yeah.
66 NOO: mmm.
67 MAR: on me monesti mietitty Maijan kanssa sitä että (1.0) et ai-
        me and Maija have often thought that
68      sillä tavalla oli hyvä aika että Lukas muutti pois kotoa
        in a way it was a good time for Lukas to move away from home
69      viime elokuussa että,
        last August so
70      (0.1)
71 RII: niin niin aivan,
        oh yeah right
72 MAR: se ois ollu kyllä
        that would have been
73 RII: mm
74 MAR: mä niinku niin jotenki symppaan lapsiperheitä tällä hetkellä.
        I like so sympathise with families with kids at the moment
```


Fig. 3. During a video-mediated break from work, Riitta orients to her local participation framework.

Participants on the break have been talking about a matter relating to education when Riitta's doorbell rings. The ringing of the doorbell, in a way, acts as a catalyst for moving on to another topic. Indeed, Riitta reacts to the ringing doorbell by looking up from her screen, and evidently says something to another person in her house, as her lips are moving. Other participants (Noora, Ulla and Martti) also note the ringing doorbell and imitate its sound in a singsong voice (lines 6–8). Riitta

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addresses their observations by confirming that it is their doorbell. After a short lapse, Ulla begins a new topic, commenting on her laziness regarding going for walks: this could be interpreted as an intent to leave the break (lines 11–12). During Ulla's turn, Riitta can be seen getting up from her seat and disappearing from camera view. Ulla's turn prompts the others to talk about what they are going to do next, discuss meetings and joke about butlers at home or having to make dinner themselves (data not shown).

As talk about what people are going to do next appears to be coming to a close, children's noises become audible in one participant's background. Riitta, then, looks up from her screen and talks to someone (lines 25–27), suggesting to others that it is Riitta's children that can be heard in the background, as she readily orients to her home space. The other participants can hear her talking to her children who can be heard in the background (lines 30–34). On line 34, while one of the children is shouting, Riitta mutes her microphone, and the other participants can see her lips moving. Riitta is clearly attempting to resolve a problem in her local participation framework, and the video call allows her co-participants access to it as well, thus making Riitta's home-life visible to them. The conversation among the participants in the virtual space has halted, as if they are waiting for Riitta to resolve the argument at home and return to the virtual break room. After a lapse (line 35), Ulla jokingly asks the others *who can read the lips,* causing laughter in the group (line 37).

With this, Ulla orients to the current interactional situation, displays social curiosity and invites others to join in as well. Martti then begins a round of jocular guesses regarding what Riitta might be saying, and Ulla and Matthew join in. It is notable that these three participants also have children, and their contributions to the guessing game suggest that they may have had to deal with situations where parents must have stern discussions with their children. Indeed, their guesses deal with Riitta telling her children to not do something, not to take something and to behave themselves, suggesting that the ones participating in the game may have some experience in the matter, and in this way display their understanding of the situation (lines 41–45).

Guessing what might be going on in Riitta's house appears to be a laughter-inducing, fun game, and Riitta also joins in the laughter. Indeed, it has been found that shared laughter can bring people together and aid in maintaining affiliation (Park, 2016). Ulla takes the guessing game a step further and makes a jocular guess at what Riitta might also be saying to her husband (line 49–50). This sparks more laughter and an aligning response from Riitta (line 51): Riitta's laughter is also

heard by her children, who are unaware of the guessing game in the virtual space, and one of them produces a loud interrogative 'what's so funny' (line 52). As this data was recorded at the beginning of the pandemic, the situation may also be novel to Riitta's children, who are unaware that other people on the virtual call may also hear them arguing. Ulla laughs at the child's question, and Riitta looks away from her screen, shaking her head, and sighs to the others *what a nightmare* (line 53–57) Ulla acknowledges this with an *okay* (line 58) and the group laughs again, while Riitta's children can still be heard yelling in the background (data not shown). At this point in the interaction, Ulla bids her farewell to the group. Ulla's leaving seems to have created a transition relevance place, and Martti's following comment in Finnish both changes the language to Finnish, and the tone of the conversation to more serious. Martti displays his affiliative stance towards Riitta's situation by recounting his own experience of his child moving out, and producing a timely expression of sympathy as the commotion in Riitta's house subsides (line 74). Riitta follows this by further explaining their situation to the others (data not shown).

The example shows familiarity among the participants on the break, so much so that they can joke about what one of them might be saying to her children. Further, breaks taken on virtual platforms during the pandemic brought a novel dimension to the break-time encounters, as they allowed access to participants' homes in a way that had not happened before. In this example, Riitta can be seen frequently looking away from her screen and talking to her children (see Figure 3), thus orienting to her local space while also keeping an eye on the video call. Thus, Riitta's home life beyond the screen becomes audible to the others, in a way that was not possible before, when breaks were taken at the workplace. The other participants are also seen observing the situation closely and orienting to what goes on in Riitta's background: while participants' gaze directions are difficult to determine on a virtual platform, the participants in this example can be seen orienting to happenings in Riitta's home verbally, thus displaying a certain social curiosity (see Article II for a more substantial analysis). The participants are also orienting to the timeliness and situationality of interaction in displaying their understanding of when to make their comments and shift to a more serious conversational tone in a timely manner.

The intrinsic nature of breaks, as this section highlights, is being social and being together. Work meetings are scheduled separately, and while work-related issues may be discussed on breaks as well, participants set up break-taking spaces and take time specifically for informal virtual encounters. Participants are observed showing their interest towards their co-workers at opportune moments in the

interaction, for instance, by commenting on the happenings in one participant's background. Example 4 further illustrates how participants display familiarity with one another, extending beyond established social relationships at work, as they joke about what a parent might say to their children.

5   Conclusion

This dissertation set out to explore break-taking from work in knowledge work communities, by examining both video recordings of naturally-occurring social interaction, and ethnographic data. The aim was to shed light on different aspects of social interaction and activity during breaks. Previous research on break-taking has focused on its benefits for the employee and employer, and social interaction during breaks has not yet been exhaustively researched. This dissertation, then, contributes to the current gap in break-taking research, especially from the perspective of social interaction and activity, created and maintained by participants. People spend a significant amount of time at work, and it is important to understand informal connections at the workplace, because they can contribute towards creating and maintaining an overall workplace climate. Furthermore, in the contemporary context of distance and hybrid work it is also beneficial to understand the significance of the physical workplace and work community.

In this dissertation, social interaction and activity during breaks from work have been approached with the following research questions:

1. How do participants collaboratively construct and maintain break-taking as a social activity and build togetherness within a work community?
2. How do participants orient to the material environment in their break-time interactions?
3. In what ways do participants on breaks display their sustained orientation to the interactional situation and each other?

This dissertation has explored and illustrated break-taking from a comprehensive perspective, starting from the minute details pertaining to how participants intertwine talking and drinking, moving on to displays of social curiosity during online breaks, and finally considering break-taking as all-encompassing communal behavior. Article I shows that having a cup of coffee or tea is a break-relevant activity, and as it is often connected to a chat with the co-workers, cups play an important part as material resources. Participants on breaks can, then, signal their sustained orientation to the ongoing interactional situation by withdrawing cups when it becomes more relevant in the moment to produce a turn-at-talk. Article II, in turn, has provided a look into break-taking on virtual platforms and shows how participants create and maintain co-presence with displays of social curiosity. Article II shows that participants adapt to the changing break-taking circumstances, and create co-presence in novel ways, which are made possible by the virtual

platform. Finally, taking a mixed methods approach, Article III has illustrated break-taking from an informal community of practice perspective, highlighting participants' views on break-taking alongside examples from naturally-occurring data, showing that participants actively create and maintain break-taking in and through interaction.

In this summary part of the dissertation, the findings of all three articles were discussed under three central themes, illustrated with examples from the data. The three themes of co-presence and displays of social solidarity and support, objects and the material environment in break rooms facilitating social encounters, and timely displays of engagement illustrate the participants' ongoing and timely involvements in shared break-taking.

Video recorded, naturally-occurring interactions, interviews and observations were utilized as data, and the dissertation both posits and shows that combining different kinds of data can provide a novel look into the social phenomenon of break-taking at work. In the data explored in this dissertation, some participants have been attending shared breaks together for a long time. The data therefore shows that shared social gatherings have a cumulative nature, and participants have a chance to get to know each other, and a routine may develop for coffee breaks at the workplace. Further, participants on breaks are actively keeping up the break-taking practice in and through interaction. Indeed, it could be argued that due to its cumulative nature and the participants' continued engagement, break-taking can be observed as a complex social activity, which reflects organizational change, as well as other currents in the contemporary world. The distinct "breakness" of break-taking is constructed in and through interaction by the participants, and its key features include a (shared) history and a routine that is communicated to newcomers. Further, creating and maintaining a community is a key feature of break-taking, and the articles show how a variety of participants' activities and orientations contribute to community building during breaks. Participants orient to togetherness in different ways in interaction: they display their continued engagement during onsite and online breaks, which is illustrated in minute details such as suspending and resuming drinking coffee, or expressing social curiosity by producing single-turn indications of interest towards co-participants. They also carry out broader activities such as inviting newcomers to participate in joint break-taking or upholding a system to ensure that a sufficient supply of coffee, tea and milk can be found in the break room. Such displays, regardless of their magnitude, also have an effect on social interaction during breaks.

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The findings of this dissertation expand on previous research on the benefits of break-taking, as well as social interaction during breaks. However, further research is needed to conduct larger scale analysis on social interaction and practices of break-taking in different fields and industries. This dissertation has explored break-taking in such knowledge work communities where participants are fairly free to determine their break-times. Thus, the results are not applicable to break-taking in other industries. For a better, and a wider-reaching understanding of break-taking, the possibilities, habits and practices relating to break-taking should be studied in more industries than one. Future studies on social interaction during breaks could also further address and develop the combination of, for instance, ethnographic and conversation analytic data.

Due to the increase in distance working during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, more research has been done on the benefits and disadvantages of distance working. For instance, a study by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health found that while distance working can reduce some loads related to work (such as the physical load and excessive amount of work), distance working is connected to negative impact factors such as loneliness, weaker attachment to the workplace, and lesser interchangeable enriching effect of work and personal life (Suutala et al., 2024, p. 30). Suutala et al. (2024) further report that young employees' experiences of social resources at work, such as a sense of community and fair treatment, have decreased (p. 36). Such findings suggest that the different ways that may make people feel like a part of the community at work, such as shared break-taking, are worth looking into when looking for ways to cultivate a sense of community and belonging at the workplace, also in terms of the contemporary working environment after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the results of this work it could also be suggested on a general level that it is important to provide a designated break-taking space that, for instance, allows people to engage in social interaction without disturbing others. Peteri et al. (2024) note that "[w]hile workspaces shape workers' identities, they also invite and inhibit social action", and also discuss the change that has become apparent when it comes to the designs of break rooms (p. 4). When designing break-taking spaces, it is worth considering what kind of interactional situations break rooms invite and encourage, and whether they provide spaces that are private enough to give the employees a chance to disconnect from work, and not disturb those who may be working nearby. As this dissertation shows, participants themselves actively work towards creating and maintaining break-taking practices: when designing break-taking spaces, it could be worthwhile to integrate the participants in the process

(see, e.g., Honkanen et al. 2023 for an example of a participatory decision-making process in an institutional context).

This dissertation has presented both previous and original research on break-taking at work, and in sum, shown that break-taking during the workday (be it onsite or online) can be beneficial in many ways. Working life is increasingly demanding, and it is important to take breaks and give the brain and the body a refreshing rest. As a concluding remark, in having focused on the intricacies of social interaction and social activity during breaks, this dissertation emphasizes that breaks in the company of others, especially laced with laughter, can contribute to a sense of community and give a boost for the working day.

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Appendix

Appendix 1   Transcription symbols

Transcription symbols

[word]	Overlapping talk
(0.5)	Numbers in parenthesis indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second
(.)	'Micropause', ordinarily less than 0.2 of a second
.	Falling intonation
,	Level intonation
?	Rising intonation
wo::rd	A colon indicates prologation of stretching of the preceding sound. The number of colons indicates the length of the prologation
w<u>o</u>rd	Underlining indicates emphasis
°word°	The degree signs indicate that talk between them is markedly quiet or soft
WORD	Uppercase indicates a loud voice
wo-	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off
(word)	Uncertain hearing, empty parenthesis indicate no likely candidate
£word£	Smiley voice
hhh	Outbreath
hhh.	In-breath
(( ))	Transcriber's omission of identifying features in talk
%%	Descriptions of embodied actions are delimited between two
€€	identical symbols (one symbol per participant and per type of action)
&&	that are synchronized with correspondent stretches of talk or time
*-->	The action described continues across subsequent lines
-->*	until the same symbol is reached
-->>	The action described continues after the excerpt's end
rii	Participant doing the embodied action is identified in small caps in the participant column, unless the same as current speaker
fig	The exact moment at which a screen shot has been taken is indicated
#	with a sign (#) showing its position within the turn / time measure
gz	Gaze
gl	Glance
l./r.	Left/right
tb.	Table

Original publications

I   Holmström, M. (2024). Preparing to talk in workplace break interaction: Withdrawing a coffee cup from the lips as a prebeginning. *Gesprächsforschung 25*, 170–194. http://www.gespraechsforschung-online.de/fileadmin/dateien/heft2024/ga-holmstroem.pdf

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III Holmström, M. (under review). Coffee breaks as informal communities of practice.

Original publications are not included in the electronic version of the dissertation.

209. Juutinen, Markus (2023) Koltansaamen kielikontaktit : vähemmistökieli muuttuvassa kieliympäristössä

210. Gangl, Georg (2023) Telling it like it really was : on the form, presuppositions, and justification of historiographic knowledge

211. Rantalainen, Katariina (2023) Early language development : relationships with social-emotional/behavioural development and maternal interaction

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215. Talonen, Eero (2024) Muntlig kommunikativ svenska i den grundläggande utbildningen : en longitudinell studie om elevernas språkutveckling i och deras attityder till studier i B1-svenska i årskurserna 7–9

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217. Tuohimaa, Krista (2024) Social-pragmatic development in children who use bilateral hearing aids or bilateral cochlear implants and in typically hearing children between the ages of four and six years

218. Aranne, Hanna (2024) Yhteisen vihollisen yhdistämä : Suomen ulkoasiain- ja puolustushallinnon toimijoiden suhtautuminen Mantšuriaan ja sen suvereniteettiin 1917–1944

219. Fenner, Anne-Maria (2024) Between a rock and a hard place : British disarmament foreign policy at the World Disarmament Conference in 1931-1934

220. Pirinen, Veera (2024) Speech disfluencies in autistic young adults and controls

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